

The European Union steps up support to independent media in the Western Balkans

Freedom of media is one of the political criteria for EU accession – a must for countries willing to join the European Union. At the EU-Western Balkans Media Days conference, the Commission put forward comprehensive proposals to strengthen independent media in the region. New EU funds will provide training for young and mid-career journalists across the region, thereby boosting investigative journalism that contributes to reconciliation. A new technical assistance programme for Public Service Broadcasters will support regional co-production of investigative journalism, media content for youth and digitalisation. In addition, to support independent media, new actions with the European Endowment for Democracy will benefit start-ups for new independent media outlets and small-scale initiatives.

Johannes **Hahn**, Commissioner for European Neighbourhood Policy & Enlargement Negotiations, participating at the EU-Western Balkans Media Days said: *“Freedom of expression is a fundamental value of the European Union and inextricably linked to further progress on the EU path. The EU-Western Balkans Media Days pave the way to a more comprehensive approach to support independent media outlets, assist the expansion of media literacy in the region, help digitalisation and know-how transfer. A vibrant, economically sustainable, independent and pluralistic media sector is equally important for exercising freedom of expression as are the legal, political and judicial conditions that guarantee it.”*

Background

1) Regional Training and Support Programme to improve Quality and Professionalism in Journalism (€2 million)

The action will focus on young and mid-career journalists trained in quality journalism and enhance publications of qualitative investigative stories. A regional network will support the development and exchange of investigative skills by involving journalists, training providers from the EU and the Western Balkans, as well as academic Institutions. The existing EU Award for Investigative Journalism will continue as part of the action. The project is expected to be launched in the first half of 2018.

2) Technical assistance programme to Public Service Media in Western Balkans (€1.5 million)

The programme aims at establishing standards and best practices across the Western Balkans as a common frame of reference for independent and professional media. The initiative will generate synergies between the 6 Public Service Media promoting regional exchanges on policies and practices. This will initiate a new phase in the media reform process, including

integrated newsrooms, editorial guidelines, and long-term strategies. Finally, the programme will expand cooperation on investigative journalism, mechanisms for co-production on selected topics and regional exchange of digitised archive materials. The projects will start in the beginning of 2018.

3) Implementing a scheme to support Civil Society Organisations and media in the Western Balkans (€4 million)

The Commission, in close cooperation with the [European Endowment for Democracy](#), will provide demand driven support to start-ups and new media initiatives. Support will be provided to journalists, bloggers and researchers in the region as well as to provide bridge funding for small-scale initiatives. The projects will start in the beginning of 2018.

EU-Western Balkans Media Days conference

The EU-Western Balkans Media Days took place in Tirana, Albania, on 9-10 November 2017 gathering over 250 representatives of media outlets and media-organisations, as well as policymakers from the EU and the Western Balkans, to discuss about freedom of expression, economic sustainability of the media sector, and the role of media in the accession process.

Two panels and six workshops provided a platform for media professionalism to exchange views and share best practices. The conference contributed to pave the way for new forward-looking initiatives to foster independent, sustainable and professional media in the region.

For More Information

[Factograph – EU support to media in the Western Balkans](#)

[Website of the EU – Western Balkans Media Days](#)

[Speeches by Commissioner Hahn at the EU – Western Balkans Media Days](#)