

The European Union strengthens its support to media freedom and young journalists in the Western Balkans

Johannes Hahn, Commissioner for European Neighbourhood Policy and Enlargement Negotiations, said: *“Protecting and safeguarding fundamental rights such as media freedom are of crucial importance, also for further progress on the EU path. While our Western Balkans Strategy has triggered a new dynamic for the EU integration of the region, we haven’t seen much progress in the area of media freedom. To boost progress also in this area, this year’s Media Days put a strong emphasis on education and training of young journalists and on actions that strengthen media literacy, foster reconciliation and support the independence, protection and economic sustainability of a vibrant media scene”.*

Freedom of media is one of the fundamental principles of the European Union and part of the political criteria for EU accession. At the [second EU-Western Balkans Media Days conference](#), the EU strengthened its support to independent media in the region and enhanced assistance to young journalists with regional initiatives. These initiatives aim to facilitate education, enable professional trainings for media operators, and strengthen media and digital literacy of young people. In addition, new programmes will foster exchanges within the region and with the EU, build capacities to prevent threats and attacks against journalists, reinforce judicial expertise and support sustainable models of media funding.

Background

For the period 2014-2020 the European Union has developed a long-term strategic approach to support media freedom in the Western Balkans. The main on-going regional programmes in this area are:

1. **Regional Training Programme to improve Quality and Professionalism in Journalism (€2 million):** the programme aims at supporting journalism education and foster exchanges between the EU and the Western Balkans. It is expected to be signed before the end of 2018.
2. **Reinforcing Judicial Expertise on Freedom of Expression and the Media (€2.5 million):** implemented in partnership with the Council of Europe (CoE), the programme provides support to the judiciary in applying the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) case-law system and offers training on ethical rules to media regulatory authorities. The continuation of the programme is under negotiation and will be part of the “EU-CoE Horizontal Facility 2”.
3. **Building Trust in Media (€1.5 million):** implemented in partnership with UNESCO, the programme supports media accountability, media internal governance and media information literacy. The continuation of the programme – focusing on media literacy- is currently under negotiation.
4. **Network of Journalists Associations (€1.2 million):** builds capacity of

journalist professional organisations and regional early warning platform reporting cases of attacks and threats against journalists

5. **Direct grant to the European Endowment for Democracy (EDD) (€4 million)** supports targeted media. Flexible re-granting scheme for pro-democracy support in fast changing environments (e.g. start-up funding, core and bridge funding, support to small-scale initiatives; new and independent media outlets/ journalists/ bloggers, non-registered organisations). EED support is complementary to other EU instruments.
6. **Technical Assistance Programme to support Public Service Media in the Western Balkans (€1.5 million):** implemented by a consortium led by the International Federation of Journalists and the European Broadcasting Union, the project focuses on sustainable models for funding, transparent election of governing bodies, integrated newsrooms, editorial guidelines, regional co-production of contents for youth and investigative reporting.

EU-Western Balkans Media Days conference

The EU-Western Balkans Media Days took place in Skopje, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia on 17-18 September 2018. It gathered more than 300 representatives of media and civil society organisations as well as policymakers from the Western Balkans and the EU to discuss the crucial role of media in the accession process and to develop forward looking proposals and actions to improve the situation of journalists and strengthen independent media.

Two grand panels and three workshops provided a platform for media professionals to exchange views and share best practices. This year's edition focused in particular on the young generation of journalists and themes such as economic sustainability, regional cooperation of media and professional training. It further contributed to pave the way for new forward-looking initiatives to foster independent, sustainable and professional media in the region.

For More Information:

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

[EU Enlargement package 2018 – Freedom of expression; information society and media](#)

[Opening speech by Commissioner Johannes Hahn at the EU – Western Balkans Media Days 2018](#)

[Closing speech by Commissioner Johannes Hahn](#)