



## **Proposed changes to the RS Criminal Code warrant additional public debate and consideration**

As a strong advocate of the freedom of speech and the freedom of the media, that are essential to any democracy, the OHR reiterates that political and institutional leaders have a responsibility to foster an atmosphere conducive to independent and professional work of the media without fear and political pressure. Every society is and will always be measured against the status of the freedom of speech and the environment in which the media are working in.

Although countering disinformation and hate-speech is a worthy effort, the reintroduction of criminalization of defamation and insult should be carefully weighed against the risk of hampering dissent and democratic debate. Combating disinformation and hate-speech must not serve as a pretext for undue restriction of the freedom of opinion or expression; nor should it prevent critical debate or further limit the functioning of media and the civil sector that are important in any democratic society.

If provisions, as announced, are to be adopted, it would be a clear disregard of the democratic principles that every society needs to adhere to. Therefore, the OHR calls upon authorities of Republika Srpska to engage in a constructive and transparent public debate with all interested stakeholders included in this process and to resolve this issue without endangering the democratic capacity of the society.