



FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION AND MEDIA

*Freedom of expression is a fundamental right safeguarded by international law, including the European Convention on Human Rights. It belongs to the values on which the European Union is founded (Article 2, the Treaty on European Union). The respect of these values and commitment to promote them is the main criteria to assess the aspirations of a country to become a member of the Union (Article 49, *ibid.*). Thereafter freedom of expression is an intrinsic part of the Copenhagen political criteria for accession to the European Union.*

The **freedom of expression and media** is a fundamental human right that is indivisibly linked to democracy and its implementation is a precondition for exercising other rights and freedoms.

Unfortunately, numerous reports, be it domestic or international, make very clear that the freedom of expression and the media environment in the country remains a serious challenge. Intimidation of journalists and lack of appropriate reaction by the institutions, transparency in media financing, respect of professional and ethical standards, absence of pluralism of opinions, integrity of media regulator, independence of the Public Service Broadcaster, unaddressed hate speech... were issues that portray the media landscape in the country.

Substantial efforts and commitment by the stakeholders are needed in order to respond to the citizens' rights to objective and trustworthy access to information. Those efforts are supported by the European Union by offered **technical assistance and supply of equipment provided to the media regulator** (the Agency for audio and audio-visual media services). The EU-funded equipment, worth slightly over 800,000 EUR, enables the Agency to perform its supervision over the broadcasters in line with the national legislation. The equipment offers continuous 24-hour recordings of broadcasted programmes by all licensed radio and TV stations. In addition to the Agency's premises in Skopje, the equipment has been provided to the eight reception points throughout the country (Veles, Kumanovo, Stip, Strumica, Bitola, Ohrid, Debar and Tetovo). A series of trainings were organised for the professional team of the Agency for audio and audio-visual media services enabling them to exploit the full potential of the provided equipment.

Media associations received grants offering numerous trainings to journalists, lawyers, judges, prosecutors and civil society organisations (CSOs) by prominent domestic and international lecturers. EU-project are also preparing valuable analyses on the legal framework, quality of journalism, media literacy, funding models of national televisions and Public Service Broadcaster, transparency of state institutions, etc. serving as basis for further enhancement of the enabling environment for free and diverse media. Several web-platforms with valuable sources for journalists are also created. Production of documentaries, videos, as well as secondary school student's magazine Medium is just some of the outputs of EU-media reforms projects. Small scale sub-granting for media outlets and CSOs supported numerous investigative stories, disclosing issues of public interest.



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