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AccessInfo: 'If the member states get their way it will basically become a waste of time to even file a request' (Photo: ec.europa.eu)

Negotiators have second go at EU transparency rules

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BY ANDREW RETTMAN

BRUSSELS - The Danish presidency will next week put forward a second draft of new rules on access to internal EU documents, as tensions rise.

The first draft fell by the wayside last week when EU parliament co-legislators said it goes too far on sheltering papers on legal advice to EU institutions, appointments of top officials, competition cases and infringement procedures.

In an unusual move, the justice ministers of two pro-transparency countries, Finland and Sweden, wrote an open letter to MEPs on Thursday (31 May) urging them not to give in. The letter was publicised by Danish journalists on the wobbling.eu website.

"The [first Danish] mandate is based on a compromise text which would, no doubt, lead to less transparency. Needless to say, our countries did not support that text," Anna-Maja Henriksson and Beatrice Ask said.

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"We trust that Denmark and the EP will see to it that no such proposal is even put on the table ... Who's with us?"

For her part, Pamela Bartlett Quintanilla from the Madrid-based pro-transparency NGO, AccessInfo, told EUobserver: "If the member states get their way it will basically become a waste of time to even file a request [to see documents]."

The Danes are to circulate their new ideas to EU countries on Monday (4 June) and to seek agreement on the new mandate from the EU Council on Wednesday before fresh talks with MEPs.

Finland and Sweden, along with Estonia and Slovenia, are in a small minority against pro-secrecy member states on the Council side.

If parliament takes Henriksson and Ask's advice and the new law falls by the wayside, an old regulation from 2001 - deemed to be more transparency-friendly - will stay in force.

For its part, the incoming Cypriot EU presidency had indicated that if Denmark cannot bring the two sides together, then it will have a go.

"The Cypriot presidency is interested in continuing the talks should there be no agreement by the end of June," an Cypriot diplomatic source told this website.

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