

10.2.2004

### APPEAL TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT

We, the undersigned European and North American historians, appeal to you to adopt legislation providing for the automatic annual release of all government documents (including those of foreign and defense ministries) that are older than thirty years, except for those proven necessary to be withheld for sound reasons of national security or protection of personal privacy.

We particularly urge you to make this legislation part of the *acquis communautaire* binding on the incoming new members of the Union. We have been alarmed to see that in several of the candidate countries—Poland, the Czech Republic, Romania, among others—NATO classification rules (closure for 30 years after the documents have been written) and references to other “Western” declassification practices have been used to keep the archival records from the communist period away from the scrutiny of both scholars and ordinary citizens, sometimes even closing archives that had previously been opened. We are ready to provide you with examples.

We strongly believe—with particular reference to the recent UN report on Freedom of Information, “Freedom of Information: A Comparative Legal Survey”, by Toby Mendel (<http://www.article19.org/docimages/1707.pdf>)—that the adoption of common European rules of access to the documentary legacy of the recent past is an indispensable attribute of democracy that

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provides the necessary bonds of trust between the governments and the people as well as among the peoples of the Union.

In view of the financial and staff shortages often invoked to block access to documents in practice regardless of legislation, we further believe that the European Parliament should establish a special body to supervise the enforcement of the common legislation. We are ready to collaborate with you on the creation of such a body and to advise it to the best of our professional abilities.

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<b>Note:</b> Nothing in this appeal should be interpreted as saying that those countries who open their archives after 20 years should henceforth prolong the period to 30 years!	London School of Economics Houghton Street London WC2, <b>United Kingdom</b>
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