

Press Conference on Free Access to Information

Podgorica, 28.09.2009

Opening Address

Dear Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am glad to greet you on the International Right to Know Day and to the press conference we are organizing together with HRMA and the Ministry of Culture, Sport and Media.

The International Right to Know Day was first celebrated on 28 September 2003 by access to information advocates from around the globe. The aim of Right to Know Day is to raise awareness of every individual's right of access to government-held information: the right to know how elected officials are exercising power and how the tax-payers' money is being spent. Over 85 countries around the world have adopted pieces of legislation allowing free access to information, guaranteed in many international documents, as the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the European Declaration of Human Rights, to mention but a few.

The OSCE in co-operation with HRMA and Ministry of Culture, Sport and Media is implementing a comprehensive project to support a proper implementation of the Law on Free Access to Information in Montenegro. This year the project is focused on further developing the capacity of civil servants from local public bodies on dealing with requests for information. Trainings were conducted in 21 municipalities on implementation of the Law on Free Access to Information in the context of the two newly adopted laws – the Law on Protection of Personal Data and the Secrecy Information Act. It is positive that the two new laws, complementary for a proper implementation of the Law on Free Access to Information were adopted. For better synchronization of the implementation of the three laws, professional meetings and discussions between the respective agencies, the trainers, representing public bodies, Administrative Court and civil sector would be recommendable.

The other part of the project is focused on raising the public awareness and educating the public in this human right which promotes freedom by keeping governments accountable and transparent. The OSCE together with HRMA published a leaflet containing basic information about the right to know and how to exercise it. Individuals remain relatively unaware of their right to information. Further efforts would be needed to promote this right and animate citizens to request information – and thus ensuring accountability of state bodies and elected officials. Civil sector has a crucial role in this process.

Media should play a critical role in upholding the right to free access to information. Journalists bring issues to the public and help citizens to find what to focus on to seek information. Media could support the implementation of the Law on Free Access to Information through publications and broadcast of specialized reports informing and educating citizens about their right to know. Freedom and independence of media, and its adherence to the Code of Ethics, professionalism and responsibility will transform the media scene into an open and healthy environment which is a must for all democratic societies.

I think that much has already been achieved in the implementation of the Law on Free Access to Information but that there is still much to be done. Debates about lessons learned in the process of implementation should continue to take place, including through further regional co-operation with neighboring countries.

Dear Ladies and Gentlemen, the OSCE Mission to Montenegro recognizes the major importance of a proper implementation of the Law on Free Access to Information as an important tool for the empowerment of the citizens in the decision making process, and we would like to commend the committed engagement of HRMA, Ministry for Culture, Sport and Media,, civil sector, Administrative Court and trainers for the continued improvement in the implementation of the law.

OSCE is going to continue this co-operation, together with all relevant partners, in order to further improve the implementation of the Law on Free Access to Information and thus contribute to further democratization of the society in Montenegro.

Thank you for your attention.