

EU – Western Balkans Media Literacy Conference: Opening remarks



Ladies and gentlemen, dear colleagues and friends,

I am pleased to welcome you to the first edition of the European Union – Western Balkans Media Literacy Conference.

The European Union is a Union of values and principles and today you will discuss important principles, which are at the core of the European Union and the European Union integration: media literacy, youth empowerment, the strengthening of civil society and media freedom.

These principles are also essential for fighting disinformation, a global challenge and a threat to democracy.

Misinformation and disinformation proliferated in the Western Balkans, in the European Union and in the whole world during the pandemic. This has been dangerous for all of us. Above all because lies about medical issues can even kill.

We have to engage globally to counter disinformation. To identify sources of disinformation and to provide citizens with reliable, accurate and timely facts.

Work is needed to protect and promote fundamental rights, such as freedom of expression and media pluralism.

During this crisis, fact-checkers and media organisations in the Western Balkans – many of you are present at today's Conference – debunked fake news, exposed disinformation trends and informed citizens.

Fact-checking organisations linked up with partners in the region, worked across borders and teamed up with organisations in the European Union, and made an important contribution to the public debate.

This – your – work does not go unnoticed. It empowers people and the youth to

speaking their minds and to become agents of change.

It is great to have many young people, who are at the forefront of the digital transformation.

With most of today's participants being from the Western Balkans, let me conclude by saying what I have underlined several times before: the European Union is not complete without the Western Balkans.

I want to thank all of you and specifically the organisation "Why not" from Bosnia and Herzegovina for co-organising today's conference, together with our EU Delegation in Sarajevo and the EEAS Stratcom Western Balkans Task Force.

I wish you all fruitful discussions and a good and productive event.

Thank you!