



## **Joint Statement by the Ambassadors of the Peace Implementation Council Steering Board**

The Ambassadors of the Peace Implementation Council Steering Board (PIC SBA) express deep concern over the recent developments in Republika Srpska, which aim to shrink the civic space and reduce public debate.

The PIC SBA condemns the physical attacks against journalists and civil society on March 18 in Banja Luka and expects all in the RS, including the highest officials, to refrain from harmful and dangerous comments that contribute to a climate of fear for journalists and activists.

The re-criminalization of defamation and insult would give Republika Srpska authorities overly broad powers to criminalize or censor the freedom of expression of media, civil society, and citizens living in the Republika Srpska. The PIC SBA urges Republika Srpska authorities to stop any activities that silence independent voices among media and civil society and expects the withdrawal of the draft law from the agenda of the RS National Assembly.

The announced adoption of an RS law on NGOs would represent an additional step backward, stigmatizing independent voices in the RS and jeopardizing democratic processes.

The PIC SBA regrets the announcement by the RS authorities that they intend to unilaterally interrupt cooperation with the representatives of two PIC Steering Board members, a harmful move against the interests of citizens living in the RS. Members of the PIC Steering Board play a crucial role in implementing the civilian aspects of the Dayton Peace Agreement.