



[BCSDN statement]

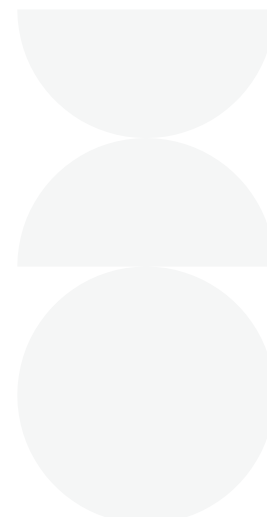
Continuing and Expanding ECMI to Demonstrate EU's True Commitment to Accession and Civil Society Participation

The Balkan Civil Society Development Network expresses strong support for the continued implementation of the Enlargement Candidate Members Initiative (ECMI), which was successfully piloted by the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) this year. This initiative represents a significant step toward fostering deeper engagement and integration between the European Union and the Western Balkan countries and Turkey that have a clear perspective toward EU accession, even before achieving formal EU membership.

We believe that with the ECMI, the EESC has established a pioneering model that encourages candidate countries to participate in EU mechanisms, showcasing in practice the potential for the gradual integration of these countries into the EU system. Moreover, the ECMI sets an important precedent that should serve as replicable model for other EU institutions, further reinforcing the EU's commitment to enlargement and a genuine involvement of the Western Balkans and Turkey prior to formal membership.

The ECMI has enabled meaningful involvement of civil society from candidate countries by allowing them to contribute to EESC opinions, particularly on issues such as social and economic cohesion. This initiative has not only demonstrated the EU institution's commitment to formally including the voices of civil society from these countries, but has also empowered civil society, with its diverse expertise and experiences, to actively participate in shaping European policies. This has been identified as critical for enhancing democracy, social dialogue, and the EU integration process. Leaders such as European Commission Vice-President Věra Jourová have highlighted how this initiative benefits not only the candidate countries but also the EU, aligning it with the EU's strategic interests.

As a network of CSOs deeply committed to the promotion of European values, democracy, and social cohesion in the region, we believe that the continuation of this initiative is essential for ensuring a more inclusive and





participatory process of European integration for our region. To reflect the EU's broader commitment to the region as a whole, we also reiterate the importance of including Kosovo in the next phases of the ECMI. No country should be left behind due to technicalities of status, particularly when there is clear progress in reform and alignment with EU norms and values. An inclusive approach, encompassing all countries on the EU accession path, will strengthen regional cooperation and contribute to the shared vision of European integration.

We are confident that the continued implementation of the ECMI, with the inclusion of Kosovo, will contribute to stronger collaboration and a shared European future for the entire region. We remain committed to supporting this initiative and stand ready for further dialogue and cooperation.

