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June 19th, 2009

Twelve CoE Member States Sign The Convention On Access To Official Documents

[Directorate of Communication – Council of Europe Conference of Justice Ministers – Twelve Council of Europe member states sign the Convention on Access to Official Documents](#)

Press release – 486(2009)

Council of Europe Conference of Justice Ministers – Twelve Council of Europe member states sign the Convention on Access to Official Documents

Tromsø (Norvège), 18.06.2009 – Twelve Council of Europe member states today signed the Convention on Access to Official Documents (CETS n° 205), the first binding international legal instrument laying down a general right of access to official documents.

This new Council of Europe Convention is the first binding international legal instrument to recognise a general right of access to official documents held by public authorities. Transparency of public authorities is a key feature of good governance and an indicator of whether or not a society is genuinely democratic and pluralist, opposed to all forms of corruption, capable of criticising those who govern it, and open to enlightened participation of citizens in matters of public interest. The right of access to official documents is also essential to the self-development of people and to the exercise of fundamental human rights. It also strengthens public authorities' legitimacy in the eyes of the public, and its confidence in them.

Belgium, Estonia, Finland, Georgia, Hungary, Lithuania, Montenegro (*), Norway, Serbia (**), Slovenia, Sweden and 'the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia' signed the Convention at the beginning of the 29th Conference of the European Ministers of Justice which is being held on domestic violence on 18 and 19 June in Tromsø. The convention will enter into force once it has been ratified by five states.

The Convention sets forth the minimum standards to be applied in the processing of requests for access to official documents (forms of and charges for access to official documents), review procedure and complementary measures. Limitations on the right of access to official documents are only permitted in order to protect certain interests like national security, defence or privacy.


Establishing a common basis of minimum standards, derived from the widely diverse experience and practice found within the Council of Europe's 47 member States, the

| June 2009 | | | | | | |
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Convention has the flexibility required to allow national laws to build on this foundation and provide even greater access to official documents.

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