

Access to Information: FragDenStaat's work



Presentation for the Dutch Ministry of Education, Culture and
Science



FragDenStaat's history

- Founded in 2011 to fight for freedom of information, in Germany and the EU. Grown to the largest organisation focused on FOIs in the EU.
- Created to challenge secrecy and abuses of power that prevent an informed and active civil society
- Roughly 20 staff, composed of campaigners, journalists, lawyers, researchers and techies
- FOIs are our primary tool: we believe official information should be easily obtained and used.



What does FragDenStaat do?

- Publishes official information and democratises knowledge
- Enables digital civil society engagement of a growing community of freedom of information activists
- Exposes structural injustices with its own investigative research and holds power to account
- Files lawsuits for more transparency and sets new legal standards
- The general public, academics, NGOs, civil society and journalists use our site



What does transparency mean for FragDenStaat?

- Working towards a cultural change that focuses on transparency
- Making it easy for people to access information on government decisions and plans
- Knowing the law and what rights people actually have instead of withholding information
- Talking with each other, to understand what information is there, findable and useful

Transparency laws instead of freedom of information laws: people don't have to ask for or request information, they are already published by public bodies

- Have even heard from people working in public authorities that they find useful documents on our website, since communication between ministries is slow as well. Transparency helps everyone!



FragDenStaat work areas

- **Tech infrastructure:** our online platform fragdenstaat.de enables easy FOI requests to German and EU authorities. It is a living archive of over 200,000 documents and over 200,000 requests.
- **Strategic litigation:** we have filed over 160 FOI lawsuits in Germany and the EU, to create legal precedents and challenge decisions.
 - Ex. Frontex (challenging the secrecy of the agency's operations in the Mediterranean)



FragDenStaat work areas continued

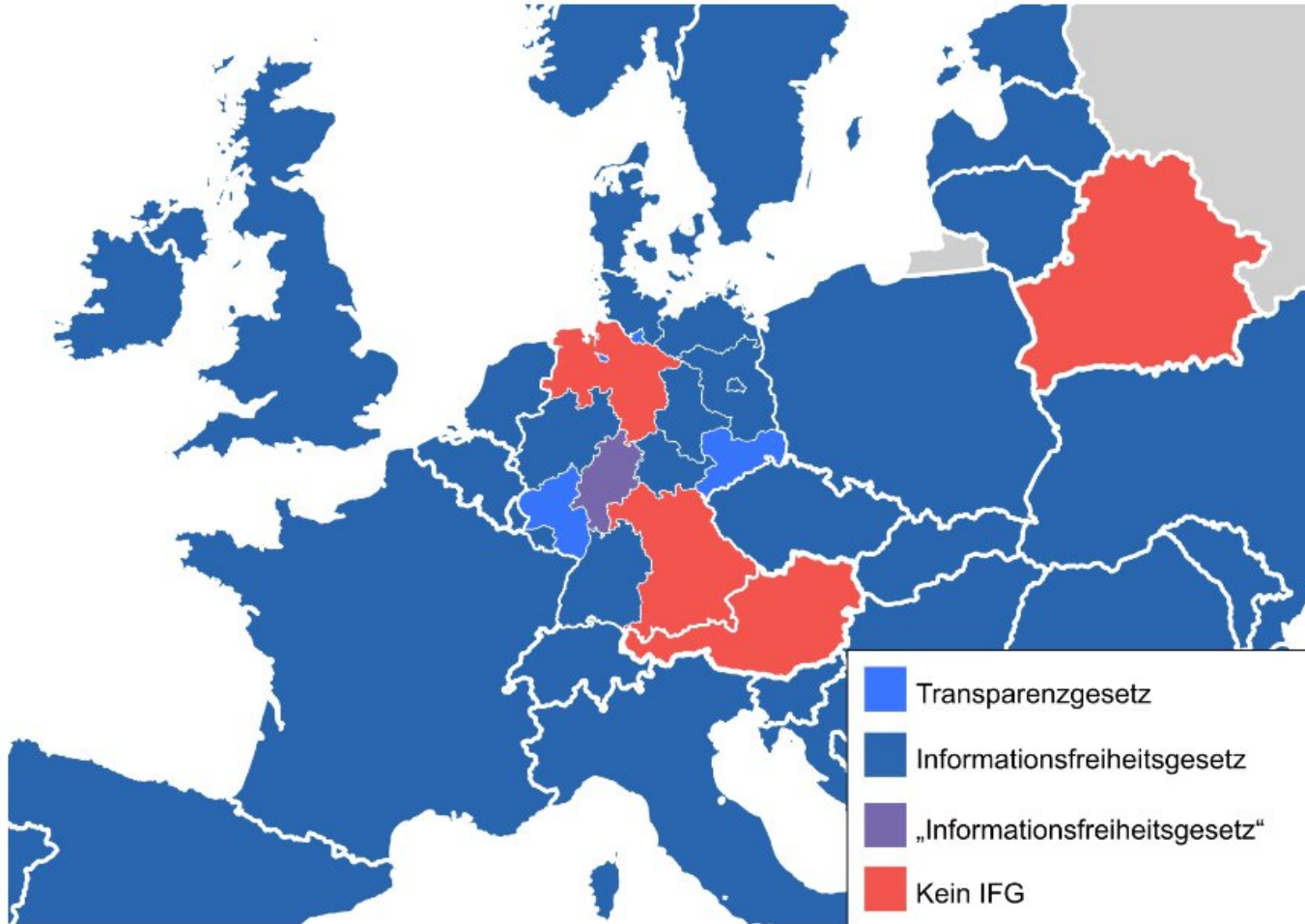
- **Journalistic investigations:** using information requests as an investigative tool, working with media partners to publish investigations throughout the EU. We also publish our own exclusive investigations, to showcase the value of FOIs as a journalistic research tool.
 - Ex. Work on EU border-industrial complex
- **Defending the right to information:** advocating for stronger FOI legislation
 - Ex. Campaigning resulting in German parliament permanently opening up thousands of scientific reports



German FOI laws

- In principle, you can request "official information" in accordance with the various information laws ▶ information that serves official purposes, regardless of how it is stored
- Federal authorities are requested on the basis of the Freedom of Information Act (IFG), the Environmental Information Act (UIG) and the Consumer Information Act (VIG)
- At state level, the state laws apply if the state in question has its own Freedom of Information Act
- Lower Saxony and Bavaria, for example, have no freedom of information laws





Examples on what's requestable

- Drafts, concepts, planning
- Maps, statistics, data
- Offers, contracts, invoices, agreements
- Communication (e-mails, letters, faxes, ...), correspondence
- Notes, remarks, comments
- Expert opinions and studies
- Selected appointment entries, calendar
- (Official) directives and decrees
- Lecture notes, presentations
- Meeting preparations, speaking notes, meeting notes, meeting follow-up



How is the deadline set within which the request must be answered?

- According to the Freedom of Information Acts, access to information must be granted immediately, within a maximum of one month
- The law therefore requires a rapid response. If you can foresee that the response to a request will take longer for good reason ->
- applicants will appreciate it if you indicate that the deadline has been exceeded in an e-mail with a few explanatory sentences



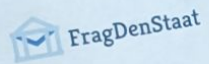
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“Meer informatieverzoeken behandelen in minder tijd?”



An illustration showing a person sitting at a laptop, with several white documents and blue arrows floating around them, symbolizing digital communication or data flow.

FragDenStaat: Die Transparenzplattform

Leitfaden für Behörden

Guide for authorities

fragdenstaat.de/fuer-behoerden

Ask yourself, if..

- there is a technical system in place to facilitate the handling of foi requests?
E-filing?
- responding to freedom of information requests within the deadlines a stated objective?
- the exceptions are interpreted narrowly?
- the fees are calculated in such a way that they are as low as possible and do not act as a deterrent?
- there are clear and easily accessible internal guidelines and processes for dealing with foi requests?





Self-Audit for Freedom of Information

fragdenstaat.de/self-audit



Functioning of our Platform & test request

- Approach is to make it as easy as possible for as many people as possible
- community approach: your request frees information, which other people will benefit from
- Establish a dialogue between citizens and authorities
- <https://fragdenstaat.de/behoerde/7681/testbehorde/>



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Anfrage erstellen



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Thank you!

