

Επιμέλεια

Αχιλλεύς Κ. Αιμιλιανίδης - Χριστίνα Ιωάννου
Δημήτρης Κούρτης - Σουλβάνα Βανέζου

Ο Θεσμός της Βουλής των Αντιπροσώπων



CYPRVS 4579004

ΒΟΥΛΗ ΤΩΝ ΑΝΤΙΠΡΟΣΩΠΩΝ
ΤΗΣ ΚΥΠΡΙΑΚΗΣ ΔΗΜΟΚΡΑΤΙΑΣ



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Transparency and Accountability for Cypriot Legislature: An Online Legislative Observatory for the House of Representatives¹

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Summary

Through a multidisciplinary lens, this paper sets out to examine the functions of the House of Representatives in terms of transparency, legal matters, accountability, e-governance, parliamentary scrutiny, and the role of digital technologies and active civic engagement. By addressing the technological limitations the House faces, Members of Parliament (MPs) can be held directly accountable to their fellow citizens, whom they represent. This work also focuses on creating an Online Legislative Observatory (OLO), highlighting MPs' contribution to the House and placing them under the radar of transparency. Moreover, it attempts to introduce a framework that incorporates a lobbying and public consultation structure deeper into the policymaking process through digital technologies and media. This begins with our proposal for an online database, which would subsequently contribute to a wider and updated e-gov-

¹ The authors have extensively addressed the lack of anti-corruption policies in Cyprus, as well as the detrimental effects of the absence of such policies on the notion of a functioning, democratic society, whose anti-corruption legal framework should align with those of its counterparts. The importance of regulated lobbying, as a tool for fostering democracy, has been stressed throughout this article. On 17 February 2022, the Cypriot House of Representatives voted in favour of a long-awaited bill, which will regulate lobbying and facilitate a transparent communication channel between the state and its citizens. The bill will come into effect in 2023. Adding to the trifecta of reforms forming part of the Cypriot government's broader anti-corruption effort, on 20 January 2022, the Minister of Justice and Public Order announced that the House of Representatives voted into law the 'Whistleblowing Bill'. The bill aims at the protection of individuals reporting possible acts of corruptions under national and EU law. Lastly, legislation concerning the establishment and operation of an independent, national anti-corruption agency has also been approved by MPs earlier this year. One of the main functions of the agency would be to conduct real-time audits on politicians and their asset declarations, supporting its overall role of monitoring misfeasance in the public sector. Certainly, the above developments mark a major step towards the development of a modern and fully comprehensive set of anti-corruption rules. Nevertheless, the overall success of the newly passed bills remains to be seen, via the effective implementation of the laws in the future.

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ernance model for the House. The creation and monitoring of an effective online database through OLO could be utilised further as a model for other civil, judicial, and governmental bodies. As a result, transparency is enhanced and effective communication with the citizenry is improved.

Keywords: Cyprus, Civil Society, E-Governance, Law, Online Database, Online Legislative Observatory, Parliament

Background and framework

Information and communication technologies (ICTs), e-governance tools, and wide-scale online databases for data analytics have forever changed the ease with which people can get hold of important information, whether educational or recreational. Today, technology is at the forefront of the movement for increased freedom of and ease of access to information surrounding governance and regulatory changes. This review will focus on the relationship between online databases and e-governance, transparency, and accountability in the context of the Cyprus House of Representatives. Considering the recent events emerging from the COVID-19 pandemic, including the widespread allegations of corruption and the lack of ease of access and accountability to Members of Parliament, the paper explores ways through which the Republic of Cyprus could effectively create an Online Legislative Observatory (OLO), backed up by an interactive online database for the purpose of contributing to the wider e-governance structure of Parliament. Such a database would be modelled after the Legislative Observatory at the European Parliament.⁷ This would help equip the citizens with much-needed knowledge on updates and new information on new approved legislation.

This work introduces a suggested monitoring mechanism backed up by the creation of an open discussion forum, just like the one proposed in other countries, like the United States,⁸ whose government is also split up into three branches: executive, legislative, and judicial. Transparency and monitoring of the parliamentary proceedings through OLO in this way is guaranteed due to the fragmentation of power, thus posing as an additional check and balancing of political power. Such a model would also incorporate a code of conduct, strictly regulating any potential areas of conflict and collusions with state institutions and private organisations partnering up with the House, as practised at a European level.⁹ Improving the use of digital, online technol-

⁷ See the European Parliament's Legislative Observatory, available at <https://oeil.secure.europarl.europa.eu/oeil/home/home.do> (last accessed on 18 March 2021)

⁸ The full proposal can be found at [OpeningParliament.org](https://www.openingparliament.org/), available at <https://www.openingparliament.org/> (last accessed on 27 March 2021)

⁹ See Amao O., *Corporate Social Responsibility, Human Rights and the Law: Multinational Corporations in Developing Countries*, London: Routledge, 2011: 212.

ogies is an important focus area for effective dissemination purposes. Finally, other small European states like Denmark, have been able to use such mechanisms to better utilise their resources and save 'taxpayers €150 million and businesses €50 million a year'¹⁰. This helps build, in the long run, a sustainable e-governance structure that helps minimise the costs for the taxpayer whilst also reducing the budget deficit.

The first part of this paper addresses the limitations, accountability, transparency, and corruption issues in democratic societies, particularly linking the absence of e-governance tools and online platforms to increased levels of corruption. The second part of this paper deals with a breakdown of why e-governance tools are needed and how the introduction of OLO could help bring about positive change. Parts three and four deal with current practices and usage of online legislative observatories and other e-tools in Cyprus and abroad, respectively. Finally, the last section concludes with the authors' policy recommendations and long-term opportunities this digitalisation and e-governance model may bring to the House of Representatives.

Democracy and Accountability

In democratic governments, an intimate relationship exists between governance transparency and corruption, whereby citizens perceive more transparent governments as less corrupt. Two of the principal pillars of democracy are transparency and openness; these values are key ingredients to building trust and accountability, which are necessary for the functioning of a just State. While the European Union (EU) continuously tries to promote those values in the institutions of Member States through legislation, Cyprus is among several EU Member States that are constantly facing legal action from the European Commission for failing to comply with their obligations under EU law.¹¹ Several of those regulations/directives that Cyprus failed to transpose into its national laws concern matters regarding transparency, corruption, bribery et cetera.

A way to cultivate transparency is through the protection of whistleblowers, defined as 'one who reveals wrongdoing within an organization to the public or to those in positions of authority'.¹² Whistleblowers face fears of being mistreated and losing their job, and governments need to implement whistleblower protection by law to safeguard those individuals. Without the existence of whistleblowers, many forms of corruption and bribery would never come to light. Despite this, Cyprus has no leg-

¹⁰ Read more at the European Union's 'Shaping Europe's Digital Future' policy section, available at <https://ec.europa.eu/digital-single-market/en/public-services-egovernment> (last accessed on 30 March 2021)

¹¹ 'European Commission to seek legal action against Cyprus over nine infringements', In Cyprus, 19.01.2019, available at <https://in-cyprus.philenews.com/european-commission-to-seek-legal-action-against-cyprus-over-nine-infringements/> (last accessed on 30 March 2021)

¹² 'Whistleblower', American Heritage Dictionary (N.D.), available at <https://www.ahdictionary.com/word/search.html?q=whistleblower> (last accessed on 2 April 2021)

islation relevant to whistleblowers and has left the terms 'whistleblower' and 'whistleblowing' undefined. On October 23, 2019,¹³ the EU announced a new directive on whistleblower protection, the EU Whistleblower Directive ('Directive'), with a transposition deadline on December 17, 2021.

Yet another example that shows the inefficiency of the Cyprus Parliament on matters of transposition of the European law was when Cyprus was late to transpose the 5th and the 6th Anti-Money Laundering Directives 'AMLD5' and 'AMLD6', which consist of joint updates to the EU's AML legal framework. The transposition deadline for the directives elapsed, on January 10, 2020 for 'AMLD5', and on December 3, 2020 for 'AMLD6'. On February 18, 2021 the Cyprus House of Representatives transposed 'AMLD5' after the many notifications sent by the Commission concerning the failure to transpose the directive into national law on time. To date, Cyprus has not yet transposed 'AMLD6' and has not notified the EU institutions on the transposition procedures.¹⁴

Past initiatives have tried to increase transparency in Cyprus. However, many of these are now inactive. For instance, Vouliwatch Cyprus was an innovative online platform, politically independent and non-profit, that aimed to introduce transparency and accountability into the Cypriot Parliament. The primary target of this initiative was to bridge the gap between the citizens and their representatives inside the Cypriot and European Parliament, and to introduce a new era in democracy. Some main features of the platform were: (1) Public questioning: in a moderated platform, citizens could publicly ask questions and receive public replies by MPs and Members of the European Parliament (MEPs); (2) Vote-watch: this application allowed users to keep an eye on the voting behaviour of each MP while informing the public on the details and background information of each legislation put forward for voting; (3) Policy Monitor (compare party positions): the Policy Monitor is a digital tool which allows our users to learn about and compare what the positions of the main political parties are on given issues.¹⁵

VouliWatch Cyprus followed the steps of the Greek initiative, VouliWatch Greece. Stefanos Loukopoulos and Panagiotis Vlachos set up VouliWatch Greece amidst the economic and political crisis in 2014 to combat extremism and provide a forum for open discussion between the Greek parliamentarians and the country's citizens. The co-founders believed that creating a space for open discussion would re-build con-

¹³ Directive (EU) 2019/1937 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 23 October 2019 on the protection of persons who report breaches of Union Law. (last accessed on 2 April 2021)

¹⁴ Haviaras L.B., 'Why Do We Have to Be So Late?' Cyprus Mail (16 December 2020), available at <https://cyprus-mail.com/2020/12/16/why-do-we-have-to-be-so-late/> (last accessed on 2 April 2021)

¹⁵ 'What is VouliWatch Cyprus?' available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EYTTTrXGWnls&t=30s> (last accessed on 5 April 2021)

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fidence in the government.¹⁶ The idea was that if there is transparency, politicians cannot hide anything, and in turn, citizens will trust them more.¹⁷ Despite VouliWatch Greece's success, VouliWatch Cyprus has become increasingly inactive, leaving the divide between the Cypriot people and their government wide open.

Unregulated lobbying also leaves the door open for corruption. Lobbying is every activity carried out with the objective of directly or indirectly influencing the formulation or implementation of the policy and decision-making process regarding legislative or regulatory activities.¹⁸ A lobbyist is an individual who performs this act. Such individuals can be professionals in the industry, representatives of non-governmental organizations (NGOs), or academics.¹⁹ Lobbying is an integral part of a healthy democracy, as it is a means by which the citizens can voice their opinions to policymakers. It aims to achieve transparency and accountability through the creation of open dialogue. However, unregulated lobbying fails to possess these aspects, and the public views the practice as corrupt. Therefore, regulating lobbying in Cypriot law would greatly enhance its utility as a tool for fostering democracy.

Importantly, there is empirical evidence to support the claim that lobbying regulations, transparency and political trust are intimately linked. Following the work of the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), Kanol²⁰ investigated whether the quality of lobbying regulations change citizens' perceptions of corruption and trust.²¹ The study found that at full disclosure the most transparent

¹⁶ 'It's a sense of adventure' - How Vouliwatch is reinventing politics in Greece, 23 November 2017, available at <https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/can-europe-make-it/its-sense-of-adventure-how-vouliwatch-is-re/> (last accessed on 16 March 2021)

¹⁷ For an interview with one of the co-founders of VouliWatch Greece see: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SCvY32DLm7A&ab_channel=openDemocracy (last accessed on 7 April 2021)

¹⁸ Lobby in Europe, What is Lobbying? available at <https://lobbyeurope.org/what-is-lobbying/> (last accessed on 7 April 2021)

¹⁹ This list is not exhaustive as, in theory, most people can be lobbyists. The above lists some of the most common forms of lobbyists.

²⁰ Kanol D., 'Knowledge of Lobbying Regulations and Attitudes Toward Politics: Findings from a Survey Experiment in Cyprus' (2017) 20 (2) Public Integrity: 163-178.

²¹ The participants in the study received one of four different lobbying definitions which varied in terms of transparency.

Condition 1: 'Lobbying is the act of trying to influence public policy by organizations such as business associations, firms, sector-specific associations, labor unions or non-governmental organizations (NGOs). In Liechtenstein, there are no data available to the public regarding lobbyists' names, which policies they lobby for or how much they spend on lobbying'.

Condition 2: 'Lobbying is the act of trying to influence public policy by organizations such as business associations, firms, sector-specific associations, labor unions or non-governmental organizations (NGOs). In Liechtenstein, lobbyists register their names on a publicly available list. The list does not report data regarding which policies they lobby for or how much they spend on lobbying'.

Condition 3: 'Lobbying is the act of trying to influence public policy by organizations such as business associations, firms, sector-specific associations, labor unions or non-governmental organizations (NGOs). In Liechtenstein, lobbyists register their names and the policies they lobby for on a publicly available list. The list does not report data regarding how much they spend on lobbying'.

conditions decreased perceptions of political corruption by up to 34.1% and increased perceptions of political trust by up to 13.8%. Another major issue that Cyprus must address is scourge of corruption. Unconstrained power given to individuals has often been a cause of abuse. Political corruption itself stems from state officials, the members of their network and administration, or elected officials who use their power for personal gain. This occurrence has the potential to slow economic growth in democracies.²² This is primarily due to how resources are allocated. With increased corruption, it is often observed that there is a correlation with increased spill-over effects in both the political and economic sense: increased inequalities (especially in income), underdevelopment and a slump in social welfare, often linked to a lack of accountability, lack of transparent guidelines, and, more often than not, an absence of various regulatory frameworks, such as lobbying.²³ This is all equally attributed to the absence of Information and Communications Technology (ICT) and e-tools for governance and the link to potentially severe levels of corruption.²⁴

The findings of the survey on the level of corruption in Cyprus conducted by the organisation 'Transparency Cyprus' with 1521 Cypriot participants show a terribly negative image. Specifically, according to the survey results, 70% consider corruption as a major issue in Cyprus, while 60% are being or have been affected by a form of corruption directly.²⁵ There is a causal relationship between unregulated lobbying and corruption; the percentage of corruption tends to be higher in countries where there is an absence of regulations on the matter of lobbying. The empirical evidence adds to the body of theoretical discussion regarding the relationship between increased lobbying regulation, more political trust, and a weaker perception of political corruption. The culmination of empirical and theoretical work highlights the need for the Cyprus House of Representatives to provide more stringent lobbying regulations to enable transparency.

The Need for E-Governance

To combat the problems of transparency and accountability, the House needs to im-

Condition 4: 'Lobbying is the act of trying to influence public policy by organizations such as business associations, firms, sector-specific associations, labor unions or non-governmental organizations (NGOs). In Liechtenstein, lobbyists register their names, the policies they lobby for, and the amount spent on lobbying on a publicly available list'.

²² Svensson J., 'Eight Questions About Corruption' (2005) 19(3) *Journal of Economic Perspectives*: 19-42.

²³ See Hossain, A.T. and Kryzanowski, L., 'Political Corruption and Cost of Equity' (2020) 1(1) *Business & Society*: 39. See also Sanz et al., 'Betrayed by the Elites: How Corruption Amplifies the Political Effects of Recessions' (2020) *Barcelona Institute of Economics (IEB)*: 1-46.

²⁴ Adam I. O., 'Examining E-Government Development Effects on Corruption in Africa: The Mediating Effects of ICT Development and Institutional Quality' (2020) 61 *Technology in Society*.

²⁵ Assiotis A. and Krambia-Kapardis M., 'Corruption Correlates: The Case of Cyprus' (2014) 17(3) *Journal of Money Laundering Control*: 260-268.

plement e-governance systems. E-governance can be defined as using ICT and the Internet to provide public service, improve government performance, and enhance participation and empowerment channels to serve political or democratic reasons.²⁶ Universally, people recognise online and e-governance tools as an exceptional tool for delivering services in the public and private sector. Providing SMART governments is the motivational idea behind e-governance, where SMART is an acronym for Simple, Moral, Accountable, Responsible, and Transparent. Although this is hard to achieve in practice, the online system acts like an open database and forum, enabling direct interaction between the electorate (i.e., the general public) and the elected (i.e., the government). The exchange is commonly held between the government and citizens (G2C or C2G), but it can also be between the government and businesses (G2B or B2G).

Building on online e-governance practices, the citizen-governance relationship is proven significant for cultivating the feeling of e-democracy — particularly via civil society routes — which more often than not speeds up effective communication, accountability, and bottom-up governance by citizens.²⁷ There is a strong correlation between a healthy civil society and even healthier institutions, which is what can be accomplished through improved communication channels and digitalisation in the public sector; the opening up of government to the rest of society. Prabhu²⁸ proposed that e-governance can achieve this feeling among its citizens through four different avenues: (1) generating greater vertical and lateral information flow; (2) reducing the likelihood that selected individuals withhold essential information from the public; (3) cultivating an environment for open debates between policymakers and the general public, and; (4) increasing the influence of citizens on policy-makers. The above brings to light the intricate connection between citizens, the government, and technology at a conceptual level through a multi-disciplinary lens. In short, e-governance tools can harness a more transparent and trusting relationship between the electorate and the elected.

As emphasised in its preamble, through the use of online databases, this article proposes the creation of OLO in a bid to enhance the transparency and accountability of the Cyprus House of Representatives. The platform is a direct application of the need for transparency between the electorate and the elected. We suggest that Cyprus follow in the steps of the EU on the creation of an online legislation observatory. In

²⁶ Abu-Shanab E., 'The Relationship between Transparency and E-Government: An Empirical Support' (2013) EGOV/ePart Ongoing Research.

²⁷ Backer D. and Carroll D., 'NGOs and Constructive Engagement: Promoting Civil Society, Good Governance and the Rule of Law in Liberia' 38(1) *International Politics*: 1-26, March 2001. (last accessed on 9 April 2021)

²⁸ Prabhu C., *E-Governance: Concepts and Case Studies*, New Delhi: PHI Learning Private Limited, 2013.

1994, the EU introduced the European Union legislation observatory (OEIL), a database that allows its users to follow the decision-making process for all EU legislative and non-legislative procedures going through the European Parliament with a particular focus on the European Parliament's activities.²⁹ Furthermore, the OLO should adopt the OEIL as its framework due to the readily available data. Our vision for OLO is to create a platform that will allow citizens to keep up to date with the political environment, create a sense of legitimacy through its transparency and help change the public opinion as regards to corruption and transparency in the Cypriot political scene. We therefore propose that Cyprus adopt a similar approach by introducing an online platform that publishes legislative and non-legislative procedures which go through the House of Representatives.

An online legislative observatory will not only increase the transparency and accountability of the House, but it will also change the way that the society interacts with the public institutions and the Government via the ICT systems. Such an integrative and holistic approach is necessary to develop an effective sustainability science that synthesizes different sources of knowledge, relevant disciplines, multi-sectoral alliances, and connections to policymakers and the public.³⁰ This approach marries together the societal, political, and technological spheres through a multidisciplinary perspective. Bixler and colleagues (2019) proposed that such an approach is necessary to create a sustainable environment.³¹ Thus, although digital infrastructure is a necessary component for safer and more inclusive cities, it is not sufficient by itself. Bixler and their team (2019) proposed that elements within the socio-economic-demographic domain, such as Public Health, Public Safety, the Economy, Education and Civic Engagement, were also necessary but insufficient elements in creating a better society. A real example that shows the positive effects of such initiatives is the Texas Metropolitan Observatory. Developed by Dr. Bixler and colleagues, the Texas Metropolitan Observatory (TMO), is a communication and data platform which is dedicated to sharing information and ideas about the common problems that the communities of Texas outface and to developing solutions for those problems.³² Although this work is focused on the Metropolitan Observatory in Texas, the House of Representatives in

²⁹ European Parliament Legislative Observatory, Introduction, available at <https://oeil.secure.europarl.europa.eu/oeil/info/info2.do> (last accessed on 18 March 2021)

³⁰ Patrick Bixler R., 'An Observatory Framework for Metropolitan Change: Understanding Urban Social-Ecological-Technical Systems in Texas and Beyond' https://www.researchgate.net/publication/334148588_An_Observatory_Framework_for_Metropolitan_Change_Understanding_Urban_Social-Ecological-Technical_Systems_in_Texas_and_Beyond (last accessed on 15 March 2021)

³¹ Environment here is not constricted to the ecological sense but rather refers to the 'external world'.

³² Texas Metropolitan Observatory, About Us, TMO background, available at <https://tmo.utexas.edu/about-us> (last accessed on 10 April 2021)

Cyprus should implement a similar framework to create a more sustainable society by means of the OLO.

Initial experimentation with such a platform in Cyprus has already taken place, albeit not in the public sector. Albeit in its very early stages, continuously sprouting and developing, the online digital 'Nomoplatform' provides the first ever interactive database of existing policy drafts that are put forward before the Republic of Cyprus House of Representatives³³. Such bills and drafts can be initiated either from the executive branch of government and its ministries in the form of draft legislation or from Members of Parliament as bill proposals. The online database provides a search engine where users can freely customise their search results by browsing through all pending drafts currently sitting at Parliament. This is of paramount importance, for at least three reasons that show the level of contribution of this platform: (i) it is a private initiative developed for free by the private sector and civil society circles (not the public sector), showcasing serious gaps and weaknesses in the public research and innovation; (ii) despite this being a private sector tool, it has been endorsed by Parliament and has been included in its official website;³⁴ (iii) it is a tool through which both the industry and the academia can benefit from its quick search and categorisation functionalities. Such a project was missing and was introduced to fill a gap that otherwise no public body had been able to deliver before.

Simultaneously, e-governance models must possess some level of maturity to show how these frameworks will transform and manage operations.³⁵ Through maturity, sustainability can be finally introduced, and these models will then be properly maintained as a public service for the benefit of the wider society. Maturity as such is very much absent from the public sector at the time of writing. The implementation of such online digital databases and platforms aims to enhance transparency at the time of creation and propose a roadmap to higher maturity levels where the availability of open data will be deeply embedded across the entire government. In this sense, the framework is dynamic rather than static.³⁶ The Observatory Maturity Model (eG-

³³ Available at <https://nomoplatform.cy/> (last accessed on 11 April 2021)

³⁴ See the official website of the Republic of Cyprus House of Representatives (N.D.) "Digital Library – Draft Legislation – Bill Proposals", available at <http://www.parliament.cy/el/library> (last accessed on 11 April 2021). Please note that the link to Nomoplatform is included at the very bottom right in Greek as "Νομοσχέδια – προτάσεις νόμου".

³⁵ Van der Meulen R., '5 Levels of Digital Government Maturity' Smarter With Gartner, available at: <https://www.gartner.com/smarterwithgartner/5-levels-of-digital-government-maturity/> (last accessed 18 March 2021).

³⁶ See Concha et al., 'E-Government procurement observatory, maturity model and early measurements' (2012) 29 *Government Information Quarterly*: S43-S50. In this piece, the authors have proposed an e-Government Procurement model. Although e-governance and e-government procurement have similar goals, they are different concepts. The former refers to using ICTs to create a more transparent relationship between the electorate and their representatives. In contrast, the latter refers to using ICTs to create a more transparent relationship between the government and its suppliers of

PO-MM) focused on the main two elements, namely observation and transformation. Four different maturity levels each eGPO-MM intends to meet have been put forward: (i) identification of current situation; (ii) comparison with other eGPO-MMs; (iii) creation of a roadmap to improve its level of maturity, and (iv) integration with other initiatives. This paper proposes an e-Governance Maturity Model that accounts for similar maturity levels.³⁷ Therefore, the Cypriot OLO should: (i) identify the current situation; (ii) compare the model with other e-Governance Maturity Models abroad; (iii) build a roadmap; and (iv) instruct policymakers to integrate the model with other initiatives. Incorporating the following degrees of maturity will ensure the evolution of open access data.

Current practices in Cyprus

Current practices in Cyprus have illustrated the need for a digital transformation in the country. Although the implementation may be costly, digitalisation could reform Cyprus for the better. Digitalization could lead to greater openness, increased transparency, and a reduction of costs in the future. The unprecedented arrival of COVID-19 has shown the need for a digitalised Cypriot Justice System. The crisis immediately enhanced chronic challenges faced by the Cypriot legal system, most conspicuously in terms of achieving greater efficiency in the face of acute delays and backlogs and in the absence of e-justice systems. The EU Justice Scoreboard is a database that provides information regarding the Member State's National justice systems, focusing on three primary elements, effectiveness, quality, and independence.

In 2019 and in previous years, Cyprus rated last in terms of time needed for cases to be tried, far exceeding the EU average. According to the database information, the time needed in Cyprus to resolve civil, commercial, administrative, and other similar cases is the longest in the EU. The Cypriot judiciary system needs an average of 1,000 days to resolve a case. After the Government's measures in response to the unprecedented health crisis, the Supreme Court followed suit, by closing all the Courts until further notice. In addition, the closure of the Courts created a significant backlog of trials resulting in major problems and in a significant increase of the delays in the justice system, as each case will take more than 5-6 years to complete.³⁸ The implementation of an e-justice system would have ameliorated these issues. Having considered

goods and services. Both e-governance and e-government procurement want to achieve greater transparency and accountability. The latter also aims to increase competition.

³⁷ Misra D. and Dhingra A., E-governance maturity model. *Electronics Information and Planning* (2002) 29: 269-275.

³⁸ 'The Time Has Come for the Cyprus Justice System and Courts to Utilize Technology' (2021) Cyprus Lawyers | Advocates | Legal | Pelecanos Law, available at <https://pelecanoslaw.com/article/the-time-has-come-for-the-cyprus-justice-system-and-courts-to-utilize-technology> (last accessed on 16 March 2021)

the current circumstances, the UK has implemented 'virtual Courts' involving telephone and video hearings, allowing the country to deal with the closure of the Courts.

Unlike the UK, Cyprus did not have the digital infrastructure needed to allow for such procedures as those typically observed in small states and societies.³⁹ Again, in 2019, the European Commission rated technology availability in the Cypriot Justice System as incredibly low on the EU Justice Scoreboard,⁴⁰ accounting for less than 10% of correspondence. Cyprus was among the five Member States that, in 2018, received country-specific recommendations from the Council concerning their justice system.⁴¹ Therefore, it is clear that, although the pandemic has shone a light on this problem, the lack of an e-justice system has been a cause for concern in the past. Another problem with the justice system is the lack of an e-filing system that stores digitized versions of all the necessary legal documents.⁴² Not only is this environmentally unfriendly, but it is also costly in terms of time, as lawyers must depend on paper-based files instead. The Cypriot Government and the Cypriot Supreme Court must address this problem and begin the justice system's digitalisation urgently.

Although the Cyprus House of Representatives has a database, it is currently insufficient.⁴³ Firstly, there is no option to search for legislation. The unsearchable nature of the database raises issues regarding the accessibility of data. It is important that legislative data is accessible as well as available. Although the House may argue that the data is indeed accessible, it needs to take further measures to ensure that it is easily accessible. Secondly, the database only contains legislation from 2020 onwards. The omission of legislative data from before 2020 again raises questions of transparency and accountability. For the site to function as a bridge between parliamentarians and citizens it is vital that the database make available data from the last several decades. Thus, even though the database is a step in the right direction towards greater transparency and accountability, there is ample room for improvements. This is precisely the challenge and the gap the Nomoplatform™ project has attempted to tackle.

Another critical move towards digitalisation was the Cyprus House of Representatives' creation of the 'Parallel Parliament'. The 'Parallel Parliament' initiative aims to bridge the gap between the electorate and the elected, by creating a more transparent and democratic society. The Parallel Parliament's primary target is the development

³⁹ Gromova E., Timokhin D., & Popova G., The role of digitalisation in the economy development of small innovative enterprises. (2020) 169 *Procedia Computer Science*: 461-467.

⁴⁰ Zantira C., 'E-justice in Cyprus: the COVID-19 paradigm' | Michael Kyprianou & Co LLC. (2021) Michael Kyprianou & Co LLC, available at <https://www.kyprianou.com/en/publications/e-justice-in-cyprus-the-covid-19-paradigm/ppp-301/15/> (last accessed 16 March 2021)

⁴¹ The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the operation of the Cypriot courts: technological challenges and the maintenance of Rule of Law – a comparative analysis with other common law jurisdictions. *Information Communication Technologies in court proceedings: EU and Cyprus*.

⁴² The time has come for the Cyprus Justice System and Courts to utilize no 37.

⁴³ March 2021 is the date of this article.

of an interactive relationship between citizens and the State to strengthen the feelings of the active citizenship and to increase the citizens' participation in politics. The platform will house discussions between policymakers and citizens which will aid political, social, economic, and cultural progress and development. To achieve these aims, the House of Representativeness created six Parallel Parliaments: (i) for Research, Innovation and Digital Governance; (ii) for Culture (iii) for Ecology, Sustainability, Environment, and Health (iv) for Civil Society (v) for Children (vi) for Young People. The majority of Parallel Parliament members are experts and stakeholders that have been invited to participate and contribute with their knowledge and skills.⁴⁴ Although this is an exhaustive list of the Parallel Parliaments to date, the House of Representatives may create more if they identify the need. Gabriela Cuevas Barron, the President of the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), praised the Cypriot Parliament for this initiative, explaining that the government has opened 'the possibility to rethink politics and institutions'.⁴⁵ Such an initiative illustrates the new wave of communication between the state and citizens of the state.

As discussed in the first section, another problem the Cyprus House of Representatives faces is the lack of lobbying regulation. Initially, lobbying does not appear to 'exist' in Cyprus, as neither if the terms 'lobbyist' and 'lobbying' are defined in the Greek language. Due to the lack of regulation and legislation surrounding lobbying, the term is left undefined by Cypriot law, which has left many individuals confused about its meaning.⁴⁶ A report by Transparency International (TI)⁴⁷ collected data regarding the quality of lobbying regulation across 19 countries. They broke down the information into three components: (i) transparency (ii) integrity (iii) equality of access. Cyprus scored below average on all three components and won the role of the worst-performing country overall. Conversations about lobbying regulations are virtually non-existent and citizens have little to no information about who is lobbying for what and where. The Group of States against Corruption (GRECO), which is tasked with monitoring compliance with the organisation's anti-corruption standards and many of European Union's institutions criticized Cyprus harshly for not regulating

⁴⁴ Syllouris D., *Inclusive Parliaments: The Role of the Speaker in Supporting Emerging Procedures and Practices Embracing the Changing Face and Needs of Parliament*. (2020) Parliament.cy, available at: <http://www.parliament.cy/images/media/assetfile/Plenary%20Session%20Address%20-%20FINAL.pdf> (last accessed 18 March 2021). See also the official landing page of the Parallel Parliament Initiative at <http://www.parliament.cy/el/%CF%80%CE%B1%CF%81%CE%B1%CE%BB%CE%B%CE%B7%CE%BB%CE%B7-%CE%B2%CE%BF%CF%85%CE%BB%CE%B7>

⁴⁵ IPU President praises Cyprus Parliament's initiatives, 2019, available at <https://www.ipu.org/news/news-in-brief/2019-07/ipu-president-visits-cyprus-and-iran> (last accessed 16 March 2021)

⁴⁶ LPAP Cyprus Association of Lobbyist & Public Affairs Professionals, 2018. Access the presentation here: <http://www.paceurope.eu/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/Lobbying-in-Cyprus.pdf>

⁴⁷ A non-profit organisation set up to combat corruption. For more details of the company, please refer to their website: <https://www.transparency.org/en>

lobbying. After many negative reports, the Government of Cyprus put together a set of rules that will prevent political corruption and will restrict the unregulated lobby.⁴⁸

On the other hand, the Members of Parliament argue that the suggested bill regarding the unregulated lobby in Cyprus will infringe their rights as elected representatives and citizens to have encounters and hearing with groups and individuals on matters concerning the society's best interests. While Cyprus still struggles to regulate lobbying, the Government of Cyprus promised that the debate on a legislation proposal that would regulate lobbying will continue after the parliamentary elections in May 2021. In conclusion, as the lack of lobbying regulations is intricately related to the problems of transparency and corruption, the Government of Cyprus must immediately act against those issues by regulating lobbying. Lobbying and decision-making remain under the radar of public scrutiny, and this needs to change to create a more just society.

For now, the public's trust in politicians may be low due to the acknowledgment of past corruption and bribery, as reflected in the Parliamentary Elections of 2021, which had a percentage of absenteeism at 34.28%.⁴⁹ Within the last couple of years, the 'golden passport' scheme has come to light whereby Cypriot citizenship was for sale in return for a €2.5 million investment in the country.⁵⁰ According to available statistics, Cyprus was one of the countries that gave the most golden EU passports (around 4,000 Cypriot passports have been issued to foreign individuals in the last seven years).⁵¹ Notably, the Cypriot passport enables the owner to travel visa-free throughout the EU, thus the scheme posed a grave security risk all across the Union. In October 2020, Al-Jazeera's Investigative Unit revealed that between 2017 and 2019, more than 2,500 individuals secured citizenship through this scheme.⁵² Out of the 2,500, approximately 1,400 were wealthy individuals, and the other 1,100 were their family members. The release of the papers, known as the 'Cyprus Papers', documenting the wealthy individuals' profiles revealed that many of them were either convicted criminals or politically exposed persons. Among those included in the list was Pham Nhat Vu, a Vietnamese businessman charged with bribery during a tele-

⁴⁸ 'Cyprus Struggles to Regulate Lobbying', *The English Edition of Kathimerini Cyprus*, Unions off the hook as members of parliament weight transparency against politicking rights, available at <https://knews.kathimerini.com.cy/en/news/cyprus-struggles-to-regulate-lobbying> (last accessed on 18 April 2021)

⁴⁹ See the Official Results of the 2021 Parliamentary Elections at http://live.elections.moi.gov.cy/English/PARLIAMENTARY_ELECTIONS_2021/Islandwide

⁵⁰ The official programme was known as 'Citizenship by Investment'.

⁵¹ Laure Brillaud, Maíra Martini, 'Golden Visas: Facts and Figures' in the Report *European Getaway: Inside the Murky World of Golden Visas*, available at https://www.jstor.org/stable/res-rep20548.4?refreqid=excelsior%3A1378eb4c782f0dcd242000668ee23257&seq=6#metadata_info_tab_contents (last accessed on 18 April 2021)

⁵² Watch the documentary here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Oj18cya_gvw&ab_channel=AlJazeeraEnglish

communications deal, and Nikolay Gornovskiy, a former Gazprom official who faced corruption charges in Russia. Furthermore, it was revealed that many state officials were involved in the scandal.

Demetris Syllouris, former President of the House of Representatives and the country's second-in-command was one of them. Sadly, this is rather ironic, considering the fact that the former Speaker was, in fact, the main architect and supporter of initiatives such as the Parallel Parliament, which aimed at opening up the House to the wider society and tackling the lack of accountability, whilst promoting stronger and transparent institutions. Both Syllouris and former MP, Giovanis, from the left-wing People's Working Party (AKEL) eventually resigned from Parliament due to their direct implication in the Al Jazeera scandal.⁵³ The Citizenship By Investment programme had also come under fire before through rigorous scepticism of other EU Member States, but since 2020 the criticism has become more systematic. The disclosure of the nexus of scandals created intense turmoil among citizens of Cyprus that led to many demonstrations and protests and to resignations of numerous state officials. The golden passports scheme demonstrates the need for increased public scrutiny whereby Cypriot citizens can hold government officials accountable for their actions.

To achieve this level of public scrutiny, citizens need to form new bodies and independent projects. An example of this is through Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) which are effective in providing the vital public space where the voice of the citizens can be heard. Defined briefly, CSOs are non-profit groups of individuals or organizations with similar interests that take action to promote and protect the common visions and interests of the people. They create open dialogues and solve problems peacefully, strengthening cooperative governance relationships.⁵⁴ Civil societies have played a successful and integral part in cultivating cooperation between opposing communities.⁵⁵ Overcoming prejudices and laying the bed for an open dialogue are fundamental components of developing trust and respect. As these bodies are separate from the government, they can draw greater attention to social issues such as corruption and injustice. By educating citizens, CSOs aim to create a more transparent and accountable society.⁵⁶ Civil society work is very limited in Cyprus: there are some service-providing CSOs including groups of volunteers and NGOs, who have

⁵³ Al Jazeera Investigative Unit 'Cypriot Parliament Speaker Quits After Passport Scheme Scandal' (2020), available at <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/10/15/cyprus-house-speaker-resigns-following-al-jazeera-investigation> (last accessed on 5 April 2021)

⁵⁴ Rosenbaum A., 'Cooperative Service Delivery: The Dynamics of Public Sector-Private Sector-Civil Society Collaboration' (2006) 72(1) *International Review of Administrative Sciences*: 43-56.s

⁵⁵ Gillespie N., Georgiou V. and Insay S., 'Civil Society and Trust Building in Cyprus' (2013) 23(8) *Development in Practice*: 1078-1083, available at https://www.jstor.org/stable/24565429?seq=1#metadata_info_tab_contents (last accessed 18 March 2021).

⁵⁶ (Reform, 2015)

been offering their services ad-hoc or in more systematic patterns, however, open dialogue, advocacy and human rights groups are very few and in nascent stages. The two major issues that CSOs face in Cyprus are the low levels of participation and the lack of funding. The state of civil society in Cyprus makes it difficult for CSOs to count as much as it is needed because civil society is still a small but growing sector that needs to be nurtured, as well as because active civic participation is still a concept that appears obscure to most Cypriots.⁵⁷ Moreover, the private sector also has a role to play in creating these dialogues. Due to their innovative technology and knowledge of financial flows, the private sector must ensure clean, ethical business among society. Finally, the EU institutions strongly support the creation of healthy and strong CSOs in the Member States. Cyprus must bridge the gap between the electors and the elected, and CSO as a form of collective action is a means of getting closer to a more transparent and just democracy.

Current practices internationally

In attempting to modernise the Cypriot Parliament and the existing, inadequate, information-sharing practices,⁵⁸ a close examination of successful current models abroad is needed to demonstrate the positive impact of legislative transparency and accountability on societies, as well as to serve as a desirable example which can be adopted domestically to address democratic deficits. In an era where the positive effects of the use of information and communication technologies for parliamentary and legal accountability are undeniable, it is certain that, if Cyprus wants to be viewed as open and transparent as its counterparts, urgent reforms are required. It is essential that values which are better aligned with the present global sentiment be adopted, and technology be utilised as an information disclosure tool and as they key to democracy.

In this quest for more open governments, several countries around the globe have made use of the Internet to increase citizen participation and facilitate vertical accountability through the sharing of data. Making governmental data widely accessible provides a sense of inclusion and significantly contributes to the struggle against corruption and opportunism.⁵⁹ Increasing openness would, perhaps, not only act as a watchdog to combat corruption, as MPs would refrain from such political behaviour in order to meet voters' expectations, but would also restore public confidence in the legislative and executive branches of the government.⁶⁰ This is particularly relevant

⁵⁷ Marina Vasilara, Goteleine Piaton, 'The Role of Civil Society in Cyprus' Published 2007, available at <http://www.cyprusreview.org/index.php/cr/article/view/273/236> (last accessed on 18 April 2021)

⁵⁸ Note that Cyprus is not included in the Open Data Barometer Report 2018.

⁵⁹ Mills L., 'Parliamentary Transparency and Accountability' K4D Helpdesk Report. Brighton, UK: Institute of Development Studies, 2017.

⁶⁰ Galster A. 'Transparency and open government' (2018) Governance Committee Report CG35 14final

amid the current domestic context of government trustworthiness being in turmoil. Access to information can also contribute to providing a better service to the public; essentially, the notion is that the more responsive a government is to its citizens' input, the better the quality of public service.⁶¹

It is essential to understand that in order for transparency, as a right per se and as a 'leverage right', to be achieved, open access to data is of the utmost importance. Open data has been defined as data that can be 'freely used, modified, and shared by anyone for any purpose'.⁶² Currently, there are many exemplary open data portals, such as data.gov.uk in the UK. The portal acts as a single-entry point to a wide range of information, including data published by central government, local authorities, and public bodies. For instance, citizens are just one click away from data on all government spending over £25,000. The portal meets all the criteria for open data in a user-friendly environment; the data is free, can be reused and shared, is easily accessible, easy to navigate, comprehensive and regularly updated. Similarly, data.gouv.fr in France and dati.gov.it in Italy are notable examples of open data portals of EU Member States. A pan-European example is the European Data Portal which provides access to data published by all levels of government in countries of the EU, EEA, and other European countries. It currently facilitates information published by 36 countries in 1,147,750 datasets.

E-governance tools, then, have been used globally, not only to promote transparency through open data, but to also put their technology to good use for enhancing active citizen engagement, mobilisation, and participation in law making, thus upholding the accountability and answerableness of governments towards the public's suggestions. A great example of how technology is used to develop democratic practices at a regional level is 'Decide Madrid'⁶³ in Spain. 'Decide Madrid' is an online forum where locals have the opportunity to publish their suggestions, following voting. Suggestions which gain enough support are considered by the local council, which then produces a report on how these suggestions can be exploited and proceeds to publish it.

On a national scale, Estonia has also developed e-mechanisms to promote transparency and accountability in decision-making through the facilitation of e-consulting. Specifically, on the Estonian portal, published drafts of laws, amendments and development plans can be found, on which all users can comment or share their own ideas. Their suggestions are reviewed and the results are published in a report. Following the conclusion of the electronic consultation process, inter-ministerial discussion takes place. The tracking of the whole procedure is made available on the

⁶¹ Hughes T. Scott, K and Maassen P., 'Improving Public Services: Guidance for developing OGP commitments' (2017) Washington DC: Open Government Partnership

⁶² <http://opendefinition.org> (last accessed on 7 April 2021)

⁶³ See more at <https://decide.madrid.es/> (last accessed on 7 April 2021)

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e-legislation website.⁶⁴ As a result, comparative lessons can be drawn in from such innovative ideas. Pending modification and adaptation, such models can be implemented domestically in Cyprus as well. Undoubtedly, Cypriot citizens have a lot to gain through the creation of similar electronic participation platforms, which would not only encourage open online discussions on decision-making but would also allow the public's direct input in such.

Likewise, apart from governmental data (executive branch), it is crucial that proper mechanisms are set in place so that important information regarding the decision-making process (legislative branch) can be published in a manner which can easily be accessed by anyone, at any time, including all recent developments. In doing so, the public will have the opportunity to become informed on various key decisions which directly affect them, the manner in which those decisions were made, and who made them. This can be achieved through the publication of the legislative process, agendas, and Parliamentary minutes. Only then governments can be considered to be in full compliance with the rule of law and basic democratic principles.

Although Cyprus has an online House of Representatives database, the existing format is far from user-friendly and its defects are clearly visible when compared to the equivalents of other states. For instance, it only includes legislation from 2020 onwards, and it is not searchable. In contrast, countries such as the UK, have long-established, easily accessible, online databases of Parliamentary Hansard, which can be searched by either a keyword or a Member's name.⁶⁵

Furthermore, the country would certainly benefit from an independent television channel which would solely broadcast House of Representatives sessions. A great example is the Greek 'Hellenic Parliament TV' (Vouli ton Ellinon), whose main aim is to keep citizens up-to-date in relation to the Parliament's activities and bring cultural events and developments to the public's attention. By actively taking steps to inform the country's citizens, shedding some light to the behind-the-scenes of the decision-making process, their fundamental rights are met and a more inclusive society is achieved.

A prominent example of an active Legislative Observatory is the European Parliament Legislative Observatory ('OEIL') which monitors the EU decision-making process for all legislative and non-legislative procedures. The Parliament founded the database in 1994 and has been continuously developing the platform. It now includes extensive information about the Parliament's activity, from its budgetary power to its right of initiative and its capacity to endorse appointment⁶⁶ (Legislative Observatory,

⁶⁴ See more at <https://eelnoud.valitsus.ee/main#tZiVarHk> (last accessed on 7 April 2021)

⁶⁵ See the database at <https://hansard.parliament.uk/>

⁶⁶ The above is not an exhaustive list of the database's information on Parliament's activities. To see more, please visit: <https://oeil.secure.europarl.europa.eu/oeil/info/info2.do>

2021). The site has four main tools: (i) a search tool⁶⁷ (ii) a plenary calendar (iii) procedure files, and (iv) 'My Observatory'.⁶⁸ The search tool allows users to search specific terms throughout the database, making vast information easily accessible. Notably, the search tool only looks for words within procedure files. The files provide the user with information concerning a particular procedure, the key players and events, and a politically-neutral summary of primary documents. Furthermore, the calendar presents information concerning the date and times of all the past, present, and future part-sessions. The last component, My Observatory, is a more personal feature. The tool allows users to set up and receive notifications when specific changes to the database occur. Together, these features create a transparent relationship between EU citizens and members of the European Parliament, whereby information is available and easily accessible.

Another European-wide initiative to create greater transparency regarding politicians' decision-making process is the Statewatch European Monitoring and Documentation Centre (SEMDOC).⁶⁹ SEMDOC is a UK-based initiative founded in 1991 to monitor civil liberties within the EU. The platform contains an extensive database with news, articles, and websites dating back to 1991 (Statewatch | SEMDOC, 2021). Its primary focus is to monitor and document the development of the EU Justice and Home Affairs (JHA) policies, ensuring that democracy and diversity are never compromised.⁷⁰ In total, over 9,000 official documents are available and easily accessible on the JHA archive.⁷¹ The archive focuses on three EU bodies responsible for policy-making: the Council, the Commission, and the Parliament. The legislative observatory contains information about the Council, the Commission, and the Parliament, as well as their respective roles in the policy-making process. Providing a comprehensive dataset around legislative procedures regarding JHA policies, SEMDOC ensures that decision-making within the EU is public and that citizens can hold politicians accountable.

In contrast to the other OLOs discussed, Poland created its own capital city legislative observatory named the Kraków Legislative Observatory. The platform acts as a means for citizens to achieve greater clarity over policy-making decisions, thus making public scrutiny over the government easier. Previous to this initiative by the Stanczyk Institute of Civic Thought Foundation there was little to no information available to the general public regarding legislative procedures in Kraków. There were

⁶⁷ Access to the search tool: <https://oeil.secure.europarl.europa.eu/oeil/search/search.do?searchTab=y>

⁶⁸ Access to My Observatory: <https://oeil.secure.europarl.europa.eu/oeil/myoeil/login.do>

⁶⁹ To visit the SEMDOC homepage, follow this link: <https://www.statewatch.org/semDOC/welcome-to-semDOC/>

⁷⁰ For more about Statewatch's vision, please visit: <https://www.statewatch.org/about/>

⁷¹ To view the JHA archive, please visit: <https://www.statewatch.org/jha-archive/>

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no recordings of sessions, and no easy way to access and search through documents as the Council uploaded the material in pdf format which is sometimes hard to search, and no efficient way to check the voting history of councillors. Through this project, the Kraków City Council and City Hall now record each session and upload it for the public to view, ensure that all documents are complete and easily searchable, and no longer allow secret voting (Krakowskie Obserwatorium Legislacyjne - Fundacja Stańczyka, 2021). The initiative also created the portal przejrzystykrakow.pl,⁷² which acts as a data hub for all of the open-access data and has, on average, over 16,000 pageviews a month. Each of these activities has increased the transparency and the quality of the legislative process in Kraków. Using the same framework and ICTs, other cities within Poland can do the same.

Across the Atlantic, Latin America has implemented a similar framework to enhance transparency, increase accountability, and reduce corruption among politicians. To date, over 65% of Latin America has now adopted a regional Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) (Fundar, n.d.).⁷³ This particular case study is interesting because Latin America has used a legal framework to demand more transparency. The Freedom of Information Act has two main components: one is proactive and the other is reactive. The proactive component means that public officials must publish certain information about their activities to the public, irrespective of whether they requested the documents. On the other hand, the reactive component is when parliamentarians publicly release information upon the public's request (*What is the Freedom of Information Act?* 2021). Through this framework, Latin America has made it easier to identify and sanction corruption and, by doing so, has increased the public's trust in government officials. Notably, they've used the help of civil society organisations (CSOs) to carry out social audits, which are independent assessments of social injustice utilising the information made available through the FOIA. By implementing these reforms, Latin America is undergoing a democratic transition in which governments are more accountable and transparent.

Worldwide, the World Justice Project (WJP)⁷⁴ is an international civil society ensuring countries' adherence to the Rule of Law. Simply, the Rule of Law is the proposal that 'no one is above the law',⁷⁵ meaning that all people, regardless of wealth and

⁷² This portal uses the following link: <https://przejrzystykrakow.pl/>, which was active until December 2020. Interestingly, the alert comes up saying that 'the requested page is currently unavailable' in 2021, despite the fact that EEA Grants lists the project as 'completed', available at <https://eeagrants.org/archive/2009-2014/projects/PL05-0103> (last accessed on 16 March 2021)

⁷³ To investigate the FOIA at a more national level, please refer to this link: <https://www.right2info.org/resources/publications/publications/the-latin-american-approach-to-transparency-and-access-to-information>

⁷⁴ To view their website, please follow this link: <https://worldjusticeproject.org/>

⁷⁵ For a definition of the Rule of Law see <https://www.lexisnexis.co.uk/about-us/rule-of-law#:~:text=In%20its%20simplest%20form%2C%20the,the%20shelter%20of%20the%20law> (last accessed

power, are subject to the same laws. The Rule of Law has a vital role in enhancing transparency and accountability among policy-makers and politicians, since it reduces the likelihood of corruption and increases social justice. Impressively, the WJP provides independent data on the Rule of Law for over 120 countries.⁷⁶ The organisation has created a comprehensive dataset and index regarding each country on its database. Each country has its overall score, global rank, regional rank, and rank change.⁷⁷ With the accessibility of this information, citizens can hold governments socially responsible and legally responsible for failing to adhere to the Rule of Law.⁷⁸ Non-governmental organisations such as the WJP are vital for monitoring this regulation as they can quickly draw attention to the government's wrongdoings and encourage social change.

These initiatives demonstrate different ways in which countries are trying to tackle corruption and increase transparency and accountability while making the world a more just place. From these strategies, two key elements arise. Firstly, participation is essential for creating a more trusting relationship between the electorate and their representatives. Secondly, non-governmental organisations have a role to play in monitoring the government's activity. By bringing these two factors together, states are trying to create a world where citizens and policymakers have open conversations about legislative and non-legislative procedures and where everyone is subject to the law.

Policy recommendations

The three main principles identified in order to achieve an open government in Cyprus are transparency, participation, and accountability. Firstly, for the public to see the workings of their government, data and information on public spending, government contracts et cetera should open up in a form of an open data portal. Secondly, for the public to be involved in the running of their government, such participation should be encouraged, for instance through the protection of whistleblowers and others who call attention to occurrences of corruption and government shortcomings. Lastly, and perhaps most importantly, to uphold the rule of law it is necessary to set up more mechanisms for the public to be heard, and feel that can it be heard, while making the government answerable to citizens.

Cyprus should draw inspiration from current practices abroad and implement its own OLO. The OLO will create a space for open-data that is widely available and easi-

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⁷⁶ 'World of Justice Project' Rule of Law Index (2021) available at <https://worldjusticeproject.org/rule-of-law-index/> (last accessed 19 March 2021).

⁷⁷ Note that Cyprus does not have a WJP Rule of Law Index at the time of writing.

⁷⁸ Johnston M., 'Good Governance: Rule of Law, Transparency, and Accountability' available at <https://etico.iiep.unesco.org/sites/default/files/unpan010193.pdf> (last accessed 18 March 2021).

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ly accessible. E-governance systems will allow citizens and members of Parliament to have open discussions about the policy-making process, creating greater transparency and accountability. Furthermore, information must be available and easily accessible. Thus, the governance system should ensure that the e-system has a functioning search tool and upload all documents in an accessible format. The implementation of open discussion forums like OpeningParliament.org (<https://www.openingparliament.org/>) would also enhance direct citizen engagement. Implementing these systems will also save taxpayers' money in the future due to the increased efficiency of e-systems. In summary, Cyprus needs to implement a comprehensive and easily accessible OLO to increase transparency and accountability among the House of Representatives.

Other reforms Cyprus should consider are reintroducing inactive initiatives and spreading awareness around current practices in place. Reviving projects like Vouli-Watch Cyprus will ensure that political activity is under public scrutiny and that politicians and policy-makers are accountable for their actions. The website's political neutrality is essential for creating an unbiased flow of information between citizens and the Cyprus House of Representatives. Bridging the gap between citizens and politicians is vital to regaining the general public's faith in the state. Also, government officials and CSOs need to increase awareness around current projects like Parallel Parliament. As the platform is already in place, the task is to educate citizens about the initiative and explain its role in creating a more open society. Cyprus must reintroduce and re-vitalise these platforms in a bid to foster democracy.

The final suggestion is to encourage the House to impose more stringent regulations around lobbying, whistleblowing, and corruption. The first step will be to define the terms in law. Defining words reduces ambiguity and makes it easier to have a proper conversation about their meanings and applications. Once the definition is in place, the House needs to introduce more stringent legislation and regulation. Having these in place will allow the government and citizens to tackle problems like corruption head-on. Lobbying and whistleblowing are integral parts of a healthy, democratic society, and therefore, Cyprus needs to introduce such concepts into its everyday practice. Cyprus needs to implement and broaden their e-governance systems to create an e-democracy. By using ICTs and strengthening regulations, the country can fight against corruption and cultivate greater transparency and accountability for the House of Representatives.