

**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.

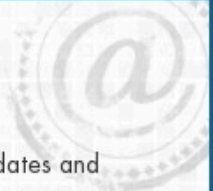


Table of content

► News

[BCSDN Virtual Event: Countering Foreign Agents Laws and Narratives with Dynamic Accountability \[November 6th & 8th, 14h CET\]](#)

[2024 EU Enlargement Package Released, BCSDN's In-Depth Analysis on Key Civil Society Findings for Western Balkans Coming Soon!](#)

[BCSDN at EESC Enlargement High-Level Forum: Shaping the EU's Path with Civil Society and Core Democratic Values](#)

[CPCD's 2023 Monitoring Matrix Report on Civil Society Environment in BiH: Increasing Threats to Fundamental Freedoms](#)

[Carnegie: All Is Not Well with EU Enlargement to the Western Balkans](#)

[CASE Coalition, ECPMF and CoE Host the European Anti-SLAPP Conference \(November 14\)](#)

► Enabling Environment

[Turkey: Government Reintroduces Controversial "Agents of Influence" Bill, Labelling Journalists, CSOs and Activists as "Foreign Agents"](#)

[Serbia: Ongoing SLAPP Lawsuits Against KRIK Threaten Press Freedom](#)

[Croatia: The Surge of SLAPPs Creates a Chilling Effect on Journalism](#)

[Albania: A Raising Alarm Over Media Access in the Parliament](#)

► **CSO Accountability**

[ICSC Annual Global Perspectives Conference: Truth, Trust, Technology \(26 November, Online\)](#)

[Civic Charge 2025: Accountability Lab Accelerator for Social Accountability Change Agents](#)

► **Donor Strategies**

[CONCORD AidWatch 2024: Whose Interests Does Official Development Assistance Truly Serve?](#)

► **Funding**

[CfP: CIVICUS Digital Action Lab \(DAL\) \(Deadline: 17 November\)](#)

[CfP: RYConnecting You\(th\) 2024 \(Deadline: 20 November\)](#)

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

[CfP: BOOST Program \(Deadline: 27 December- Regional Grants\)](#)

► **Events and Opportunities**

[CfA: 15th EESC Civil Society Prize \(Deadline: 7 November\)](#)

[CfA: Encouraging Democratic Values and Active Citizenship among Youth \(Deadline: 10 November\)](#)

[CfA: Community Solutions Program \(Deadline: 13 November\)](#)

[CfA: 5th WBF MOVE Mobility Grant Scheme \(Deadline: 15 November\)](#)

[CfA: Inclusive Democracy Accelerator \(IDA\) \(Deadline: 24 November\)](#)

[CfA: Stanford University Fisher Family Summer Fellows Program on Democracy and Development \(Deadline: 16 January 2025\)](#)

News

[BCSDN Virtual Event: Countering Foreign Agents Laws and Narratives with Dynamic Accountability \[November 6th & 8th, 14h CET\]](#)

counter harmful narratives? BCSDN is hosting a two-day virtual event, on November 6th and 8th at 14h CET to explore these pressing questions. During the first day, experts will share insights from Hungary, Slovakia, Bulgaria, and the Western Balkans, and Turkey, examining how these laws gain traction, the stigma they create, and effective strategies to protect civil society, while on the second day, effective civil society resilience strategies, from grassroots mobilization to combating smear campaigns will be explored. Experts will discuss internal accountability practices, standard-setting, and innovative uses of AI and technology to counter harmful narratives against CSOs. Interested in joining? Find more [here](#).

Source: BCSDN

2024 EU Enlargement Package Released, BCSDN's In-Depth Analysis on Key Civil Society Findings for Western Balkans Coming Soon!

The European Commission's latest Enlargement Package evaluates the progress of Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Serbia, Georgia, Moldova, Ukraine, and Türkiye on their EU accession paths. Civil society in the Western Balkans operates in diverse conditions, from largely enabling in Kosovo, Montenegro, and North Macedonia, to challenging in Albania and constrained in Bosnia and Herzegovina, where funding and consistent government cooperation are limited. Serbia remains the most restrictive, with ongoing attacks, smear campaigns, and SLAPP lawsuits targeting critical voices. In BiH's Republika Srpska entity, the withdrawn "foreign agents" law and persistent criminal penalties for defamation threaten democratic values and freedoms. Stay tuned for BCSDN's upcoming annual Background Analysis of the EU Enlargement Package, which will provide further insights on fundamental freedoms, CSO financial viability, and government cooperation, comparing findings to the upcoming 2023 Monitoring Matrix Regional Report. Read more [here](#).

Source: BCSDN

BCSDN at EESC Enlargement High-Level Forum: Shaping the EU's Path with Civil Society and Core Democratic Values

EESC hosted the Enlargement High-Level Forum in Brussels on October 24, where over 140 representatives from civil society, governments, and EU institutions, including BCSDN members' representatives, as a part ECMI initiative discussed the critical role of civil society in the EU accession process. The forum emphasized a collaborative approach for a "values-driven" enlargement, aligning candidate countries with EU democratic standards. Ms. Biljana Spasovska, BCSDN's Executive Director, spoke to a panel addressing the need for genuine EU engagement, stressing that transparency, accountability, and citizen participation are essential. She highlighted the shrinking civic space in the Western Balkans, particularly in Serbia, and urged the EU to strengthen monitoring and ensure civil society's role in a credible accession process. The forum underscored that resilient civil society is fundamental for sustainable reforms and the EU's path to inclusive growth and social equity across Europe. Read more [here](#).

Source: BCSDN

CPCD's 2023 Monitoring Matrix Report on Civil Society Environment in BiH: Increasing Threats to Fundamental Freedoms

CSOs. While CSOs maintain certain freedoms, such as the ability to register and operate with access to foreign funding, numerous obstacles persist. Key issues include limitations on peaceful assembly, increased government interference, and constraints on freedom of expression, notably under the defamation law. Additionally, CSOs face unclear taxation rules and restrictive financial conditions, with public funding processes often opaque and susceptible to political manipulation. The report recommends harmonizing legal norms across government levels, ensuring activists' protection, and increasing transparency in public funding. It further stresses the need for consistent civil society involvement in policy-making to foster a more enabling environment. A regional report on the civil society environment, summarizing country reports from BCSDN members, is forthcoming. Find the report [here](#).

Source: CPCD

[Carnegie: All Is Not Well with EU Enlargement to the Western Balkans](#)

Serbia and North Macedonia are rethinking EU membership, exploring alternatives that promise economic benefits without the EU's demands. While the EU has promoted integration with the Western Balkans—most recently through the Berlin Process summit and a 6 billion EUR growth plan—progress remains mixed. North Macedonia's path has stalled due to Bulgaria's constitutional demands, while Serbia's balancing of relationships with China, Russia, and EU countries suggests a non-EU path that's gaining appeal. This shift risks leaving the Western Balkans in prolonged uncertainty, heightening interethnic tensions, particularly in North Macedonia, and challenging the EU's influence in the region. Frustration with EU delays has led both countries to consider alliances with Hungary and China as alternative pathways, adding complexity to regional dynamics. Without progress toward EU integration, the Western Balkans may struggle to find a stable path forward, impacting both regional stability and the EU's long-term interests. Read more [here](#).

Source: Carnegie

[CASE Coalition, ECPMF and CoE Host the European Anti-SLAPP Conference \(November 14\)](#)

The Coalition Against SLAPPs in Europe (CASE), the European Centre for Press and Media Freedom (ECPMF), and the Council of Europe will co-host the second European Anti-SLAPP Conference on November 14, 2024. The event will focus on combating SLAPPs—strategic lawsuits intended to intimidate and silence those exercising their rights to public participation. The conference will introduce Europe's first standards against SLAPPs, including the Council of Europe's recommendation and an EU package to protect public participants from abusive legal actions. Attendees will explore legislative frameworks, national implementation strategies, and hear testimonies from SLAPP victims. High-level representatives from European institutions, journalists, lawyers, policymakers, and civil society members, including BCSDN representatives, will be present to discuss and support these initiatives. The event highlights collaborative efforts by CASE and other organizations to safeguard freedom of expression and enhance protections for public engagement across Europe. More information is available [here](#).

Source: European Anti- SLAPP Conference

Enabling Environment

Turkey: Government Reintroduces Controversial “Agents of Influence” Bill, Labelling Journalists, CSOs and Activists as “Foreign Agents”

The Turkish government has [reintroduced](#) the controversial “agents of influence” bill to parliament after previously withdrawing it due to public backlash. The legislation seeks to add a new offense to the Turkish Penal Code, imposing prison sentences of three to seven years on individuals acting in the interests of foreign entities. While the government asserts that the bill targets espionage, critics argue it poses serious threats to journalistic independence and freedom of expression, recalling issues with previous laws like the “disinformation law.” CSOs caution that vague definitions within the bill could be misused to target NGOs perceived as influenced by foreign interests. In a joint statement, various press organizations condemned the bill as a direct attack on press freedom, warning that it could allow journalists, CSOs, and activists to be unjustly labeled as “foreign agents,” thereby undermining the public’s right to accurate information and restricting freedom of expression. Read more [here](#).

Source: *duvaR.english*, *MLSA*

Serbia: Ongoing SLAPP Lawsuits Against KRIK Threaten Press Freedom

Media organizations in Serbia are raising alarms over multiple SLAPPs targeting the Serbian investigative news outlet KRIK. Currently facing 16 lawsuits, KRIK journalists Stevan Dojčinović and Bojana Pavlović are being prosecuted by Court Judge Dušanka Đorđević, for alleged data protection violations after the journalists reported on Judge Đorđević’s assets using publicly available information. The plaintiffs are seeking hefty penalties, including prison sentences and journalism bans. Critics argue these lawsuits are intended to intimidate journalists and stifle press freedom rather than pursue legitimate legal action. [The Media Freedom Rapid Response](#) consortium warns that a guilty verdict could have dire implications for independent journalism in Serbia, marking a significant test of the judiciary’s commitment to upholding freedom of expression and transparency in the face of government pressure. They call for [stronger anti-SLAPP protections](#) to safeguard investigative reporting. Read more [here](#).

Source: *MFRR*, *International Press Institute*, *KRIK*

Croatia: The Surge of SLAPPs Creates a Chilling Effect on Journalism

Between 2016 and 2023, Croatia witnessed a troubling surge in lawsuits against journalists, with over 1,300 cases filed, nearly half classified as SLAPPs. These lawsuits aim to intimidate and silence the press, often initiated by public figures seeking to suppress reporting on issues of public interest. A [recent study](#) by the Croatian Association of Journalists and the Center for Democracy and Law highlights that many lawsuits exhibit characteristics of SLAPPs, including disproportionate damage claims and procedural tactics designed to increase costs for defendants. Serial plaintiffs, including politicians and judges, frequently file repeated lawsuits, exacerbating the pressure on media outlets. Although the judiciary’s success rate in SLAPP cases is low, the prolonged legal battles create a chilling effect, discouraging investigative journalism. Critics argue that the current legal framework fails to adequately protect media freedom and emphasize the need for specialized judges to address these challenges. Read more [here](#).

Source: *OBCT*

Albania: A Raising Alarm Over Media Access in the Parliament

The SafeJournalists Network has expressed deep concern over the repeated obstruction of journalists' access to the Albanian Parliament, highlighted by a recent incident on October 17, when journalists were denied entry by the Republic Guard, preventing them from covering parliamentary activities, including filming deputies arriving amid rising tensions. This obstruction is part of a troubling trend, as documented over the past year. Previous incidents include barriers to access, and multiple occasions where journalists faced physical removal or restrictions during important events. The SafeJournalists Network has urged the Albanian Assembly to address these issues, emphasizing the need for an environment that allows journalists to freely exercise their rights. Such freedoms are crucial for maintaining a healthy democratic society, and immediate actions are necessary to rectify this ongoing problem. Read more [here](#).

Source: SafeJournalists

BIRN Report: E-Government in the Balkans Still a Work in Progress

The BIRN report, "Open Data and Digitalisation in the Western Balkans: The State of Play," highlights significant challenges in the implementation of e-government services across the region. Despite the global trend toward digital government, political will and institutional capacity are lacking in the Balkans, limiting access to public services. Countries like Serbia, Albania, and Montenegro have established e-government portals, but their offerings remain inadequate. For example, while Serbia's "eUprava" portal provides 186 services, Montenegro's system primarily offers usage instructions rather than direct services. Cybersecurity is also a concern, as vulnerabilities have led to major ransomware attacks. Financial constraints further hinder progress, with limited state budgets failing to support comprehensive digital transformation. Although EU and international organizations offer some assistance, experts stress the need for sustainable funding to effectively promote and implement e-government solutions in the region. Read more [here](#).

Source: BIRN

CSO Accountability

ICSC Annual Global Perspectives Conference: Truth, Trust, Technology (26 November, Online)

The ICSC's Annual Online "Global Perspectives" Conference will address the increasing complexity and distrust in today's world. It invites participants worldwide to explore the critical role of CSOs in uniting communities and amplifying vulnerable voices. Amid the rise of misinformation and rapid technological change, attendees will engage in discussions on how CSOs can restore trust and adapt to new challenges. The conference features six sessions covering key issues, including the impact of AI, mental health advocacy, and effective narrative-building against anti-rights movements. The participants will have opportunities for networking and sharing insights, focusing on strengthening information ecosystems and promoting human rights. [Join the conversation](#) to help shape a more inclusive and equitable future for civil society.

Source: Global Perspectives

Civic Charge 2025: Accountability Lab Accelerator for Social Accountability Change Agents

Civic Charge 2025 is an innovative online accelerator launched by Accountability Lab to support social accountability change agents eager to enhance their governance initiatives. Building on the success of the Accountability Incubator, which has empowered over 300 young activists across 12 countries since 2015, this program fosters a global learning community for individuals already engaged in governance projects. Participants will deepen their impact by working collaboratively to unlock their strengths in a supportive environment. This year, Civic Charge partners with the Center for International Private Enterprise (CIPE) to introduce the CIPE Creative Industries Fellowship, focusing on creative solutions for governance issues. Ideal candidates include activists from diverse backgrounds working on climate justice, digital governance, and inclusion, who are committed to enhancing civic agency and promoting underrepresented voices in decision-making processes. Read more [here](#).

Source: *AccountLab*

Donor Strategies

CONCORD AidWatch 2024: Whose Interests Does Official Development Assistance Truly Serve?

The AidWatch 2024 report delivered by CONCORD highlights the critical condition of European Official Development Assistance (ODA), revealing significant shortfalls in meeting long-standing commitments. In 2023, ODA from EU Member States totaled 82.4 billion EUR, or 0.51% of Gross National Income (GNI), falling far below the 0.7% target established decades ago. Alarming, over 18.9 billion EUR of reported ODA failed to meet the OECD's eligibility criteria. The report underscores the need for increased transparency and monitoring, as many allocations do not prioritize poverty reduction or equality. A significant portion of bilateral ODA lacks a gender equality focus, with only 3% deemed disability-inclusive. While some positive developments have emerged, urgent action is necessary for ODA to fulfill its potential. The report calls for EU Member States to meet their ODA commitments, ensure alignment with partner countries' needs, and enhance overall coherence for sustainable development. Read more [here](#).

Source: *CONCORD*

Funding

CfP: CIVICUS Digital Action Lab (DAL) (Deadline: 17 November)

Target group: CSOs from the Global South countries, particularly those with restricted civic space. Organizations advancing inclusive democracy and representing historically excluded groups, such as rural communities, indigenous peoples, women, youth, and the LGBT+ community.

Amount: Grants ranging from 10 000 USD to 30 000 USD, covering both participation costs and project implementation.

Duration: Over a nine-month period

Deadline: 17 November

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

CfP: RYCOConnecting You(th) 2024 (Deadline: 20 November)

Target group: CSOs in the Western Balkans Six (WB6): Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Montenegro, North Macedonia, and Serbia.

Aim: To support peacebuilding, reconciliation, youth empowerment, and societal engagement in the Western Balkans. Also, to promote regional cooperation, intercultural learning, dialogue, and mutual understanding among youth in the region.

Amount: Total funding of 300 000 EUR. Grants range from 15 000 EUR to 30 000 EUR.

Duration: 4-8 months

Deadline: 20 November

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

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: max 8 months

Deadline: 27 November

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

CfP: BOOST Program (Deadline: 27 December- Regional Grants)

Target group: CSOs in the Western Balkans (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Montenegro, North Macedonia, and Serbia), working in youth engagement, entrepreneurship, rural development, environmental sustainability, cultural heritage, and community development.

Aim: To support the Western Balkans integration into the EU by fostering democratic, economic, social, and cultural growth, and to empower CSOs through sub-grants aimed at strengthening civil society and encouraging regional and national initiatives in key areas.

Amount: Total funding: 2 250 000 EUR; Regional Grants: 450 000 EUR; National Grants: 1 800 000 EUR.

Duration: Regional grant programme: 14-16 months

Deadline: Regional grant programme: 27 December (the launch of the National Grant programme is March 2025).

Events and Opportunities

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 \(EESC\)](#)

CfA: Encouraging Democratic Values and Active Citizenship among Youth (Deadline: 10 November)

Target group: Undergraduate students from all higher education institutions in Bosnia and Herzegovina

Countries: BiH

Short Description: This nine-month program, supported by the National Endowment for Democracy (NED) since 2012, aims to educate students on democratic principles, human rights, and active citizenship. It encourages critical thinking on sensitive topics and develops communication and research skills through a series of educational events, research projects, and community initiatives.

Duration: 9 months (December 2024 – September 2025)

[Link to more information \(Humanity in Action\)](#)

CfA: Community Solutions Program (Deadline: 13 November)

Target group: Experienced community leaders aged 26-39 working in community development, democracy and human rights, environment, peace and conflict resolution, or women and gender issues.

Countries: Select countries across Africa, East Asia and the Pacific, Europe, Middle East and North Africa, South and Central Asia, and the Western Hemisphere.

Short Description: CSP is a year-long professional leadership program that includes a four-month practicum in the U.S., leadership training, and a community-based project upon return home.

Duration: August 2025 – December 2025 in the U.S., followed by a six-month community project

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

CfA: 5th WBF MOVE Mobility Grant Scheme (Deadline: 15 November)

Target group: Individual artists, cultural professionals, academics, journalists, and activists from the Western Balkans.

cooperation by enabling individuals to travel within the Western Balkans. The grant aims to foster people-to-people connections, intercultural dialogue, and regional cooperation through professional exchanges in areas like arts, media, environmental protection, peacebuilding, and more.

Duration: 6 months

[Link to more information \(Western Balkans Fund\)](#)

CfA: Inclusive Democracy Accelerator (IDA) (Deadline: 24 November)

Target group: CSOs working with governments; CSOs with existing participatory initiatives focused on marginalized groups, including women, youth, and displaced people.

Countries: Latin America, Africa, Asia, or Eastern Europe

Short Description: The program aims to enhance participatory and deliberative democracy for historically marginalized communities and equip CSOs and governments with tools and mentorship to engage these groups more effectively in policymaking and budget planning.

Duration: March 2025 – August 2025

[Link to more information \(People Powered\)](#)

CfA: Stanford University Fisher Family Summer Fellows Program on Democracy and Development (Deadline: 16 January 2025)

Target group: Mid-career practitioners from developing and transitioning countries working in democracy, legal, economic, or governance reform.

Countries: Developing democracies worldwide, with a focus on Eurasia, Africa, and transitioning states.

Short Description: This Stanford University program, hosted by the Center on Democracy, Development and the Rule of Law, offers training for approximately 28-30 fellows in democratic practices and development strategies. Fellows are selected based on their professional impact and leadership potential.

Duration: Intensive 3-week on-campus program

[Link to more information \(CDDRL Stanford\)](#)



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