



Outcome statement of the Second Regional Conference of the initiative:

“Strengthening Media Freedom in Bosnia and Herzegovina, North Macedonia and Serbia”.

Jahorina, 8 December 2023

We, the Netherlands Helsinki Committee and Free Press Unlimited, appreciate the vibrant participation of representatives of the journalist and judicial communities from Bosnia and Herzegovina, North Macedonia and Serbia in the second regional conference “Rising Above the Headlines: Protecting Press Freedom and Strengthening the Judiciary in the Western Balkans”;

Building upon previous years of cooperation, we express gratitude for the active partnership of the Bosnia and Herzegovina Journalists Association, the Association of Journalists of Macedonia, the Independent Journalists Association of Serbia, the Centre for Judicial and Prosecutorial Training of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Centre for Judicial and Prosecutorial Training of the Republika Srpska, the Academy for Judges and Public Prosecutors of the Republic of North Macedonia and the Judicial Academy of the Republic of Serbia ;

We welcome the spirit of open communication across the respective professions during this conference and are inspired by the commitment to human rights and freedom of expression as voiced by so many participants;

We remain committed to continue cooperating with all local stakeholders who are working towards strengthening media freedom and safety of journalists in the Western Balkans;

We stand in solidarity with their commitment to ensure that the path to EU membership is inextricably tied to the realisation of the rule of law and an end to impunity for all crimes against journalists;



We will work towards stronger collaboration with international actors in the region, such as the EU, the CoE, OSCE and UNESCO, in regard to strengthening mechanisms of prevention, protection and prosecution of crimes against journalists;

We recognize the importance of participants' engagement in monitoring and keeping track of attacks against journalists;

We welcome the creation of institutions dedicated to improving relations and building sustainable programs to safeguard media freedom;

We are committed to further building and strengthening the relationship between the judicial system and the journalists' community in regard to both existing and new challenges such as online safety of journalists and Strategic Litigations Against Public Participation (SLAPPs).

We look forward to supporting further dialogues between journalists and judicial professionals at the country levels, and to taking stock of progress at the third and final regional conference in the current phase of this initiative.