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## **The other side of free access to information: librarians' awareness**

### Summary

In 2003 the Act on the Right of Access to Information was adopted by the Croatian Parliament as a result of a joint initiative undertaken by seventeen non-government organizations that formed a coalition. The Croatian Library Association was one of the founding members of the coalition. The Association's decision to join the initiative followed from its prior activities aimed at raising awareness of the library profession of the issue of professional responsibility defined as provision of free access to information for all library users. Following the establishment of IFLA/FAIFE Committee the Croatian Library Association found its own Committee on Free Access to Information and Freedom of Expression in 1998. A special issue of the Association's Library Journal was dedicated to the topic of free access to information and published in 2000. A Round Table on Free Access to Information has been organized and held as an annual event since 2001. The specific topic of the Second Round Table on Free Access to Information, held in 2002, was the availability of official publications in the public libraries in the country. The research performed by the participants of the Round Table showed not only that official publications were not adequately represented in the collections, but also that the public authorities libraries' facilities were rather poor and that those libraries could hardly provide adequate services. The reluctance of public authorities to put the information on their activities on the web was also noted. Also, public libraries in the country often have to purchase official publications, what means that Croatian citizens must pay twice for official information.

It might seem that librarians and citizens in Croatia still have to fight for freedom of access to information, but they are also well aware of its other side: the issue of privacy. The new Act on the Protection of Personal Data promulgated in 2003 is pertinent for libraries, too. Some of its articles are ambiguous and can be interpreted differently. Also, it is not quite clear what kind of data is to be considered personal and what constitutes an infringement of privacy. The newspapers have recently focused on the alleged phone tapping of journalists by the intelligence services, while politicians complain over the reckless journalists who endanger their privacy. The latest dispute is whether the university records of a politician can be disclosed to the public. There has not yet been any report of either journalists or intelligence services showing interest in the library records but the future will tell.