

BCSDN Calls for the Protection of Civic Space amid Protests in Albania and Democratic Accountability in the EU Accession Process



Balkan Civil Society
Development Network

The Balkan Civil Society Development Network (BCSDN) expresses deep concern over the escalating tensions, violence and reported restrictions affecting civic space amid the ongoing protests in Albania. While condemning all acts of violence, including attacks against police officers and the destruction of public and private property, BCSDN stresses that **freedom of peaceful assembly, freedom of expression and meaningful civic participation are fundamental to democratic governance and must be protected without intimidation or retaliation**. The reported use of excessive force, arbitrary detentions, intimidation of journalists, and threatening rhetoric against protesters raise serious concerns about the protection of these rights and the space available for democratic dissent.

Beyond the immediate events, since May 2026, Albania has witnessed sustained civic mobilisation, reflecting accumulated grievances over decisions affecting public resources, transparency, corruption, institutional accountability, and limited opportunities for citizens to influence decisions affecting their lives. In mid-October, a new wave of student-led protests intensified the mobilisation, escalating into violent confrontations, arrests and injuries among protesters and police officers. These developments have raised serious concerns about the authorities' response and the protection of fundamental rights.

*BCSDN stands with Albanian civil society organisations and independent human rights monitors, which have documented violations and called for independent investigations and institutional accountability, including through their **joint statement of 20 October** and an earlier **open letter to Albanian institutions**. BCSDN supports these demands and calls for timely, effective action to protect fundamental rights, ensure accountability and prevent further restrictions on civic space.*

These developments also raise important questions about the relationship between progress towards EU membership and democratic change in practice. Civil society across the region has long warned that legislative alignment and institutional reforms do not necessarily translate into more accountable, responsive institutions or meaningful public participation. Protecting fundamental rights and ensuring that citizens can hold institutions accountable must remain central to Albania's European integration process.

Across the Western Balkans and Türkiye, BCSDN's monitoring points to a recurring pattern in which citizens, activists and civil society organisations demanding accountability are increasingly portrayed as serving a "foreign agenda" or threatening political stability. Similar narratives have accompanied student-led protests in Serbia, while foreign funded civil society in Türkiye has faced growing suspicion and restrictions. Such narratives risk legitimising restrictions, intimidation and attacks against those exercising their fundamental rights, rather than recognising them as legitimate participants in democratic life.

As one of the frontrunners in the EU accession process, **Albania's response will be an important test of whether fundamental rights, civic participation and institutional accountability are genuinely central to the accession process.** How Albanian authorities and EU institutions address these concerns will send an important signal across the region about the credibility of EU integration as a driver of democratic change. Protecting civic space must remain a measure of democratic progress, not a secondary concern or a commitment that exists only on paper.

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