



Balkan Civil Society  
Development Network



## BCSDN Virtual Event [6<sup>th</sup> & 8<sup>th</sup> November 2024]

# Weaponizing Accountability: How can CSOs Effectively Counter Foreign Agents Laws and Narratives with dynamic accountability?

*As part of the Global Accountability Week (GAW) 2024, we are pleased to invite you to a regional event to discuss the growing concern how accountability and transparency is used as a premise to restrict the civic space and portray civil society as foreign agents attempting to destabilize the country. The two-part event will unpack the practices used in Hungary, Slovakia, Bulgaria, and Serbia, among other, and seek to discuss lessons learned and different dynamic approaches to accountability as ways to fight back the crackdown on civic space.*

## BACKGROUND

In recent years, several European countries have introduced or proposed "foreign agents" laws that target CSOs receiving foreign funding. Hungary has been at the forefront of this trend, enacting legislation that requires NGOs receiving foreign funding to register as "foreign-supported organizations," a move that has been widely criticized by the European Union for undermining democratic principles. Georgia, too, despite the significant backlash and massive public protests, managed to introduce a foreign-agents law in May this year. Intensified discussions or proposing draft laws have also been prominent in Slovakia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia and Turkey. These legislative efforts, while framed as promoting transparency, accountability and fighting malignant foreign influence, are often used as tools to suppress dissent, limit civil society's influence, and erode democratic freedoms.

The European Union has expressed concern over these developments, however the European Commission itself proposed a highly contested Defence of Democracy package containing a directive on regulating foreign influence among the civil society. While the Directive is on hold, the impact is already very serious, beyond the EU's borders.



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This event takes stock of the discussions held during BCSDN's 2023 event "Defending Civic Space in the Balkans," which focused on the threats to civil society posed by foreign agents' laws, particularly in Republika Srpska, Bosnia and Herzegovina. That discussion highlighted the need for greater solidarity among CSOs and the importance of public trust and engagement with constituencies. The 2024 event builds on these insights, aiming to explore strategies CSOs can use to shift the narrative around foreign agents' laws and engage the public through dynamic accountability.

Bringing together prominent civil society representatives, journalists, and experts this event will be a place to:

- **Analyze** the enabling factors behind such legislation and the tactics used to suppress civil society, including the stigmatization of organizations and narratives around foreign influence.
- **Discuss** how various dynamic accountability approaches from the region can counter these harmful narratives and legislative attacks. The event will specifically highlight successes and lessons learned in Grassroots Mobilization & People-Driven Work, Self-Regulation & Standard-Setting, Improving Communication and Public Trust, and Leveraging New Technologies as ways to support civil society's resilience against restrictive measures.

## THE GLOBAL ACCOUNTABILITY WEEK

The Global Accountability Week (GAW), launched as a small campaign in 2017, raises awareness on the importance of strengthening CSO accountability worldwide and highlights its positive impact. Led by AGNA (CIVICUS), GAW has grown into a full-week campaign where CSOs and platforms like the Global Standard for CSO Accountability share experiences, good practices, and success stories on transforming accountability, legitimacy, and transparency with their constituents, including staff, supporters, and society at large. The shared efforts of organizations, big and small, across various regions, send a strong message that accountability is possible for all.

**Venue:** Zoom | Registration Links: [DAY 1](#); [DAY 2](#)

**Date:** 6<sup>th</sup> November and 8<sup>th</sup> November 2024



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## DRAFT AGENDA

DAY 1: 6<sup>TH</sup> NOVEMBER

### UNPACKING FOREIGN AGENTS' NARRATIVES

#### 14:00 -14:10 Opening

Global Accountability Week 2024 - [Biljana Spasovska](#), BCSDN Executive Director

Rise of Foreign Agents' Laws and Globally Coordinated Responses - [Mandeep Tiwana](#), Chief Officer, CIVICUS Global Alliance

### COUNTERING RESTRICTIVE LEGISLATION: A DIALOGUE ACROSS REGIONS

*WHAT* were the early warning signs? *WHAT* were/are the tactics used to justify, popularize and legitimize such restrictive civil society legislation? *WHAT* responses from civil society were most effective? *HOW* can less successful strategies be improved to better defend civic space in the future?

#### 14:10 - 14:50 Insights from the EU

- [Márta Pardavi](#), Hungarian Helsinki Committee, Hungary
- [Peter Čuroš](#), Via Iuris, Slovakia
- [Zahari Iankov](#), Bulgarian Center for-not-for profit law, Bulgaria

Discussion

#### 14:50 - 15:30 Reflections from the Western Balkans & Turkey

- [Alma Mustajbašić](#), Civic Initiatives, Serbia
- [Rana Kotan](#), TUSEV, Turkey
- [Stefan Blagić](#), Restart Srpska, BiH

Discussion

#### 15:30 - 15:40 Summary and Key Takeaways

[Petar Knežević](#), CRNVO, Montenegro



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## DRAFT AGENDA

DAY 2: 8<sup>TH</sup> NOVEMBER

### EFFECTIVE RESPONSES THROUGH ACCOUNTABILITY

#### 14:00-14:05 Opening

Dynamic Accountability approaches for countering harmful narratives – [Marija Vishinova, BCSDN](#)

#### 14:05 - 14:50

Grassroots Mobilization & People-Driven Work: Exploring successful local mobilization efforts

- [Iva Marković, Polekol, Serbia](#)
- [Jelena Božić, SviĆe, Serbia](#)

Effective communication strategies for countering public smear campaigns:  
Is there such a thing?

- [Darjan Radenkovikj, Zhar Ptica, North Macedonia](#)
- [Vesna Radojevic, KRIK, Serbia](#)

#### Discussion

#### 14:50 – 15:35

Standard-Setting, Self-Regulation and the internal CSO accountability:  
(How much) does it really matter?

- [Aleksandra Savevska, MCIC, North Macedonia](#)
- [Aida Daguda, Center for Promotion of Civil Society, BiH](#)

Turning AI & New Technologies into opportunities for countering foreign agents' narratives

- [Andrej Petkovski, Share Foundation, Serbia](#)
- [Zorica Velkovska, Blink 42-21, North Macedonia](#)

#### Discussion

#### 15:35 – 15:45 Key Takeaways and Closing

[Klotilda Kosta, Partners Albania/BCSDN Board Member](#)