



**BCSDN ROUNDTABLE DISCUSSION**

# **DEFENDING CIVIC SPACE IN THE BALKANS**

**01 NOVEMBER 2023, 3PM CET**

**COURTYARD BY MARRIOT SARAJEVO/ZOOM**

*(invitation only)*

## **BACKGROUND**

Recent trends to civic space in Bosnia and Herzegovina require our urgent attention and actions of support to BiH civil society.

The ongoing political crisis in Bosnia and Herzegovina has led to increased pressures on civil society and media in the country, materializing in controversial laws and regulations that have the potential to undermine the foundations of democracy, erode fundamental rights, and severely limit the operations of civic actors. A series of bills has been introduced aimed at silencing dissent, including amendments to the Republika Srpska Criminal Code that re-criminalize defamation, and the recently adopted draft “foreign agents’ law” which targets and stigmatizes foreign-funded organizations, while banning political activities vaguely enough to make all forms of advocacy a punishable offence.

The changes are characterized as a blow to the country's civic space and civic freedoms, creating a climate of uncertainty for individuals and organizations dedicated to civic engagement and human rights. In response to these developments, a growing debate on the state of democracy in Bosnia and Herzegovina has emerged, drawing the attention of national and regional civil society, as well as the international community. Yet, there is still a need for more coordinated, tangible, effective joint actions.

BCSDN stands with civil society in Bosnia and Herzegovina. We invite you to join us for a gathering in Sarajevo to show our solidarity, explore strategies on how to protect civic space and fundamental freedoms in BiH, and discuss how to prevent spill-over effects and build resilience in the region.





## **EVENT GOALS**

1. Create space for dialogue and exchange of information,
2. Learn from examples from the region and beyond,
3. Improve coordination of responses and encourage further political buy-in, and
4. Explore collaborative solutions to minimize the corrosive effects of harmful legal provisions.

## **AGENDA**

15:00 - 15:05	<b>Opening remarks</b> Biljana Spasovska, BCSDN Executive Director
15:05 - 15:20	<b>Civic space state of play in BiH</b> Aida Daguda, CPCD Executive Director
15:20 - 15:30	<b>Reality check: Impact on CSO operations on the ground</b> Aleksandar Žolja, Helsinki Citizens' Assembly (TBC)
15:30 - 16:50	<b>Open floor discussion</b> - What has been done so far to challenge the shrinking of civic space in BiH? - Learning from unfortunate attempts to shrink civic space in the region and beyond - What else can be done?
16:50 - 17:00	<b>Wrap up and next steps</b>
17:00	Cocktail/Networking

**We count on your participation!**