

Societal dialogue on the state of democracy in Serbia needs to be launched

On the occasion of the release of the recent Freedom House “Nations in Transit” report in which Serbia found itself in the category of a “hybrid regime” instead of a democratic country for the first time in 17 years, we express serious concern for the state of democratic institutions in Serbia. We call on the Government of the Republic Serbia to take these assessments seriously and work hard towards ensuring the conditions for the improvement of democracy and media freedom in the country, and call on the European Union and its Member States to adequately recognise these issues as crucial in the process of European integration.

We remind that, for the past several years, Serbia has also been regressing when it comes to the indicators of media freedom such as World Press Freedom Index of the Reporters Without Borders, where it fell 39 places since 2014. Also, European Commission reports on Serbia in sections related to the state of democracy and media freedom are becoming increasingly harsh, pointing at the deterioration of democratic institutions and a concerning lack of progress in media freedom.

Having this in mind, we call on the Government of Republic of Serbia to take the assessments of Freedom House and other, domestic, foreign and international relevant organisations, including the European Commission, when it comes to the state of democracy and media freedom, as an alarm bell. We urge that, instead of attempts to rebut the reports on the level of methodology, selective representation of information from several reports and the already proverbial scorn of the assessments of the respected international organisations, including the European Commission, which largely coincide with the assessments of domestic civil society organisations, a serious societal dialogue on the state and the future of democracy in Serbia needs to be launched.

Civil society organisations will continue to carefully monitor the worrying trends in Serbia and inform the public so that the European integration process does not become a form devoid of substance, and that its credibility is preserved. We call on the European Union and its Member States to take the problem with the state of democracy and media freedom in the context of accession negotiations of Serbia seriously. Without democratic transformation and ensuring the rule of law and media freedom, membership in the European Union will not be possible. We call on the EU and its Member States to use the mechanisms announced in the new Methodology for improving the accession process of Western Balkan countries.

This statement is signed by think tanks and civil society organisations:

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Belgrade Centre for Security Policy (BCSP)
Belgrade Fund for Political Excellence (BFPE)
Centre for Contemporary Politics (CSP)
European Movement in Serbia (EMinS)
European Policy Centre (CEP)
International and Security Affairs Centre (ISAC)
Lawyers' Committee for Human Rights (YUCOM)