



PRESS RELEASE

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COUNCIL OF EUROPE URGED TO RECOGNISE BROAD RIGHT OF ACCESS TO INFORMATION

Strasbourg, November 15, 2006 - Three leading freedom of information organisations are calling on the Council of Europe to ensure that its future treaty in the area of freedom of information provides a robust safeguard of the right to access information.

Access Info Europe, ARTICLE 19 and the Open Society Justice Initiative today presented a joint briefing to the Group of Specialists which is preparing the treaty, warning that the working document in some respects sets a lower standard than the practice of most countries in the region. The three organisations urged the working group to draft a treaty which will require prospective State Parties to bring their legislation up to the level of international best practice. The briefing is based on a survey of the access laws of 26 Council of Europe Member States.

The briefing calls on the Group of Specialists to:

- Guarantee a right of “access to information” held by public authorities rather than the narrower right of access to “official documents” currently envisaged by the treaty. In 22 of the 26 countries surveyed, individuals enjoy the broader right of access to information.
- Extend the scope of the treaty beyond the executive branch of government to legislative bodies and judicial authorities. Currently, these bodies are covered only insofar as they perform administrative functions. The study found that in all 26 countries legislative information is already to some degree publicly available, either under the access law or other legislation. Judicial information is available upon request in at least 18 of these countries.
- Extend the scope of the treaty to cover private bodies which are substantially financed by public funds, in line with the laws of at least 13 of the countries surveyed.

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Notes for Editors:

- The briefing, including an analysis of the current working document and the comparative study, can be downloaded at <http://www.access-info.org/> or <http://www.article19.org/publications/law/legal-analyses.html>
- 35 of the 46 Member States of the Council of Europe currently have dedicated access to information laws.