



OFFICE OF THE HEAD OF MISSION

TALKING POINTS

Ambassador Hans Ola Urstad, Head of the OSCE Mission to Serbia

**Roundtable: “International Rights to Know Day”
Media Centre**

Belgrade, 28 September 2006

Madam Deputy Prime Minister, Your Excellencies, Commissioner Sabic, Ladies and Gentlemen,

- Free access to information makes for good government. And good governments should welcome review by citizens, whether we talk about the way government and public institutions practice openness and transparency, the way laws are being enacted, amendments to laws or even about the most important document of any country, its constitution.
- The Law on Free Access to Information in Serbia strongly recognizes the fundamental importance of the citizens’ right to know. This, however, can only be achieved through full and genuine implementation of the Law. In this respect, I would like to congratulate Commissioner for Information Rodoljub Sabic and his Office for their tireless efforts.

Commissioner Sabic, however cannot act alone. We should give credit as well to civil society and particularly the Coalition of NGOs for Freedom of Information for their work in promoting free access to information and educating citizens and public officials. Implementation also depends on each and every institution covered by the law and they should facilitate mechanisms that enable easy access to information.

- The OSCE Mission to Serbia has contributed to the free access to information process through various initiatives including:
 - The publication of a guidebook to the law; Roundtables held in municipalities on rights and obligations within the law; and Training seminars for national government officials in Belgrade and ten districts in Serbia.
 - We look forward to continued cooperation with Commissioner Sabic to strengthen implementation of the law as well as with civil society and all interested parties.

- The right to know is sometimes rightfully limited by rights of others or by prevailing public interests. The Law on Free Access to Information clearly defines legitimate exemptions of this right. The Law cannot stand alone, it needs supplementary legislation, primarily laws regulating personal data protection and classified information. Additionally, hopefully the right of free access to information will have its place in the new Constitution of Serbia.
- Access to information reminds us that public institutions exist to serve the people. In advance, I would like to congratulate the winner of today's prize--and all the candidates for showing the proper way for official entities to provide information to citizens.
- Thank you.