

BiH Parliament Adopts Freedom of Access to Information Law - Breaks New Ground in Southeastern Europe

Sarajevo, October 24, 2000 - The OHR and the OSCE Mission to BiH welcome the passage of the Freedom of Access to Information Act by the Parliamentary Assembly of BiH. The legislation, introduced by Sejfudin Tokic and Ivo Lozancic, was adopted by the House of Peoples yesterday, Monday, October 23. The House of Representatives adopted the legislation on Wednesday, October 18.

"The Parliamentary Assembly took a truly important step and signalled that it takes seriously the right of citizens to expect accountability and transparency in government. This Parliament is the first in the ex-Yugoslavia to adopt such legislation," said the OSCE Head of Mission, Ambassador Robert L. Barry. "The citizens of this country have been vested with a powerful tool - the legal right to demand information from the government - I can only hope that they will use it."

Under the act, every member of the public has the right to access information held by government and other public bodies. This act presumes that access to information is the rule and denial of access is the exception and requires the government to provide as much information as possible at the lowest reasonable cost. An important step toward promoting greater openness in government, this act will open doors that have long been closed and will limit the grounds on which information can be withheld. The result of this act will be more informed public discussion of policy, greater review of the actions and decisions of government bodies, and more opportunities for the public to scrutinize information previously available only to the government.

The act was drafted by the OSCE with the guidance of the OHR and the extensive assistance of local and international legal experts. The act was also informed by broad public commentary in which many sectors of society participated including the media, NGOs, civic groups, legal practitioners and members of local government.