



**Balkan Civil Society
Development Network**

E-MAIL ALERTS

BCSDN E-mail Alerts (EMA) is a bi-weekly service that consolidates and disseminates relevant and up-to-date news and information on civil society development in the Balkan region and wider. The EMA service has over 1500 subscribers and is regularly being sent on the 1st and the 15th of every month. If you would like to contribute please send us your news at executiveoffice@balkancsd.net.

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News

[BCSDN Calls for an End to Crackdown on Serbian Civic Freedoms, Urging the EU and International Community to Join in Support](#)

BCSDN, in a [joint statement](#), strongly supports Serbian civil society, [calling](#) for an end to government repression and standing with activists defending democratic values and basic rights. Recent protests over corruption, environmental issues, and rigged elections—intensified by opposition to Rio Tinto’s mining plans—have faced government-led smear campaigns, intimidation, and arrests. In 10 days, 33 activists were detained, and 39 organizations, including BCSDN, were targeted in a coordinated media attack. The EU’s lithium mining deal with

Green Party has [backed](#) anti-lithium mining protesters ahead of a key parliamentary debate in the National Assembly of Serbia this week, calling for stronger environmental protections. BCSDN remains committed to monitoring and responding as the situation develops. Read the full BCSDN statement [here](#).

Source: BCSDN/ European Western Balkans

[EPI Policy Brief: Reflections on Rule of Law Instruments in View of EU Accession](#)

EU is committed to promoting democracy, human rights, and the rule of law, both within its member states and in candidate countries. These values are central to the EU's enlargement policy, which prioritizes rule of law reforms, which features a "fundamentals first" approach. Recently, the EU has opened some of its key rule of law mechanisms, such as the EU Rule of Law Reports and FRA, and EESC to candidate countries. Additionally, the New Growth Plan for the Western Balkans, aimed at supporting socio-economic development and EU accession reforms, places the rule of law at its core by tying financial support to legal reforms. While these initiatives demonstrate the EU's strategic approach to fostering governance and growth, challenges in their implementation persist. The recent EPI paper explores these challenges and provides recommendations to enhance the effectiveness of these mechanisms in ensuring stability, prosperity, and adherence to European values in the Western Balkans. Find the paper [here](#).

Source: European Policy Institute (EPI)

[Albania Breaks Away: First EU Negotiation Chapters Start in October, Moving Ahead of North Macedonia](#)

Albania is set to open its first negotiating cluster with the EU on 15 October, marking a key step in its accession process. Meanwhile, North Macedonia is not expected to advance, even though it began its accession talks at the same time as Albania in 2022, facing delays due to Bulgaria's likely veto over unresolved identity issues linked to the 2022 French proposal. The Permanent Representatives Committee (Coreper), consisting of the ambassadors of EU member states confirmed Albania's fulfillment of benchmarks for Cluster 1, which focuses on fundamental reforms, including the rule of law. The country will discuss the first five chapters, notably Chapters 23 and 24,

this was unlikely. Read more [here](#).

Source: European Western Balkans

CSOs Expectations for a Vibrant EU Civic Space: An Open Letter on the Next Five Years

In an open letter to key EU leaders, 415 CSOs from 26 Member States and 4 candidate countries urged prioritization of a vibrant civic space in the upcoming five years. They emphasize civil society's vital role in democracy, human rights, and accountability but note a decline in civic freedoms, the rule of law, and democracy within the EU. The letter calls for a European Civil Society Strategy, a dedicated Commission Vice President for democracy and civic space, and improved funding policies. It advocates for a European Democracy Semester to monitor civic space, enhancing the Fundamental Rights Agency's role. The document outlines actionable recommendations aimed at ensuring civil society's empowerment and protecting fundamental rights across Europe. Read more [here](#).

Source: Civil Society Europe

EU CSOs: Q&A on the European Cross-Border Associations Directive

The document addresses key questions regarding the European Cross-Border Associations (ECBA) Directive proposed by the European Commission and the following European Parliament resolution. It aims to clarify the Directive's implications for civil society actors and outlines its potential to enhance cross-border cooperation among non-profit associations. The document was prepared by the informal coalition on the European-Cross Border Associations Directive, coordinated by Civil Society Europe with other prominent European organizations. The document emphasizes the Directive's role in facilitating the establishment and operation of European cross-border associations, promoting mutual recognition and legal support across member states. Additionally, it discusses concerns about security, legal status, and the Directive's alignment with existing national legislations, reinforcing its importance in fostering a more integrated non-profit sector in the EU. Read more [here](#).

Enabling Environment

Serbian CSOs Call for Action: One Year of Prosecutor Inaction on Misuse of Millions of EUR in Public Tender Funds

A year after filing a criminal complaint regarding the misuse of millions of euros from public tenders by the Ministry of Family Care and Demography in Serbia, BCSDN member Civic Initiatives and members of the OKO Coalition demand updates from the Prosecutor's Office for Organized Crime. The complaint, filed in September 2023, accuses former Minister Radomir Dmitrović, ministry staff, and legal representatives of 24 NGOs of misusing public funds in tenders held in 2022. Additionally, two individuals, Bojan Lešović and Tatjana Borojević, are accused of using their influence to secure funds for organizations not meeting formal requirements. Despite evidence, no charges have been made, and the pre-investigation process began only two months after the complaint. Civic Initiatives and OKO continue to monitor the allocation of public funds and call for transparency and timely action to prevent misuse. They urge authorities to prioritize public interest over private gains in public tenders. [Read more here.](#)

Source: Civic Initiatives

BCSDN at the III Regional Conference Stronger Together: Journalists and Judiciary Safeguarding Media Freedom

From September 18-20, the third regional conference, "Stronger Together: Journalists and the Judiciary Protect Media Freedoms," was held in Mavrovo, North Macedonia, organized by the [Association of Journalists in North Macedonia](#), Free Press Unlimited, and the Netherlands Helsinki Committee. Over 90 journalists, judges, and

BCSDN's regional [research on SLAPPs](#), highlighting how these lawsuits not only target journalists but also CSOs and activists working to protect the civic space and the overall democracy in the region. She stressed the need for increased awareness, legal protections, and capacity building for everyone involved, especially judges. The conference concluded by underscoring the importance of media freedom for democracy and urged alignment with EU standards and stronger regional coalitions. Read more [here](#).

Source: BCSDN

Serbia: United Media Alerts International Community on Escalating Media Attacks

United Media (UM) has alerted the international community to escalating attacks on independent media in Serbia. In a letter to European officials, organizations protecting press freedom, and diplomats, UM highlighted the targeting of the outlets—N1, Nova, Danas, and Radar—by government officials, pro-regime media, and political figures. The attacks intensified following UM's coverage of lithium mining protests, with President Vučić and parliamentary leaders accusing UM and the minority owner of United Group Dragan Šolak of plotting an assassination of the President Vučić. UM warns that these baseless claims endanger journalists and suppress media freedom. Data shows 628 articles in 2023 targeting independent outlets, primarily UM's. More than 40 attacks on UM journalists were recorded, with little action taken by authorities. UM calls for urgent intervention to protect media freedom in Serbia. Read more [here](#).

Source: N1

Albania: SCiDEV Welcomes Country Joining the European Centre for Countering Hybrid Threats

In September, Albania became the 36th member of the European Centre of Excellence for Countering Hybrid Threats (Hybrid CoE), aiming to enhance its ability to address hybrid threats like cyberattacks and disinformation. The Albanian Parliament ratified the membership with overwhelming support, designating the National Authority for Cyber Security as the national representative. SCiDEV welcomes Albania's membership in the Hybrid CoE, which strengthens the country's national security by enhancing cooperation with EU and NATO partners and providing

EU and NATO partners, it also presents challenges, requiring significant investment in infrastructure and capacity building. To effectively tackle the complex landscape of hybrid threats, Albania must ensure coordination among various authorities and involve the private sector in training initiatives. The country's strategy must also safeguard democratic values while enhancing national security against multifaceted threats. Read more [here](#).

Source: SCiDEV

Croatia: Major Challenges in Advancing Media Freedom

The international media freedom mission to Croatia has underscored significant challenges regarding media law reform, transparency in state advertising, and journalist safety, including the threats posed by Strategic Lawsuits Against Public Participation (SLAPPs). Conducted between September 9 and 20, the mission involved meetings with various governmental and media organizations. Critics have expressed concerns over the media law reform process, citing a lack of public consultation and potential politicization in appointing members to the Agency for Electronic Media. Despite some positive initiatives to enhance journalist safety, such as new protocols from the Ministry of the Interior, further action is needed for effective implementation. Journalists continue to face access challenges to information and smear campaigns against them, particularly regarding corruption issues. Ongoing monitoring by civil society and international watchdogs is essential to uphold media freedom as a democratic cornerstone in Croatia. Read more [here](#).

Source: ARTICLE 19

CSO Accountability

[#ShiftThePower Fellowship: Building Power Together and Creating Space for Change](#)

#ShiftThePower movement, the fellowship emphasizes community philanthropy and participatory practices. The first two cohorts engaged in discussions and reflections on vital topics, including capacity building in the Global South, community-led development, and decolonizing aid. Fellows participated in various initiatives, such as organizing events and contributing to over 30 articles on systems change and activism. The Fellowship created a supportive environment for exploring power dynamics and strengthening connections among participants, empowering them to apply learnings to their work in different countries. The GFCF invites those interested in community-based approaches to apply for the next cohort of the fellowship. Read more [here](#).

Source: Shift The Power

OECD Report: Pathways Towards Effective Locally Led Development Co-operation

The OECD synthesis report highlights the growing commitment of providers to support locally-led development, where local actors play a key role in framing, designing, delivering, learning, and ensuring accountability. The report offers a comprehensive overview of these efforts, examining how provider systems—through policies, financing mechanisms, partnerships, and management processes—can either enhance or limit local agencies. Emphasizing the need for context-specific and locally defined approaches, the report avoids prescribing a single path and encourages sequenced, tailored strategies for effective development cooperation. Read more [here](#).

Source: OECD

Donor Strategies

Statement on Philanthropy's Vision for the UN Summit of the Future and Beyond

highlighted that private philanthropic funding for development reached 42 billion USD from 2016 to 2019, crucially supporting efforts to alleviate poverty and advance the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The statement calls for increased resources in lower-income countries and a commitment to inclusive local funding mechanisms. It advocates for strengthening partnerships and innovative financing approaches to address inequalities and enhance civic space. The group aims to ensure that philanthropic contributions are recognized within international development frameworks, urging multilateralism that is effective and representative of diverse stakeholders. Read more [here](#).

Source: OECD

The Challenge of Tied Aid in Global Development

A 2020 OECD study reveals that less than 10% of bilateral donor funding for CSOs reaches the Global South, with the majority directed to Northern CSOs and or to large International Non-Government Organisations (INGOs). This practice, which has persisted for decades, stems from a historical reliance on Northern organizations for citizen engagement in development. While commitments to locally-led development have emerged, including the 2022 Donor Statement on supporting locally-led development, funding remains largely tied to Northern entities. This entrenched system fosters distrust in Southern CSOs, perpetuating a narrative of inadequacy despite their proven competence. To address this imbalance, it is crucial to raise awareness in the Global South, reformulate donor strategies, and redefine the roles of INGOs and Northern CSOs to support equitable partnerships and genuine local empowerment. Read more [here](#).

Source: Shift The Power

CfP: SMART Balkans Public Call for National Interventions Grant (Deadline: 21 October)

Target group: CSOs and CSO networks in Albania, BiH, Kosovo, Montenegro, North Macedonia, and Serbia.

Aim: Strengthen participatory democracies and Euro-Atlantic integrations by supporting CSOs in Security & Stability and Governance projects.

Amount: 8 223 685 NOK (708 938 EUR) total, with at least 33 grants awarded

Duration: 6-8 months

Deadline: 21 October

[Link to more information \(SMARTBalkans\)](#)

CfP: NHC Catalysts of Change for CSOs in RO, BG, HR, SI, PT (Deadline: 22 October)

Target group: CSOs in Romania, Bulgaria, Croatia, Slovenia, and Portugal, focused on women's rights, environmental justice, and anti-corruption.

Aim: Strengthen grassroots CSOs through coalition building, advocacy, and enhanced capacity in monitoring and influencing policies at local, national, and EU levels.

Amount: 30 000 – 40 000 EUR per grant.

Duration: 12-18 months

Deadline: 22 October

[Link to more information \(Netherlands Helsinki Committee\)](#)

CfP: Environmental Investigative Journalism Grant – Earth Investigations Programme (Deadline: 24 October)

Target group: Cross-border teams of at least two professional journalists and/or news outlets to conduct investigations into environmental affairs related to Europe (all the countries, not only the EU).

Aim: Investigate environmental issues that involve European affairs or compare local environmental policies

400,000 EUR. The total budget for 2024 is 1,600,000 EUR.

Duration: 20 rounds of application over 6 years (2022–2028)

Deadline: 24 October 2024, (23 January, 3 April, 24 July, 23 October 2025)

[Link to more information \(Journalismfund Europe\)](#)

CfP: IJ4EU Fund – Cross-border Investigations Grants (Deadline: 28 October)

Target group: Newsrooms, journalistic teams, and freelance journalists based in at least two European countries, both EU and non-EU.

Aim: Support cross-border investigative journalism by providing funding and additional support (mentoring, training, legal assistance) for ambitious projects on topics of cross-border relevance.

Amount: *Investigation Support Scheme:* Up to 50 000 EUR for newsrooms and investigative teams; and *Freelancer Support Scheme:* Up to 20 000 EUR for freelance journalist teams.

Duration: The program runs until November 2025, with subsequent calls in early 2025.

Deadline: 28 October

[Link to more information \(IJ4EUe\)](#)

CfP: Civic Initiatives Call for Encouraging Participation and Representation of Albanian Youth (Deadline: 31 October)

Target group: Local organizations, encouraging the participation and representation of Albanian youth in Preševo and Bujanovac.

Aim: By empowering local organizations to leverage their community connections and understanding of local challenges and needs, the call aims to create an environment where Albanian youth actively engage in social events and where their voices are heard and respected.

Amount: The total amount of funds available for this call is approximately 80 000 GBP (92 800 EUR), with grants of up to 15 000 GBP (17 400) for partnerships or 10 000 GBP (11 600 EUR) for individual applications.

[Link to more information \(Civic Initiatives\)](#)

CfP: BIRN Audience-Engaged Journalism Grants for Media in the Balkans and Visegrad (Deadline: 27 November)

Target group: Media outlets from Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Hungary, Kosovo, Montenegro, North Macedonia, the Czech Republic, Poland, Serbia, and Slovakia.

Aim: Engage audiences in reporting, fostering trust and addressing underreported issues, with a focus on marginalized communities, youth, and women.

Amount: Up to 4 000 EUR for individual stories, and up to 8 000 EUR for cross-border stories.

Duration: Two-year initiative as part of the Media Innovation Europe project.

Deadline: 27 November

[Link to more information \(BIRN\)](#)

Events and Opportunities

CfA: RCC Butterfly Innovation Award 2024 (Deadline: 10 October)

Target group: Young innovators and teams from the Western Balkans (average team age < 35)

Countries: Western Balkans

Short Description: The Butterfly Innovation Award offers 30 000 EUR for innovative solutions in six categories: industry, green innovation, STEM, youth, university, and women's innovation. Each category winner will receive 5 000 EUR. Projects must demonstrate a tangible impact on the region. An award event will be held in November

[Link to more information \(Mreza Mira\)](#)

CfA: RECAS Fellowship Program (Deadline: 15 October)

Target group: Early Career Researchers (PhD holders or candidates in later stages of study, within 5 years of obtaining PhD)

Countries: Worldwide

Short Description: The RECAS Fellowship Program invites Early Career Researchers to conduct research or develop projects at one of the Centers for Advanced Studies in the Western Balkans. Fellows receive support from universities in Rijeka and Belgrade, with optional co-hosting at universities in Skopje, Sarajevo, Ljubljana, Pristina, Tirana, or Podgorica. Research themes focus on economic, digital, and green changes in the Balkans.

Duration: 4 to 6 months, starting December 15, 2024

[Link to more information \(RECAS\)](#)

CfA: 15th EESC Civil Society Prize (Deadline: 7 November)

Target group: Non-profit initiatives by individuals, CSOs, and private companies registered in the EU

Countries: EU member states

Short Description: This prize rewards innovative initiatives combating harmful polarisation in European society, promoting European identity and shared values. The total prize is 50 000 EUR, shared among up to five winners.

Duration: N/A

[Link to more information \(EESC\)](#)

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