



European Ombudsman

Emily O'Reilly
European Ombudsman

Mr Frans Timmermans
First Vice-President
European Commission
BE-1049 Brussels
Belgium

Strasbourg, **19 -02- 2015**

Re: EU engagement with the Open Government Partnership - a leading role for the European Commission?

Dear Mr First Vice-President,

As you know, I have been closely following the progress announced by the Commission in areas of mutual concern and interest. I have been encouraged by your efforts to build a Union that works better, is more accountable and prides itself on operating openly. It is against this background that I draw your attention to the Open Government Partnership (OGP)¹. Having met and discussed with you, I am convinced that you will see the added value in EU engagement with this groundbreaking initiative.

The aim of the OGP is to make governments more open, accountable, and responsive to citizens. I cannot put it more eloquently than US President Obama, who said at the recent 'OGP High-Level Side Event to the 69th United Nations General Assembly':

'When we started this, we didn't know if it was going to work. And I could not be more proud to see the enormous changes that are taking place all around the globe – in small increments sometimes. It's not flashy. It doesn't generate a lot of headlines. But the work you're doing here is a steady wave of better government, and a steady wave of stronger civil societies. And over time, that means that not only will individual countries be stronger, and not only will the citizens of those countries have greater opportunity and are less prone to experience injustice, but that translates into a world that is more just and more fair. And that's the kind of world that I want to leave my children.'

¹ See <http://www.opengovpartnership.org>



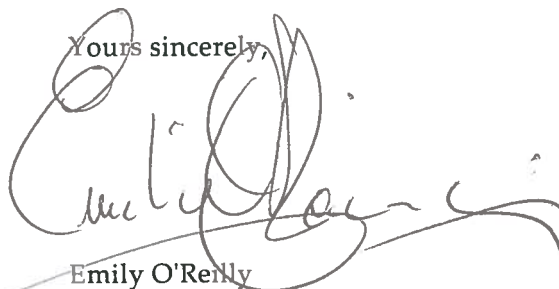
As European Ombudsman, I have been engaging with the OGP and will continue to do whatever I can to encourage the EU institutions, bodies, offices and agencies to take inspiration from its work in relation to accountability, citizen participation, transparency and the facilitating role of new technologies. By way of example, I have referred to the OGP in my ongoing work with the European Central Bank, the European Investment Bank, and the EU's regulatory agencies, all of which do work that impacts directly on the lives of citizens. I also hope to attend the next biannual OGP global summit in Mexico from 26 to 28 October 2015.

Twenty EU Member States now participate in the OGP. I am not suggesting that the Commission should in any way seek to be involved in what Member States as such are doing in terms of their OGP action plans. Rather what is needed is for the EU level of governance to be involved. The OGP Minimum Eligibility Criteria would not seem to pose an obstacle in that the EU satisfies the basic requirements of fiscal transparency, access to information, public officials' asset disclosure and citizen engagement, as defined on the OGP website². Moreover, the work on an OGP action plan could only help the Commission in terms of responding to the demands of the citizen and civil society for better government.

I understand that the Commission has, in the past, regarded itself as constrained by the fact that the EU is not a State. It is, however, unlikely that the members of the OGP would reject EU participation for that reason. On the contrary, I am convinced that the OGP would be eager to carve out an official role for the EU. My view is that if the political will is there, there is the potential for the Commission, on behalf of the EU, to become a leading force for change within the OGP. I hope that you will take the lead. Naturally, I am ready to have discussions with you in relation to identifying and spreading good practices among the Union institutions.

Should your services require any further information or clarifications concerning this matter, they can contact Ms Rosita Agnew, Co-ordinator for own-initiative inquiries (tel: +32 2 284 25 42).

Yours sincerely,



Emily O'Reilly

² See <http://www.opengovpartnership.org/node/1338>