



## **Recriminalization of defamation is an attack on the rights of RS citizens**

Changes to the Criminal Code of Republika Srpska that recriminalize defamation represent an attack on civil liberties characteristic of authoritarian regimes. They serve to restrict freedom of speech and shrink the space for civic engagement as the cornerstones of a democratic society.

The recriminalization of defamation in Republika Srpska enables the authorities to suppress and censor media freedoms and civil society, curtail free critical thought, and silence dissenting voices. Even without the draconian sanctions, it paves the way for dubious criminal proceedings and the degradation of freedom and democracy at the expense of the residents of Republika Srpska.

These changes are also a step backward on the path towards EU membership, as it is not in line with the 14 key priorities outlined in the European Commission's opinion.

The OHR will closely follow this topic, with the strong conviction that, in a democratic society, citizens should be able to freely express their opinions even when those opinions collide with official government policy. It shall also stay in close cooperation with all international stakeholders regarding this issue.

The protection of the freedom of expression and freedom of opinion, as well as the unhindered freedom of the media to report on facts, are fundamental aspects of the BiH Constitution, and therefore the Dayton Peace Agreement.