Joint statement on recent moves regarding media freedom in BiH

Joint statement of OSCE Mission in BiH, OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media, EU Delegation in BiH/EU Special Representative in BiH and US Embassy in BiH

Recent activities in the Federation Parliament raise concerns regarding Bosnia and Herzegovina's commitment to both independence of the media and to the rule of law. In particular, efforts to replace the entire RTV FBIH (Radio Television of Federation of BiH) Steering Board at one stroke appear to contravene good governance principles and the law on RTV FBIH, and to weaken the independence of FTV. Since the European Union will evaluate Bosnia and Herzegovina's commitment to an independent media as part of the membership process and the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media constantly monitors BiH's adherence to media freedom commitments, today we jointly urge Federation officials to ensure that competent non-partisan professionals are appointed to the FTV board in accordance with existing laws. Likewise we urge journalists and media managers to do their part to uphold professional standards.

The state of media freedom in Bosnia and Herzegovina remains an important priority of the international community. We are disappointed to see the media sector, and in particular public broadcasters, used as a pretext for political positioning when much urgent practical and technical work in this sector remains to be done.

Solidifying the independence of the media begins with renewed focus on strengthening the independence of all of BiH's public broadcasting system and the Communications Regulatory Agency. As required by law, we urge institutions to follow through with harmonization of entity-level laws with law at the state level and with setting up the corporate structure for BiH's public broadcast system. Likewise, we encourage institutions to convincingly address the issue of digitalization so that BiH media can keep pace with media throughout the world.

Professional, independent and unbiased media institutions are one of the most important aspects of a thriving democratic society and represent a core value of our organizations. We urge adherence to these principles and note that we are closely monitoring all legal developments and appointment procedures regarding public media institutions. We therefore urge the authorities to consider carefully the legal reviews commissioned by the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media to assist BiH in establishing a media framework that allows for politically and financially independent public service broadcasters and a broadcast regulator. The EU will continue to measure Bosnia and Herzegovina's progress toward the EU in the context of the Copenhagen criteria, in particular how well the country follows rule of law principles and ensures professional, independent and unbiased media. The results of this analysis will be published in the next Progress Report. The OSCE will continue to follow developments via the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media to promote full compliance with OSCE media freedom commitments. The U.S. will continue to follow developments related to FTV and other media freedom issues, including in its annual Human Rights Report. The OHR will continue to follow developments in the sector in terms of their compliance with the Peace Agreement, and the steps taken to implement it.