



ACCESS TO INFORMATION

by Access Info Europe - <https://www.access-info.org>

Title:

Access to information: the right to ask, the right to know

Objectives

- Raising awareness among youth so they learn they have a right of access to information.
- Learning what is the right of access to information, existing both in their countries and in the EU.
- Discovering the platform AsktheEU.org.
- Learning how to submit an access to information request on AsktheEU.org.

Methods (discussion, role play etc.):

- PPT Presentation
- Showcasing the platform
- Kahoot game
- Working in groups (submission of requests/obtaining information)
- Discussion and debate with participants

Time format:

The ideal time format is 1.30h, but it can be adjusted between 1h and 2h.



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Democracy skills addressed:

- Research Skills – transparency & access to information
- Awareness on rights
- Awareness on human rights
- Knowledge on Political Systems & Participation Methods



Age group:

The ideal age group is 18 - 30 years old, but it can be used for different ages.



Number of participants:

The ideal number is around 15 participants, but the facilitator can choose if appropriate to work with a smaller or bigger group.



Necessary materials/software:

- One computer and screen for the facilitator.
- Mobile phones or computers for participants to play the Kahoot game.
- Computers for participants to submit requests – no more than 4 participants per computer. If participants do not have a computer, they can also use their smartphones or tablets.



Sources:

- <https://www.asktheeu.org>
- Powerpoint Presentation (attached)
- Kahoot game (See Annex in p. 12)
- Guide on Access to EU Documents
- Alaveteli Deployments (See p. 7)
- AsktheEU.org Requests on the News (See p. 10)



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Remarks:

The facilitator can use the PPT Presentation during the whole activity.

If the activity is implemented together with other EU Democracy Rally activities, it would be important, during the activity, to make the connection with the other activities, such as those on:

- Human Rights, indicating that the right of Access to Information is also a human right embedded in the right to freedom of expression.
- Simulation Game, where they learn the working methods of the EU institutions, more concretely the EU Parliament. Participants could request access to documents at the EU Parliament.
- Fake News, and how important it is to have access to information to counterfeit fake news.

For future facilitators who might want to conduct this activity themselves, they will be able to use a full description of the activity, the ppt presentation, the list of questions and answers for the Kahoot game, the 'Guide on Access to EU Documents', the 'AsktheEU.org Requests on the News', and the 'Alaveteli Deployments', so they have all the necessary background information.

Facilitators can choose to shorten the activity and adapt it to different groups. For example, the activity can be focused only in working in groups for creating and submitting requests and/or searching for relevant information.

Since this activity is addressed to young people in a context of playful and interactive activities, it would be best to communicate concepts in the simplest way possible and to avoid complicated legal jargon. The facilitator should always be ready to ask questions to participants to keep them engaged, as well as accepting their questions and doubts as the activity rolls out.



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STRUCTURE OF THE ACTIVITY



Introduction to the activity (5 -10 mins.):

1. Facilitator introduction.
2. Warm up and introductory questions to the topic:
 - a. Who knows what is the right of access to information?
 - b. Who knows what is transparency?
 - c. Has anybody ever submitted an access to information request?



Introduction to the right of access to information (30 mins):

1. What is the right of access to information?
2. Recognition of the right:
3. The right in Europe
4. RTI Rating – Find your national law!
5. Regulation 1049 - What does it say?
6. Access to EU documents
7. AsktheEU.org
8. Alaveteli in EU countries
9. I want information, but for what?
10. Use Cases
11. Tips for submitting requests
12. What happens after you submit your request?
13. How to appeal



Kahoot game (5 – 10 mins):

We divide participants in groups of 3-4 people if they have a laptop, or 2 if they only have a smartphone. They will work in groups for the rest of the activity. The Kahoot game will be displayed on the screen, and participants, in groups, will play and try to get as many answers right as possible. The game includes 8 questions that can be found in the Annex in page 12.



Participants draft and submit a request (30 mins):

The facilitator will provide a list of topics or information to be requested based on participants' interests. A potential list of topics could be: climate change, gender equality, covid-19, refugees, Erasmus, youth employment, or any other topic that is of participants' interest. They can think of information that could be useful for them in order to build a campaign, or a project, which they will develop during the rally.

If participants need a little bit of help choosing what they want to ask, here is a list of potential information to be requested:

1. Number of people reporting to have suffered online harassment (disaggregated by gender).
2. Number of refugees taken in by each EU Member States (including country of origin).
3. Number of European students who received an Erasmus scholarship in the last year.
4. EU measures to tackle climate change within the EU institutions.
5. EU measures to tackle youth unemployment in the EU.
6. Number of people who are fully Covid-19 vaccinated / or not vaccinated / or boosted in the EU.

Participants will work in groups of 2 to 4 people. Each group will choose a topic or specific information to request. One member of the group will sign up in the AsktheEU.org platform. They will choose to which EU body they want to submit the request. The facilitator will support participants in choosing the right body. They will write the request and submit it. The facilitator will support participants in the final wording of the request to make sure it is appropriate. Participants will be able to follow up via email with the facilitator if they need support during the process of receiving a response to their request.

It is important to reinforce the idea that they do not have to do it perfectly, just to experience the process and break the fear of engaging in a process with an EU institution.



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Alternative structure:

Participants can choose, instead of submitting a request, to find relevant information on the AsktheEU.org platform. The group will choose a topic/specific information to find, for example, to build their advocacy strategy. They will explore the access to information requests available on AsktheEU.org using the 'Browse requests' tab and the search engine inside the platform. They can check all the different requests submitted by the platform users and use the information provided by the EU institutions in their responses.

If there is enough time, the facilitator can choose to do both activities, submitting a request and finding information on the platform.



Discussion time (10 mins):

The facilitator should have a final debate and Q&A with participants to make sure they understood the concepts and clarify any questions they might have. This is a list of potential questions to ask to participants:

1. Why do you think the right of access to information is important to you as a citizen?
2. How do you envision the work of journalists or activists if they didn't have this right?
3. Now that you know where to start, would you submit an access to information request in the future? If not, what prevents you from doing it?
4. Do you think it is easy to exercise this right? Why do you think it is or it is not easy?
5. Any further questions?



ALAVETELI DEPLOYMENTS IN EU COUNTRIES



About Alaveteli

[Alaveteli](#) is free software for making Freedom of Information (FOI) or access to information (ATI) requests. It can easily be translated into any language, and customised for variations of FOI or ATI law. Alaveteli was developed initially by mySociety and is being improved for international use by a number of organisations including [Access Info Europe](#). The development of Alaveteli was supported by a number of foundations and charities who are interested in transparency across the world.



How it works

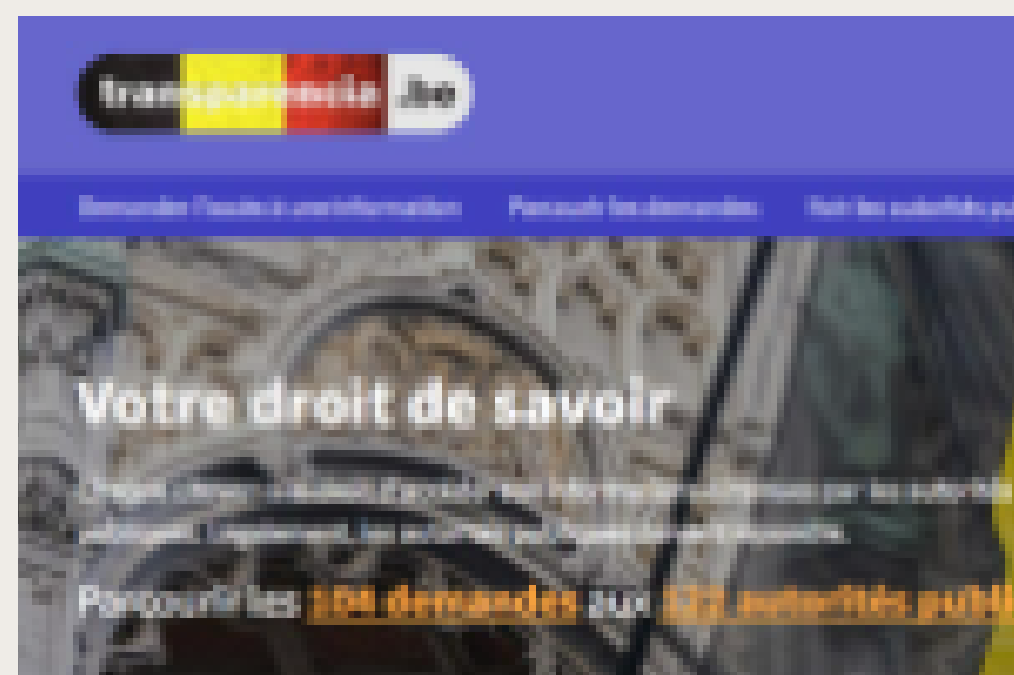
Citizens can use Alaveteli to request information to public bodies, and the replies they receive are recorded for all to see on the website. Historic requests, along with any resulting correspondence, are archived publicly online. This increases the availability of the requested information and encourages transparency. Therefore, Alaveteli acts both as a useful tool for citizens, and as an advocacy tool for right-to-know campaigners. The project supports FOI websites around the world.



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AVAILABLE DEPLOYMENTS

BELGIUM



Transparencia

transparencia.be

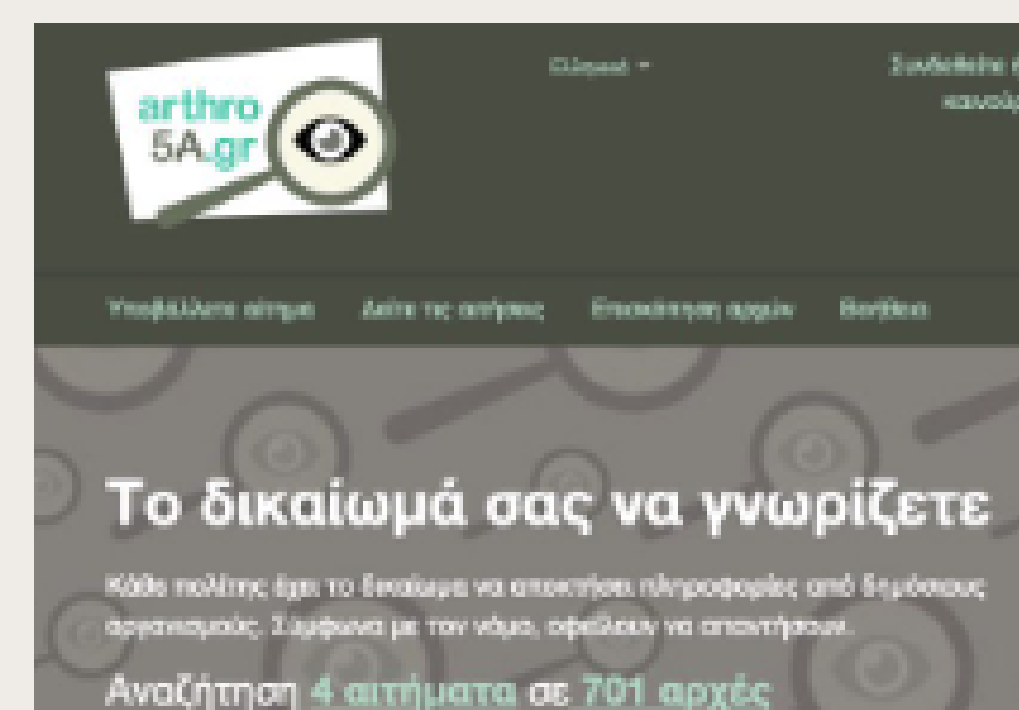
CROATIA



Imamo pravo znati

imamopravoznati.org

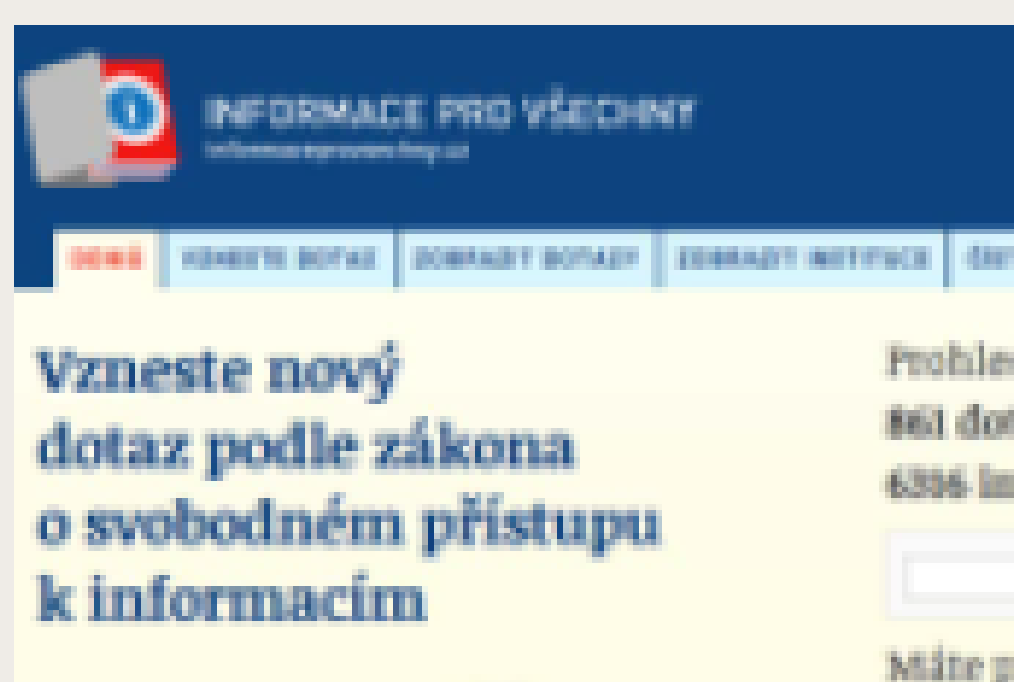
GREECE



arthro5A.gr

arthro5A.gr

CZECHIA



Info Pro Všechny

nfopro vsechny.cz

FRANCE



MaDada

madada.fr

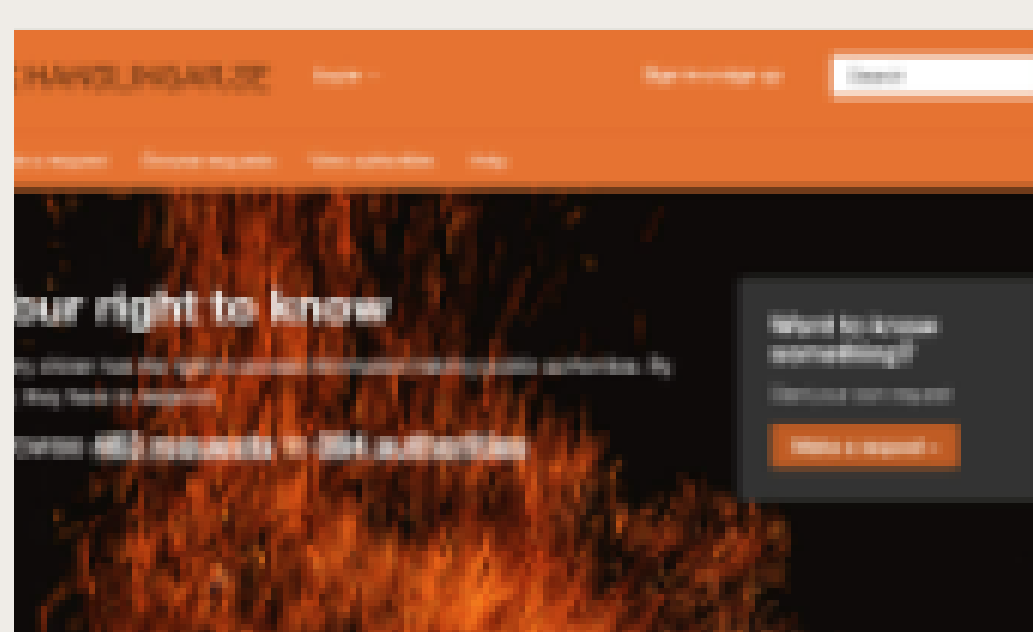
NETHERLANDS



de Woo-Knop

woo-knop.nl

SWEDEN



Handlingar

handlingar.se

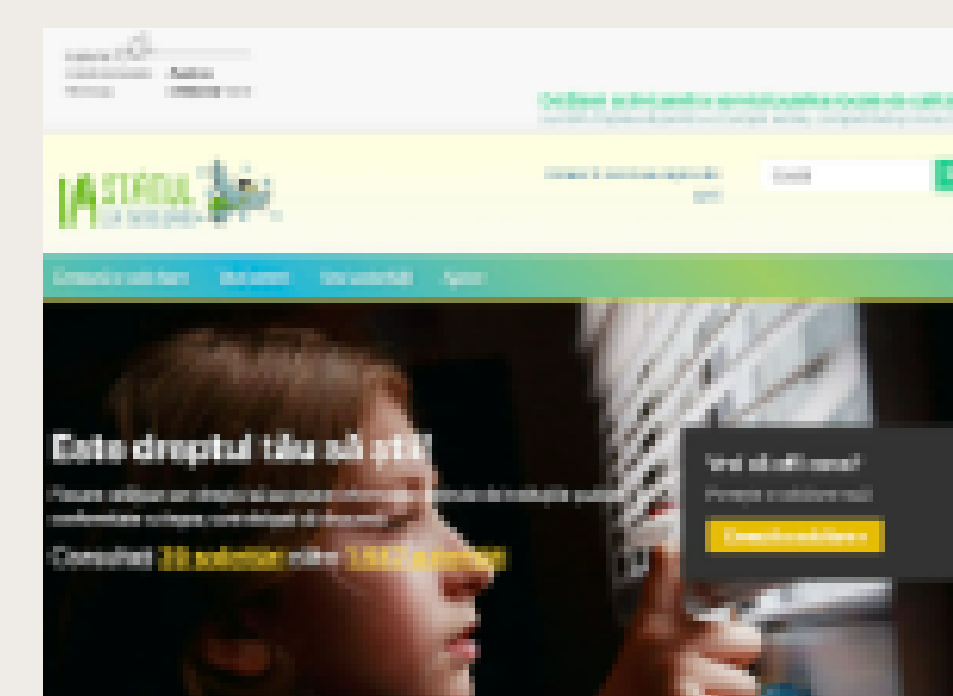
HUNGARY



Ki Mit Tud

kimittud.atlatszo.hu

ROMANIA



Ia Statul la Întrebări

iastatullaintrebari.ro

There are more Alaveteli platforms available in other countries outside the European Union and in different parts of the world. Please see them all here: <https://alaveteli.org/deployments/>

EU INSTITUTIONS

EU

AsktheEU.org

At the European Union level, there is a request platform called [AsktheEU.org](https://asktheeu.org) to request access to documents to all EU bodies. It is managed by the Access Info Europe team.



AsktheEU.org

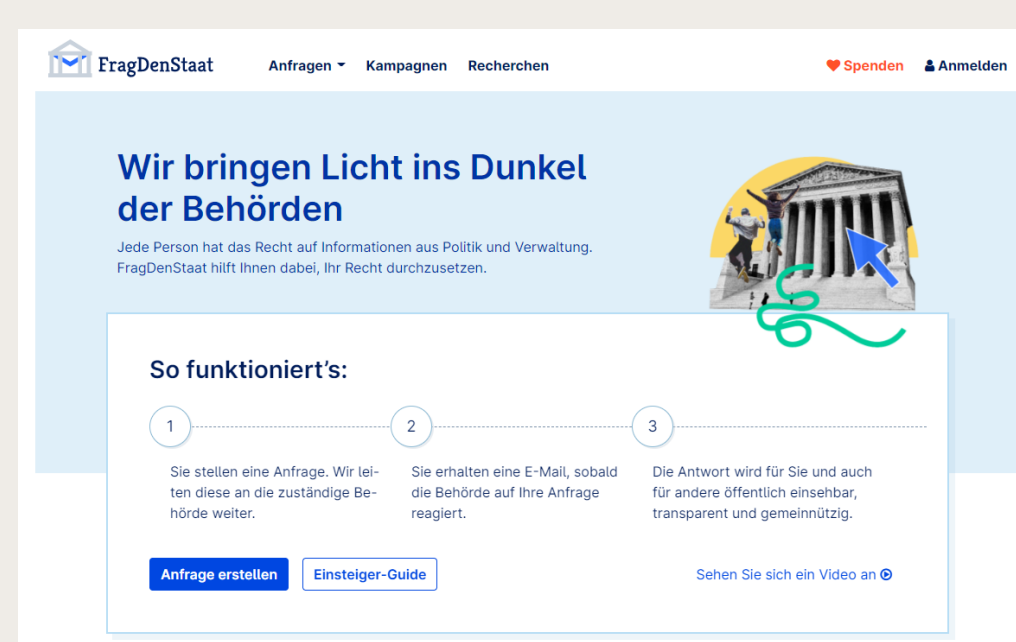
[AsktheEU.org](https://asktheeu.org)

SIMILAR PLATFORMS

FragDenStaat

In Germany and Austria there is a very similar platform called FragDenStaat.

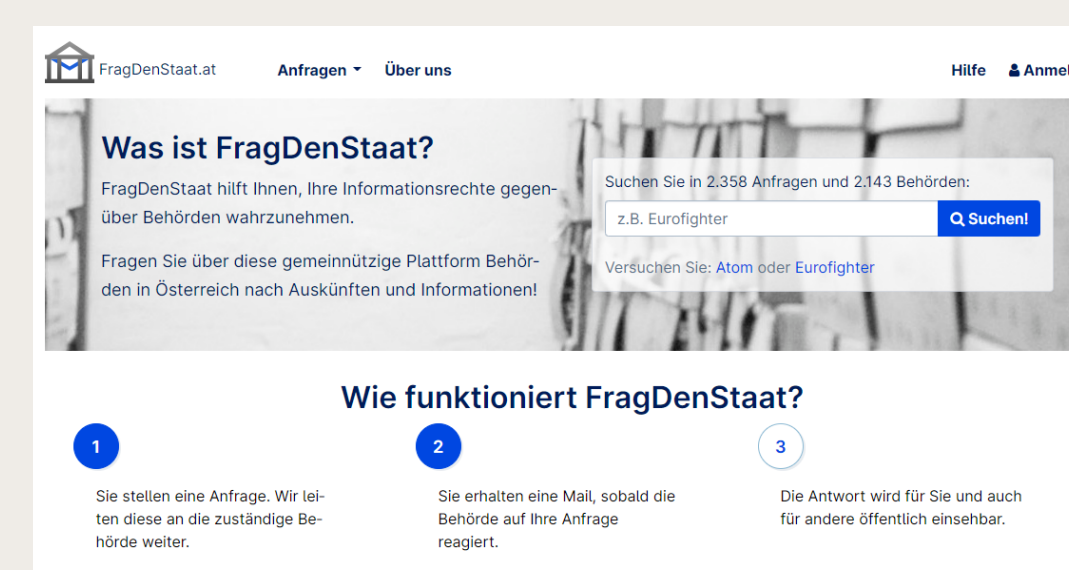
GERMANY



FragDenStaat

fragdenstaat.de

AUSTRIA



FragDenStaat

fragdenstaat.at

ASKTHEEU.ORG REQUESTS ON THE NEWS

Many journalists, civil society organisations and NGOs use the information they obtain through their access to information requests to write articles and reports, or to build their campaigns. See some examples here below:



EU News Via Documents Requests – A Universal Charger, netzpolitik Reports

An [AsktheEU request](#) for internal documents revealed that the European Commission were taking steps towards introducing a common charger for all devices, as [Alexander Fanta reported for netzpolitik.org](#) in 2021.



NGO Reports – InfluenceMap & EU Lobbying

In 2020 [InfluenceMap reported](#) on lobbying around the EU's Ecolabel for financial products, based on stakeholder consultation documents obtained [through AsktheEU](#) by Rebecca Vaughan. Another InfluenceMap report, covering the [aviation sector](#), used AsktheEU requests to show coordinated airline lobbying on climate issues.



Investigative Journalism with FOI – Follow the Money on Revolving Door

Peter Teffer, for investigative outlet Follow the Money, [requested emails and documents via AsktheEU](#), showing that a former director of the European Defence Agency took up a new position as a defence company lobbyist before getting approval from the EU. This violated EU rules, [the investigation](#) revealed in 2020.



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Using AsktheEU for National Reporting – Maldita & the Spanish Mask Tax

Through an [AsktheEU request](#), Sergio Sangiao and Maldito Dato obtained a letter from the European Commission, which told the Spanish Ministry of Finance that sales tax on face masks could be reduced – seven months before the Spanish government actually lowered the tax rate. The request featured in [this 2020 article](#).



Requests Gaining Media Attention – Vaccine Negotiations Over SMS?

Alexander Fanta, netzpolitik.org, [requested via AsktheEU](#) text messages exchanged during the Covid vaccine deals between EU Commission President Ursula Von der Leyen and Pfizer CEO Albert Bourla.

The request was denied, sparking a debate of what is considered a “document” under EU regulation, with the Commission receiving [criticism from the Ombudsman](#). Spiegel International reported on the request in 2021 article [“The European Commission Deletes Mass Amounts of Emails and Doesn't Archive Chats”](#).



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ANNEX

ACCESS TO INFORMATION ACTIVITY - KAHOOT GAME

Using the free version of Kahoot, the available type of questions are 'Quiz' and 'True or False', and only a maximum of 10 people will be able to connect to the game. If there are more participants, they can play in teams. When using a pro account, there are more types of questions available and more participants will be able to join.

This is a list of questions that can be used for the Access to Information activity:

1. There is a regulation that guarantees European citizens' right to request access to EU documents (True or False)
 - a. True (correct)
 - b. False
2. What's the name of the platform to submit requests to EU bodies? (Quiz)
 - a. AskEurope.org
 - b. AccesstoEU.org
 - c. AsktheEU.org (correct)
 - d. EUrequests.org
3. When I submit a request, I'm obliged to explain why I want the information
 - a. True
 - b. False (correct)
4. I need to pay a fee to submit an access to information request
 - a. True
 - b. False (correct)
5. On AsktheEU.org, only registered users can see the submitted requests and its responses
 - a. True
 - b. False (correct)
6. How many days should I wait for a response to my request to a EU body?
 - a. 30 working days
 - b. 10 working days
 - c. 15 working days (correct)
 - d. 20 working days
7. If I don't receive the information I requested, I don't have a right to appeal
 - a. True
 - b. False (correct)
8. To which EU body can I submit my appeal?
 - a. European Data Protection Supervisor
 - b. European Ombudsman (correct)
 - c. European Information Centre
 - d. Publications Office of the European Union



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