



## Anti-corruption organisations call for reform of Access to Information Laws in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia and Montenegro

*Sarajevo, 1 June 2010:* Faced with a chronic lack of transparency in the region, leading anti-corruption organisations today called for urgent reform of the access to information laws of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia and Montenegro.

The call by Transparency International BiH, Transparency International Croatia, MANS and Access Info Europe, follows consultations with citizens, journalists and NGOs who confirmed that public authorities frequently do not respect the right to information, particularly in those cases where access to information would reveal corruption.

According to the recommendations presented today, proper application of exceptions and implementation of sanctions is essential to reduce secrecy and to make more information available for citizens.

While a lack of transparency is common in the region, experts have identified specific problems in each country. In BiH many laws mandate secrecy, this confusing situation means that public officials often prevent citizens from exercising their right to information. Srdjan Blagovcanin, Executive Director of Transparency International BiH, said, "all laws at the entity level urgently need to be harmonised in accordance with the state law on Freedom of Information."

Croatia, the only country in the region not to have begun the process of signing and ratifying the Council of Europe Convention on Access to Official Documents, also lacks an independent information commissioner and public officials are not yet obliged to consider the public interest in releasing information. Transparency International Croatia is part of a working group on amendments to the Croatian Freedom of Information Act. The amendments, which incorporate the recommendations presented today, will be submitted to the Croatian parliament.

Anti-corruption experts in Montenegro say that their work is impeded by unlawful use of exceptions to deny access to documents such as privatisation contracts. Even in cases where access is granted, experts are often denied the right to receive copies of documents, being permitted only to view the originals, thus making it impossible for them to analyse the information and identify cases of corruption.

"It is imperative to guarantee the right of access to information in this region, not only to fight corruption but also to strengthen democracy and allow citizens to participate in decision making on matters which will affect their future," said Lydia Medland from Access Info Europe.

The four organisations this year launched the project 'Turn on the Light', supported by the EU which will work to empower citizens, NGOs and other stakeholders to use their right to information.