

**DECLARATION**  
**ON IMPROVING THE DIALOGUE BETWEEN PARLIAMENTS AND JOURNALISTS'**  
**ASSOCIATIONS IN WESTERN BALKANS**

*A catalyst for deeper regional cooperation and a steppingstone towards EU integration*

Today marks an important milestone for the Western Balkans. Representatives and members of the National Parliaments and four Associations of journalists from Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, North Macedonia, and Serbia have agreed and recognized the importance of cooperation in the area of safety of journalists and the freedom of expression in general. Only with quality laws adopted by parliaments in previous consultation and collaboration with the local journalists' associations, efficient and fair regulation is expected to improve the safety of media workers truly and, consequently, secure the right of information of the citizens.

This gathering proves that there is a willingness among national parliaments and associations of journalists in Western Balkans in the future to increase the communication and exchange of practices out of not only the media workers but also in the general picture all citizens would benefit.

**WE, the participants in the first Regional Conference, representing the national parliaments and associations of journalists of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, North Macedonia, and Serbia and have agreed**

- to enhance dialogue between parliaments and journalists' associations from our countries as a way forward to improving the state of freedom of expression and strengthen the role of civil society organizations in the policymaking process;
- to work on improving the institutional discourse between members of national parliaments and journalists, thereby positively impacting the European integration process of our countries
- aligning with EU rules and standards on freedom of media, to support the need for urgent changes that will improve the legal environment for the safety of journalists, a precondition for exercising freedom of expression and the right to information;
- to promote inclusive regional cooperation between all countries from the Western Balkans, thereby creating a forum for parliaments and associations of journalists of other countries from the region to join this initiative

Furthermore, in the upcoming year, we commit to working together to:

1. Improve existing national legislation, particularly the criminal laws, on the safety of journalists with the tendency to create systemic legal solutions by which media workers will be safer, and impunity will not be tolerated. All legal acts will follow the freedom of expression and safety of journalists' recommendations of UNESCO, OSCE, and the Council of Europe and Directives of European Commission with consideration of each country's specific media local context.

2. Upgrade the existing national legislation on hate speech, including the spread of intolerance on national, religious, sexual, gender, cultural, religious, linguistic, political, and any other basis.
3. Encourage strengthening of self-regulatory mechanisms and public accountability within media outlets in such a way that the values of professional and ethical journalism will be the base for the production and editing of media content,
4. Promote interprofessional solidarity and cooperation, exchange of information and knowledge of journalists, media, and media companies on an equal basis, within the country, and across borders, to create a solid and responsible media community that together contributes to strengthening journalistic competencies and works in the interest of citizens and reputation of media among the general public;
5. Extend regional cooperation with parliaments and associations of journalists from other Western Balkan countries,
6. Support organization of the next Regional Conference on Improving the dialogue between parliaments and journalists' associations in Western Balkans where all countries from the region will be invited, thereby making this conference a traditional and regular annual event for all the countries and associations of journalists in the Western Balkans.

26. 11. 2021

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For the Parliament of Bosnia and Herzegovina - Mr. Lazar PRODANOVIC



For the Parliament of Montenegro - Mr. Aleksa BECIC



For the Parliament of North Macedonia - Mr. Talat XHAFERI



For the Parliament of Serbia - Mr. Radovan TVRDISIC



For the Association of Journalists of Macedonia - Mr. Mladen CADIKOVSKI



For the BH Journalist Association - Ms. Borka RUDIC



For the Independent Association of Journalist of Serbia - Mr. Zeljko BODROZIC



For the Trade Union of Media of Montenegro - Mr. Radomir KRACKOVIC

