

Press Release: Open Cyprus Project calls on Pegeia Council to respect right of access to environmental information

Wednesday, 18 May 2011 00:00



The Open Cyprus Project today called on Pegeia Council and all local authorities to respect the public's right of access to information, especially information concerning environmentally sensitive areas in Cyprus, island-wide. This call comes after Pegeia Council refused the request of Councillor Linda Leblanc for a copy of planning permits for a controversial new coastal development, which might endanger the protected coastal zone in the Sea Caves area (Thalassines Spilies, Pegeia).

"The lack of access to information from local authorities in Cyprus is a serious problem," confirmed Orestis Tringides of IKME, one of the organisations leading the Open Cyprus Project. "Our research has found that full information is provided in response to just 8% of information requests."

According to information received by the Open Cyprus Project, there are systematic failures to provide information by Pegeia Council, including frequent denials to Councillor Leblanc of copies of letters sent to the Council and of written documentation on important issues discussed at the Council meetings, which results in an impediment to work as a councillor. In the same way, local residents have been forced to resort to lawyers to have their freedom of information rights respected.

"These are further examples of the violations of the public's right to know caused by the inadequate legal framework for this right in Cyprus," added Faika Deniz Pasha of KAB.

The grounds for denying access to information include a misapplication of the law on protection of the personal data [Law n.138(1)/2001] which does not apply to companies - in this case a developer and its contracting companies.

The refusal by Pegeia Council to provide the environmental information to Councillor Leblanc is also a breach of the right of public access to environmental information regulated in the Republic of Cyprus in accordance with EU law (Act N.119(1)/2004, transposition of Directive 2003/4/EC) which in Article 2 specifically gives a right of access to planning permits. Similarly, Art.41 of the Public Procurement Law [N.112(1)/2006] establishes transparency measures that appear to have been disregarded by the Pegeia Council.

"EU rules clearly establish that anyone may request copies of environmental information, without having to state a reason," noted David Pardo of Access Info Europe, a specialist organisation based in Madrid and part of the Open Cyprus Project. "The exceptions to this right are very limited and do not seem to apply in this case."

The Open Cyprus Project supports the case of Councillor Leblanc and call for the respect of everyone's right of access to information by all public bodies in the Republic of Cyprus.

The Open Cyprus Project is an EU-funded bi-communal initiative that aims at advancing the right to know, improving government transparency and fostering citizen participation in both the northern and southern parts of the island of Cyprus.

For more information, please see www.accessinfocyprus.eu

Alternatively, you can e-mail contact@accessinfocyprus.eu

Notes for editors:

KAB is founded by a group of Civil Society volunteers in 2006 with the aim of ensuring that information flow among the Turkish Cypriots and the international community. <http://www.cypruseu.org> Faika Deniz Pasha, Cyprus EU Association Project Manager

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IKME was registered in 2002 in Cyprus as a Non Governmental Organisation aiming to contribute to the prevalence of freedom, democracy, socialism and the European values. <http://www.ikme.eu> Orestis Tringides, Researcher - Orestis@tringides.com / +357 22377776

Access Info Europe is an international human rights organization based in Madrid, which works to promote a strong and functioning Right of Access to Information in Europe and globally. <http://www.access-info.org/>

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