

Third EU-Western Balkans Media Days: EU reaffirms comprehensive support to media freedom in the region

At the third [EU-Western Balkans Media Days](#) taking place from 12-13 September in Podgorica, Montenegro, the European Commission confirmed its support to the region with new initiatives focusing on media accountability, literacy and governance, judicial expertise on freedom of expression and promotion of reconciliation and regional cooperation. This is part of the EU's firm support to media freedom and independence of journalism in the Western Balkans and underpins the ongoing regional programmes worth €20 million.

Johannes **Hahn**, Commissioner for European Neighbourhood Policy and Enlargement Negotiations, commented: *"Freedom of expression and media freedom are part of the very foundation on which our Union is built; they are also key political indicators in the EU accession process. In view of the worrying developments across the region, from undue political interference to the spread of disinformation, this year's Media Days shed the spotlight on the relation between media and politics, and paved the way towards identifying concrete actions and opportunities to improve the current situation."*

The third edition of the EU-Western Balkans Media Days gathered some 350 representatives of media and civil society organisations as well as policymakers from the Western Balkans and the EU. For the first time, political representatives from the region also joined the discussions on the crucial role of media in the accession process, aimed at developing forward-looking proposals and actions to improve the situation of journalists and strengthen independent media.

EU support to media in the Western Balkans

The European Union pursues a long-term strategic approach to support media freedom in the Western Balkans. Ongoing EU assistance includes a number of programmes and initiatives focussed on economic sustainability, media accountability and regional networks that foster regional cooperation and reconciliation.

The ongoing support amounts to over **€20 million**, including **€11.5 million** through 5 regional programmes and **€8.2 million** for initiatives in the six Western Balkan partners.

Regional programmes:

- 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 case-law system and offers training on ethical rules to media

regulatory authorities.

- Regional Training Programme to improve Quality and Professionalism of Journalism (€2 million): supports a regional network led by the Balkan Investigative Reporting Network (BIRN) to enhance journalism education and to promote exchanges between journalists and academia from the EU and Western Balkans. The Regional EU Award Scheme for Investigative Journalism is financed within this framework.
- Building Trust in Media (€1.5 million): implemented in partnership with UNESCO, the programme supports media accountability, media internal governance and media information literacy.
- Direct grant to the European Endowment for Democracy (€4 million): Flexible re-granting scheme for media and pro-democracy support in fast changing environments.
- 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 promotes sustainable models for funding, transparent election of governing bodies, integrated newsrooms, editorial guidelines, regional co-production of contents for youth and investigative reporting.

Among the **€8.2 million support** in the six Western Balkans we are currently implementing initiatives such as: Towards improved labour relations and professionalism in the Albanian media; Mapping human rights in media observing positions of citizens, vulnerable layers of society and media community in Bosnia and Herzegovina; Supporting Media and Independent Journalism with a Human Rights Perspective in Kosovo; Towards more professional and credible investigative journalism in Montenegro; News and digital literacy project: Where fake news fails (North Macedonia); Technical assistance contracts to two Public Broadcasters in Serbia.

For More Information

[EU – Western Balkans Media Days](#)

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

[EU Enlargement package 2019 – Freedom of expression](#)

[Video message by Commissioner Hahn](#)

[Opening remarks by Director-General Christian Danielsson](#)

[Directorate General for European Neighbourhood Policy and Enlargement Negotiations](#)