23 November 2021

Start of the online courses on "Freedom of Expression" and "Protection and Safety of Journalists" for judges and prosecutors in Serbia

The implementation of the tutored online courses on **"Freedom of Expression"** and **"Protection and Safety of Journalists"** for judges and prosecutors in Serbia has started on 23 November 2021.

The courses have been prepared in the framework of the joint European Union and Council of Europe's action on ***"Freedom of Expression and Freedom of the Media in South-East Europe (JUFREX)"*** and in co-operation with the Council of Europe's Human Rights Education for Legal Professionals (HELP) Programme.

In the context of an effective democracy and respect for human rights mentioned in the Preamble to the European Convention on Human Rights **freedom of expression is of utmost importance**. Without a broad guarantee of the right to freedom of expression protected by independent and impartial courts, there is no democracy. The European Court on Human Rights has repeatedly stated that freedom of expression "constitutes one of the essential foundations of a democratic society and one of the basic conditions for its progress and for each individual's self-fulfillment".

Yet, freedom of expression and the safety of journalists are facing **major challenges** in Europe today. In many countries, journalists and other media actors are facing **threats** such as censorship, political and economic pressure, intimidation, job insecurity, abusive use of defamation laws as well as physical attacks. These offences are often committed in an intolerable context of **impunity**, which fuels recidivism and has a chilling effect on media freedom. Another danger for journalists and their sources comes from surveillance laws passed in some states under exceptional circumstances and often by resorting to extraordinary legal procedures, which may also lead to self-censorship in the media community.

The online courses aim to support legal professionals, but also other relevant professionals in understanding the European standards concerning freedom of expression and protection of journalists. All relevant and relating topics covered within the courses are explored in practical way, by using presentations, interactive screens, knowledge tests and reflective exercises – hand in hand with discussing information on the domestic legislative and institutional framework and practices in Serbia.

The courses are implemented in co-operation with JUFREX action partner – the Judicial Academy of Republic of Serbia and used as a tool to supplement traditional materials used in legal education. The courses will be implemented even beyond the action's lifetime which will also ensure their long-term sustainability.

This activity was organised within the action on "Freedom of Expression and Freedom of the Media in Serbia (JUFREX)" and in co-operation with the HELP in the Western Balkans, both part of the joint EU and Council of Europe programme "Horizontal Facility for the Western Balkans and Turkey 2019-2022".