

Transparency International EU

The global coalition against corruption

Investigating Corruption in the Media and Telecoms Industries

Alex Johnson · Wednesday, February 17th, 2016

March 18th, 10:00 – 14:00, NH Budapest City Hotel, Budapest (Hungary)

The media are often referred to as the fourth pillar in democracy. The media can shape the public's view on the issues of the day and play a role in monitoring and investigating the actions of those in power and informing citizens about them. Yet the media industry is not immune to corruption. Types of corruption in the media vary from bribery in the form of cash for news, staged or fake news, gift giving, concealed advertisement and advertisements to nepotism, and media capture by vested private or political interests. A study into media ownership in Georgia showed a number of instances where media owners were suspected of interference in the editorial policies of the broadcasters, undermining media freedom.

Clearly who owns the media is an important issue for transparency, good governance and democracy. But how about who owns the internet? The internet is increasingly central to our lives, as more and more citizens go online. This is reflected in the media industry, which is progressively using the internet as its key medium. Those who own the internet (internet service providers) hold the keys to citizen's daily lives and have the power to either protect or infringe access to information and the privacy of our communications. A recent [project](#) by the OCCRP, in partnership with RISE Project and EurActiv.ro, investigated who owns the internet across Eastern Europe. One of the findings showed that [Serbia](#) is a legal grey zone for data protection. State authorities can get usernames and passwords to access ISPs' internal systems, allowing them to access retained data at any time.

At the global level the telecommunications industry is very lucrative with 10 billion mobile phone and internet users worldwide and a total market value of approximately US \$2 trillion. But what can citizens and other stakeholders find out about these companies and why should they care about how transparent the companies are? A recent [report](#) by Transparency International looked at 35 major industry players to find out how transparent they are in three areas that are crucial for fighting corruption: disclosure of anti-corruption programmes, organisational transparency and disclosure of key financial information by country of operation. One of the findings showed that only four companies reveal information about their tax payments in each of the countries where they are active.

This workshop is organised as part of the Transparency International EU project **The European Corruption Observatory**, which aims to bring together journalists and anti-corruption campaigners to encourage pan-European tracking of corruption-related news and

foster awareness of corruption trends. The overall aim is to improve awareness of the transnational dimension of corruption and to strengthen monitoring and detection capacities of the media, public authorities and civil society around Europe.

The workshop will take place in Budapest, Hungary on March 18th. To register for this event please email Alison Coleman at acoleman@transparency.org

Travel and accommodation costs may be reimbursed. Please contact Alison Coleman for more information.

Agenda

10.00 – 10.30: **Registration**

10.30 – 11.30: **Investigating Corruption in the Media and Telecoms Industries**

- **Transparency International Georgia**
Who owns Georgia's media? Study of ownership of media outlets in Georgia
- **Smari McCarthy Chief Technologist OCCRP**
Who owns the internet? The Internet ownership project
- **Krisztina Papp, Transparency International Hungary**
How Transparent are Global Telecommunications Companies? Transparency in Corporate Reporting

11.30 – 12.00: **Discussion**

12.00 – 12.30: **Introduction to the European Corruption Observatory Platform**

- *Interactive session where the database will be showcased to the participants, they will be invited discuss the practical aspects of the Observatory as a platform and monitoring tool and provide feedback on improvements / additions to the tool*

12.30 – 14.00: **Lunch**

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