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Transparency: The foundation of social order in times of crisis

Vienna, 18.03.2020: When a country finds itself in a state of emergency, a difficult balancing act must be accomplished: Namely between necessary measures of governments and the fundamental rights of individuals. The focus of public attention lies almost exclusively on one topic, currently on the containment of the coronavirus (COVID-19). Two issues that are directly related to crisis situations are transparency and corruption prevention.

Emergency situations harbor the risk of being exploited for the benefit of individuals at the expense of massive damage for the general public - this can also be subsumed under the definition of "Corruption" by Transparency International.¹ This becomes evident in the current situation i.e.: In several European countries, there is a massive shortage of urgently needed protective masks. Often there is also criminal energy involved. The development, distribution and licensing of vaccines must also be transparent in order to grant legal access to all people who urgently need it.

"Transparency International - Austrian Chapter tries not to lose sight of topics in the "offside" during this difficult time and continues to raise awareness for transparency in the public sector!", explains Prof. Eva Geiblinger, Chair of Board of TI-AC.

One of the most important aspects in coping with crises is the transparent handling of information. If the public is informed in advance about further potential measures of the government, uncertainty can be reduced, panic avoided and the willingness to cooperate with painful measures increases.

Media also plays a crucial role. The interaction between the federal government and established media outlets can lead to a significant reduction of "fake news" and thus save lives. Crisis management must be well planned, include all important sectors and focus on protecting the population - but above all it must meet the criterion of transparency.

According to Prof. Geiblinger: "In these difficult times, transparency is essential. We at TI-AC are grateful that the Austrian Federal Government and those responsible are complying with the important aspect of transparency."

¹ "The abuse of entrusted power for private gain" (Transparency International)

“Transparent information policy for students, doctors and professionals can provide the population with security in times of crisis and increase confidence in decisions of governments. This leads to cooperation, an efficient crisis management and hopefully to a sooner end of the measures imposed and the crisis in general.”, says Prof. Geiblinger.

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