

**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.

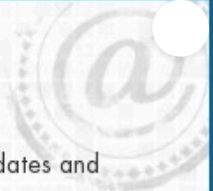


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News

Foreign Agents' Laws vs. Dynamic Accountability: How CSOs Can Defend Civic Space

The BCSDN virtual event “Weaponizing Accountability: Countering Foreign Agents' Laws and Narratives” convened experts from Hungary, Slovakia, Bulgaria, Turkey, and the Western Balkans on November 6-8 to address restrictive foreign agents' laws stigmatizing CSOs. Day 1 highlighted strategies to counter government-imposed narratives labeling CSOs as foreign threats, while Day 2 focused on building civil society resilience through dynamic accountability, emphasizing grassroots mobilization, transparency, and proactive communication. Experts, activists, CSO practitioners, and journalists shared innovative solutions to maintain CSO credibility and public trust, leveraging technology and fostering community engagement. BCSDN pledged further fostering of collaboration in defense of civic space, emphasizing adaptability and value-based messaging to counteract divisive legislation. Read more [here](#).

First SLAPP Competition for the Western Balkans to Raise Awareness on Freedom of Expression

Our member organization from Serbia, Civic Initiatives, is launching the first SLAPP competition for the Western Balkans, starting with a social media campaign and concluding with an award ceremony in Belgrade on November 28. BCSDN contributes through participation in the Jury and as a panel speaker. The competition aims to highlight the chilling effects of Strategic Lawsuits Against Public Participation (SLAPPs) on freedom of expression, civic activism, and democracy in the region. It seeks to shame those who use these lawsuits to silence individuals and organizations working for the public good. The event is organized in partnership with the European Fund for the Balkans, following the model of the European SLAPP competition. Prizes will be awarded in three categories: Environmental Harm, Obstructing Transparency, and Audience Choice. The competition will raise awareness about the abuse of laws to suppress public interest and promote freedom of expression across the region. Read more [here](#).

Source: Civic Initiatives

New Enlargement Commissioner Marta Kos Pledges for Merit-Based Accession Process

During her European Parliament hearing, Commissioner-designate for Enlargement Marta Kos outlined her plans for EU enlargement. She emphasized that despite new geopolitical pressures, the process will remain merit-based. Kos stressed the importance of political commitment, especially in areas like justice reform and anti-corruption, while warning against stagnation or backsliding. She also highlighted the EU's role in defending values amid global tensions and expressed support for Ukraine's EU path. On bilateral disputes, she rejected the idea of a "land swap" between Serbia and Kosovo. Kos pledged to engage civil society and communicate the benefits of enlargement effectively, ensuring that candidate countries comply with reforms before joining the EU. She also committed to strengthening cooperation between the European Commission and the European Parliament. Read more [here](#).

Source: European Western Balkans

Civil Society Presents Key Recommendations to Strengthen the Berlin Process

At the Berlin Process Summit in October, the Civil Society and Think Tank Forum (CSF) presented [policy recommendations](#) to leaders from the Western Balkans, EU, and UK. Developed by over 115 civil society organizations across seven thematic groups, these recommendations focused on pressing issues: EU integration, reconciliation, gender diversity, energy, climate change, environmental protection, and disinformation. The CSF also commissioned [a study](#) to mark the 10th anniversary of the Berlin Process, mapping its achievements and proposing steps to strengthen its impact. Key recommendations included creating a dedicated secretariat for continuity, formalizing monitoring efforts, and boosting support for democracy and regional reconciliation. As a crucial support for EU accession, the Berlin Process has enabled agreements like CEFTA and remains vital for advancing cooperation in the region. Read more [here](#).

Source: WB CSF, European Western Balkans

Enabling Environment

Mass Detentions as Serbian Protesters Demand Justice After Deadly Train Station Disaster

Thousands of protesters marched in Belgrade on November 11, demanding accountability for the deadly collapse of the Novi Sad train station's roof, which killed 14 people on November 1. Throughout the series of protests, there have been [massive arrests](#) of demonstrators, with an ever-growing number of detained as they continue to demand justice and accountability for those responsible for the tragedy. Organized by Serbian opposition groups under the slogan "Corruption Kills," the protest called for the resignation of officials, including Novi Sad Mayor Milan Djuric and Prime Minister Milos Vucevic, who was mayor during the renovation. Protesters also called for the publication of confidential contracts related to the reconstruction and monitoring of past infrastructure projects. Despite rain, they marched to the Serbian presidency, demanding justice and arrests. No one has been arrested in connection to the tragedy, and only Minister Goran Vesic resigned but denied responsibility. Our member organization, [Civic Initiatives](#), [demands an immediate investigation](#) into police actions during the protest and calls for accountability within Serbian institutions. Read more [here](#).

Source: Civic Initiatives, Balkan Insight

RSF Calls Serbia 'Europe's Weak Link' on Press Freedom

During a recent mission to Belgrade, Reporters Without Borders (RSF) noted that press freedom in Serbia remains under attack. Following the massive protests in Belgrade and Novi Sad, triggered by the tragedy that occurred on 1 November at the entrance of the Novi Sad Railway station in which 14 people lost their lives, the RSF mission notes alarming cases of violence against media crews. Among the notest cases of such violence are attacks, including damage to N1 channel's camera and physical assaults on Euronews and Radio 021 reporters, threats against FoNet cameraman. RSF has addressed those issues, including the issue of impunity culture for the attacks on journalists, including the rise of abusive SLAPP lawsuits targeting independent media like KRIK, and Kremlin-linked disinformation via RT Balkan Serbian to the officials. Read more [here](#).

Source: Reporters Without Borders

Launching of Dialogue on Media Freedom and Journalist Safety in Albania

At the 10th Media Development Forum that took place on 23 October, in Tirana, the EU Ambassador to Albania, Silvio Gonzato, announced support for a structured dialogue on media freedom and journalist safety in Albania. This initiative, facilitated by the University of Tirana's Journalism Department, aims to foster collaboration among state authorities and media stakeholders. Backed by the EU and the Council of Europe, it will provide experts and resources to advance European standards. The dialogue will tackle issues such as journalist safety, working conditions, ownership concentration, public media independence, and transparency in advertising and financing. A concept note on its methodology and timeline has been submitted for agreement, with the goal of proposing concrete recommendations to the Albanian government and Parliament within a year. Read more [here](#).

Source: SafeJournalists

SCiDEV's Working Paper: Initial Assessment of Albania's Legal Framework for Harmonizing the Anti-SLAPP Directive

In 2023, Albania saw an increase in Strategic Lawsuits Against Public Participation (SLAPPs), a trend that poses significant risks to media freedom and the safety of journalists. SLAPPs are used by powerful entities to silence independent voices by intimidating critics with costly and burdensome lawsuits, often aimed at discouraging public participation in matters of public interest. Reports indicate that journalists, especially those covering sensitive topics like corruption, are frequent targets. Albania's legal framework lacks sufficient protections against SLAPPs, and the absence of a clear definition complicates identifying such cases. The EU's Anti-SLAPP Directive, adopted in 2024, provides safeguards to protect individuals from manifestly unfounded legal actions, encouraging early dismissal of such claims. As Albania aligns its laws with EU standards, a review of national legislation is underway to strengthen protections for journalists and activists, ensuring greater freedom of expression and press independence. Read SCiDEV's working paper on the topic [here](#).

Source: SCiDEV

Silenced Through the Courts: Serbian Journalist Faces Seven Lawsuits for Exposing Local Misconduct

Verica Marinčić, a journalist from Inđija, Serbia, faces severe harassment, including seven lawsuits targeting the survival of her independent media outlet, IN Media. Her reporting, especially on the municipality's distribution of "potency honey" to schoolchildren, has led to ongoing intimidation and a court ruling against her, demanding substantial damages for alleged harm to minors. This case exemplifies a typical SLAPP (Strategic Lawsuit Against Public Participation), intended to suppress critical reporting rather than pursue justice. The accumulated legal pressures threaten Marinčić's personal well-being and increase the risk of self-censorship within her newsroom, highlighting the urgent need for a supportive environment where media workers can operate freely. Despite these challenges, Marinčić remains dedicated to journalistic freedom, underscoring the importance of mental health support for media professionals under the strain of SLAPPs and similar forms of legal intimidation. Read more [here](#).

Source: Cenzolovka

CSO Accountability

Unfunded Accountability in Localization: Part 1

During the first part of a two-part series of blogs about accountability in the non-profit sector and its localization with a focus of helping funders gain a better understanding, Jean Scrimgeour explores the critical role of accountability in the nonprofit sector and its connection to the localization agenda. As funders advocate for more official development assistance to reach local partners, the costs of maintaining accountability have increased. While accountability is often viewed as financial oversight, it also encompasses the sustainability and well-being of staff and partners. Local organizations frequently struggle to finance accountability measures due to limited funding. Accountability Lab emphasizes the need for tailored policies and collaborative efforts among donors to empower

Source: Accountability Lab

Donor Strategies

VAT Exemption: A Guide for EU Funded Grantees in the Western Balkans & Türkiye

EU TACSO 3 has released an updated VAT Exemption Guide for CSOs in the Western Balkans and Türkiye that receive EU grant funding. The guide explains the procedures for obtaining VAT exemption and refunds on goods and services purchased with EU funds, including registration requirements and eligibility criteria. It clarifies the VAT exemption process for various types of grants, such as country-level or regional, and different grant-making combinations, including main applicants, co-applicants, and sub-grantees. The guide also addresses VAT exemption and refund requirements within the IPA beneficiaries and provides detailed guidance for CSOs to navigate the complex tax procedures. This living document will be updated regularly to reflect changes in VAT regulations. Read more [here](#).

Source: EU TACSO 3

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.

Aim: To strengthen the organizing, advocacy, and campaign capacities of CSOs through digital solutions. To support pilot projects that increase the impact and sustainability of pro-democracy work.

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) – Call for Proposals 2024 (Deadline: 20 November)

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: Call for CSOs in Romania – Mini-Grants for Strategic Planning (Deadline: 25 November)

Target group: CSOs in Romania (associations, foundations, federations).

Aim: Strengthening the capacity of NGOs through well-structured strategic planning processes.

Amount: Maximum financing of 20 000 lei – approximately 4 000 EUR per project, no co-financing required.

Duration: 3 months (January 1 – March 31, 2025)

Deadline: 25 November

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

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: Society Against Corruption in Montenegro (Deadline: 27 November)

Target group: Local CSOs and media outlets in Montenegro

Aim: To combat corruption, particularly in healthcare, education, and the environment, by strengthening the capacity of local media and civil society.

Amount: Maximum grant of 12 430 USD per grant (6 grants available)

Duration: The project duration is not specified, but applicants have 3 months to complete activities

Deadline: 27 November

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

Target group: Youth organizations and organizations working with youth in BiH.

Aim: Support local youth initiatives focused on improving youth cooperation, participation, and policy development.

Amount: Up to 1 955 KM or approximately 999 EUR (LOT I), and up to 2 151 KM or approximately 1 099 EUR (LOT II).

Duration: Initiatives must be implemented by 15 April 2025

Deadline: 20 December

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

Events and Opportunities

CfA: Scholarship for Research on Media Freedom & Journalists' Safety in Albania (Deadline: 20 November)

Target group: Journalists and researchers in Albania

Countries: Albania

Short Description: BIRN Albania, in partnership with SCiDEV and Qendra Faktaje, is offering grants to local journalists and researchers for the production of research papers or analyses on media freedom and journalists' safety in Albania. The project is funded by the European Union. Grants of 1 500 EUR gross will be awarded to applicants focusing on key topics such as media concentration, online harassment, gender safety, and disinformation.

Duration: 3 months (Research period)

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

CfA: Democratic Innovations Accelerator (Deadline: 24 November)

Target group: Civil society and government organizations focused on enhancing public participation and democratic innovation in policymaking.

Countries: EU countries and Horizon Europe countries (including Albania, Armenia, Bosnia & Herzegovina, Faroe Islands, Georgia, Iceland, Israel, Kosovo, Morocco, Moldova, Montenegro, New Zealand, North Macedonia, Norway, Serbia, Tunisia, Türkiye, Ukraine, and the United Kingdom).

Short Description: The Democratic Innovations Accelerator (DIA) program, led by People Powered and Coglobal as part of the Nets4Dem project, supports 40 selected participants through a six-month capacity-building initiative. Participants will receive mentorship, access to participatory program resources, live sessions, online courses, and peer-learning opportunities to develop and implement action plans for democratic innovation in governance.

Duration: March 2025 – August 2025

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

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

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

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: Global Perspectives 2024 'Truth, Trust and Technology' (Deadline: 26 November)

Target group: Leaders and innovators from international civil society organizations (ICSOs), politics, and business.

Countries: Global

Short Description: The Global Perspectives 2024 event will focus on the intersection of truth, trust, and technology, addressing the challenges posed by mis- and disinformation, the role of civil society organizations in strengthening information ecosystems, combating anti-rights disinformation, and fostering systems of trust and risk-sharing between donors and recipients.

Duration: One day, 26 November, 10:00-17:00 CET (Online).

[Link to more information \(International Civil Society Centre\)](#)

CfA: Transatlantic Inclusion Leaders Network Fellowship 2024 (Deadline: 4 December)

Target group: Young, diverse leaders in elected office, civil society, and business

Countries: WB6, EU and EU candidate countries, United States

Short Description: TILN is a transatlantic fellowship network of young leaders collaborating to promote inclusive policies and social cohesion across the US and Europe. Fellows receive mentorship, coaching, and training to prepare for leadership roles that reflect the diversity of society.

Duration: Approximately 7 months (December to June)

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

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