

#YOUTH TRAIL2021

Youth and Media in Focus

TIRANA MEDIA PLATFORM

This document was put forward in the context of 8th Annual South East Europe Media Conference – “Journalism in times of crisis”, by OSCE Presence in Albania’s Youth Trail¹ participants - eighteen young journalists from across Western Balkans, meeting in Tirana, between 10 and 14 October, 2021.

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We, young media professionals from Western Balkan countries, believe that there is no better time for committing ourselves to media freedom by engaging to improve the quality of media work and its framework conditions by tackling shared problems and striving to find joint solutions that concern our future in this profession. We are calling it the Tirana Media Platform.

Nowadays, journalism is going through multifaceted challenges affecting broad spectrum of media - from mainstream media, to citizen journalism and online portals. We believe these challenges need to be recognized and addressed head on, and we as young media professionals see ourselves as part of the solution.

We have jointly identified and named the following **challenges to be addressed through the Tirana Media Platform:**

- Media suffers from low ethical standards, also when reporting on gender-based violence and marginalized groups. There is limited self-regulation, underrepresentation of women journalists in decision-making, lack of transparency of its ownership and funding, political controls over free speech, and limited access to information on matters of public interest;

¹The 2021 “Youth and Media in Focus” Youth Trail Camp edition brought together promising young journalists from Western Balkan countries in Tirana around a concrete task: to enable young media professionals to work together on Tirana Media Platform on youth and media, tackling challenges and prospects of media work from a youth perspective.

- The low level of media literacy, the worrying exposure to fake news and disinformation amongst the general public and the limited options for capacity building and support for independent reporting and investigative journalism have greatly limited the extent to which media can effectively keep in check political and economic power;
- The limited possibilities for gatekeeping in social media have flung a door open to hate speech, sensational reporting, political propaganda, concerted disinformation campaigns serving to narrow interest, clickbait, intimidation and unchecked online abuse.
- The predominantly poor working conditions of journalists in the region, often including lack of job security, and lack of safety and protection, in particular for women journalists, while on duty undermine their capacities to deliver quality work and withstand external pressure.

In the light of the challenges listed above, we are bringing to the attention of the Western Balkan countries, their representative institutions, authorities, media partners, international organizations, journalists' communities and their organizations, the following recommendations:

- Media literacy and critical thinking should be covered in curricula starting as of elementary school;
- Fact checking services should be in place, and journalists should engage more in fact checking themselves;
- Journalist associations should join forces to actively tackle the spread of fake news and disinformation whilst ensuring self-regulation;
- Continuous professional learning and capacity building possibilities should be made available to journalists to tackle a wide spectrum of challenges;
- All media outlets should make their funding sources public and list information about ownership with regulatory bodies;
- There should be incentives and positive recognition in place for those media outlets engaging in self-regulation;
- All higher education institutions teaching journalism should include ethics in curricula;
- Independent journalist associations should be directly involved in the efforts to safeguard high ethical standards in media;
- Easier and timely access to information and unprocessed data of public interest should be made available at the request of journalists;
- Media outlets should step up efforts to manage abusive reader interaction on online media;

- Raise awareness among journalists about the risks arising from giving voice and space to promoters of hate speech and radicalization leading to violent extremism;
- A minimum level of transparency regarding online media should be ensured;
- Legal frameworks should tackle more effectively the protection of journalists, especially women and marginalized groups in journalism. This should include fast track prosecution for crimes against journalists and treating attacks on journalists on equal footing with attacks on public officials;
- Media outlets and journalists associations should condemn publicly and promptly attacks on journalists, especially women journalists, related to their work;
- Editorial boards and media management should include more women in decision-making;
- National labor codes should more effectively safeguard the rights of journalists including the right of journalist representatives to negotiate better working conditions.

We are fully aware of the complexity and efforts needed to deliver on the Tirana Media Platform. We believe there is a pressing need to continue working together to jointly follow-up to the implementation of our recommendations across the Western Balkan countries.

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