Parliamentary Assembly
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COUNCIL OF EUROPE
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The right to freedom of information: ensuring access to historical documents

Motion for a resolution
tabled by the Committee on Legal Affairs and Human Rights

This motion has not been discussed in the Assembly and commits only those who have signed it

In June 2013, a broad assembly of experts from international organisations, civil society and state institutions in Tshwane (South Africa) adopted the "Global Principles on National Security and the Right to Information" designed to give guidance to legislators and relevant officials with a view to reaching an appropriate balance between public interests both in national security and in access to information. The Parliamentary Assembly endorsed the Tshwane Principles in its Resolution 1954 (2013) and Recommendation 2024 (2013) "National security and access to information".

Regrettably, several European States still restrict access of researchers and civil society to historical documents, in particular those related to periods of authoritarian rule, on grounds of national security considerations or the protection of privacy.

Tragedies of the past must be openly discussed, on the basis of full, objective information, in order to draw the right lessons to avoid repetition.

Therefore, the Assembly should examine the situation in Europe with regard to access to historical documents with a view to preparing relevant practical recommendations, taking into account the right to freedom of expression and information (Article 10 of the European Convention on Human Rights).