



EUROPEAN UNION

Delegation of the European Union

Skopje, 11 April 2012

**Panel Discussion and launch of EIDHR funded project:
“Access to Public Information – Source for Better Information”
11 April 2012, EU InfoCentre**

Speaking points

**H. E. Ambassador
Aivo ORAV
Head of the European Union Delegation**

Respected Media and Civil Society Representatives,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is with great pleasure that the EU Delegation hosts today's panel discussion on access to public information instrument.

Today's event marks the start of an EU project funded under the European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights (EIDHR). Its objective is to reinforce the use of the access to information instrument by media, thus contributing to the quality of their reporting as well as strengthening the independent media.

The right of access to public information gives citizens the opportunity to participate in public life, help set priorities, and hold their governments accountable. Exercising this right is indispensable for the media and civil society to enable monitoring of the work of public authorities and take part in decision making process.

Free flow of information is an important tool for confidence building between a government and citizens, making public administration more efficient in delivering services. It empowers citizens to scrutinise and value the activities of the public authorities but also renders more effective use of other public and political rights.

A great number of national and international courts have confirmed that **access to information held by public bodies is a fundamental human right** as is an inherent part of Article 10 of the European Convention on Human Rights protecting the freedom of speech, recognised also by the European Court of Human Rights.

In EU this right is enshrined in Article 15 of the Treaty of the European Union, but the central instrument to that purpose is Regulation 1049/2001 of the European Parliament and of the Council, setting out the modalities for a right of access to EU documents and regulating transparency of disclosure procedures.

Further, one of the potentially **most powerful tools available to public are the access to information laws** which now exist in most of the countries in Europe, many of them recently adopted and still significantly to be utilised by the media.

The EU welcomed the continuous implementation of the Law on Access to Public Information (2006). **Yet, the Government still needs to strengthen the instrument, as noted in the Progress Report 2011:**

- Existing legislation on public access to information has yet to be amended in order to ensure full transparency;
- Internal control mechanisms in public administration need to be further improved;
- The Commission for Protection of the Right to Free Access to Public Information needs sufficient financial and political support to efficiently respond to the increasing number of complaints due to administrative silence;
- Proactive publication of information on the structure, policies and budget of each public body, available in languages used in the country, published on websites and media.

All segments of civil society and media should make even greater efforts to inform their members and citizens acting as multipliers at all levels.

Effective cooperation between organisations working for freedom of information,

media organisation and civil society is needed for strengthening their and citizens' ability to obtain information.

Moreover, well-informed citizens could contribute better to the country's EU integration reforms. This could be only accomplished with joint efforts of public institutions, media and civil society.

I wish all those involved in today's debate and particularly the project implementing organisations, the *Center for Civic Communication, Skopje* and their partners the *Access to Information, Spain and Balkan Investigative Reporting Network, Skopje*, a successful work!

Thank you for your attention!