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## **Swedish Foreign Minister Carl Bildt Urged to Defend European's Right to Know**

### **Human rights organizations call on Council of Europe to improve Draft Convention on Access to Official Documents**

Swedish Foreign Minister Carl Bildt, who is currently chairing the Council of Europe, was today called on to defend the public's right to know on 27 November by not adopting without changes the Council of Europe's draft Convention on Access to Official Documents.

The draft Convention has received heavy criticisms from the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) as well as from the OSCE Special Representative on Freedom of the Media, the Information Commissioners from nine European countries, by more than 250 civil society organizations, and by the Council of Europe's own Steering Committee on the Media and New Communication Services, concerns that were not fully considered on their merits.

In a letter to Carl Bildt, human rights and civil society groups from across Europe and globally Sweden's warned that to adopt the treaty as it stands, ignoring the call by the Parliamentary Assembly to strengthen it, might encourage some countries to lower existing standards.

They also noted that Sweden, with its long history of open government, having been the first country in the world to adopt a law on access to official documents (in 1766), should fulfill the stated goals for its Chairmanship of the Council of Europe which include "promotion of democracy" and "transparency".

"As with all human rights treaties, this treaty will

The main text of this treaty was drafted over a period of just 1.5 years (January 2006 to July 2007) and that meetings of the drafting group during this period totalled only 14.5 days. Participation of civil society was relatively limited and there were no attempts at broader consultation with the public or with experts in this area such as Europe's Information Commissioners, something which is particularly problematic given that (as the Explanatory Memorandum of the Convention itself states) the right of access to official documents is essential for participatory democracy.

We consider that the grave concerns expressed by PACE and a wide range of other actors, as well as respect for the democratic process, requires a proper reassessment of the draft treaty. We urge you, in your role as Chairman of the Committee of Ministers and as Foreign Minister of Sweden which has a long tradition of open government having been the first country in the world to adopt an access to information law, to take the decision to give further time to reconsideration of the provisions in the draft that have been most heavily criticised.

Yours sincerely,  
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