

Highlights 12

January - March 2026



Understanding hate, building stronger foundations for our communities

After months of online attacks, Aleksandra from Montenegro began to self-censor. She withdrew from advocating for her community and even for her own rights. Every post, comment and debate had become a battlefield, and the cost of speaking out had grown unbearable. This is one of the silent consequences of hate speech - people gradually disappear from public space, with lasting effects that often extend into their private lives. Her story is one of many captured in the recently presented “Mapping Hate Speech Report” in Montenegro, an event attended by President of Montenegro Jakov Milatović, alongside representatives of institutions, civil society and international partners.

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STRENGTHENING JUSTICE



Applying European Court standards on liberty in Albania

Legal advisers of the Constitutional Court of Albania took an important step toward

ensuring more consistent protection of the right to liberty and security. They enhanced their knowledge on the application of the European Court of Human Rights' case law and standards under Article 5 of the European Convention on Human Rights at the domestic level. The capacity building session helped participants better identify relevant European Convention principles and use the European Court's reasoning in their own decisions, in the efforts to strengthen the protection of individual rights in Albania, in line with European standards.

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Montenegro adopts Victims' Rights Strategy

The Government of Montenegro has adopted the Victims' Rights Strategy and Action Plan, marking a significant milestone as the country's first

comprehensive strategy that provides an overall framework for the protection of all victims of crime. The Strategy establishes a systematic and long-term approach to improving protection and support for victims. Through co-ordinated measures across institutions, it aims to ensure that victims' needs are recognised and addressed in a timely, effective, and rights-based manner.



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ADVANCING HUMAN RIGHTS



Improving the treatment of prisoners with mental health disorders in Albania, in line with European standards

The EU and the Council of Europe are assisting the Albanian prison service to establish a structured and standardised practice to support prisoners with mental health disorders upon admission, in line with the recommendations of the European Committee for the Prevention of Torture. As part of efforts to expand this practice in more prisons across Albania, 25 representatives from 3 prisons and 2 pre-trial detention facilities, gathered to build their skills in working with inmates affected by mental health disorders.

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North Macedonia initiates pioneering telemedicine in penitentiary healthcare

At the request of North Macedonia's Ministry of Health, the Council of Europe completed for the first time an assessment mission on introducing telemedicine in penitentiary healthcare. The findings of the assessment report supported by the European Union and Council of Europe, were discussed with the public stakeholders in a roundtable in Skopje, including officials from the Ministry of Health and its e-Health Department, the Directorate for Execution of Sanctions, the Agency for Personal Data Protection, as well as the health centres in Skopje and Shtip.

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FIGHTING ECONOMIC CRIME & CORRUPTION



Authorities expand knowledge on asset declaration systems for public officials

Türkiye is improving its supervision of public officials' financial declarations through a workshop focusing on comparative regulatory, policy and institutional arrangements for financial disclosure systems for public officials and the verification of data. The workshop provided a comparative overview of the regulatory, policy and institutional frameworks.

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Supporting digitalisation of gift registration for public officials in North Macedonia

The Act of Acceptance for the Gift Registry Platform was signed today at the premises of the Council of Europe Programme Office in Skopje by Oleg Soldatov, Head of the Programme Office, and Adem Cucul, President of the State Commission for the Prevention of Corruption.

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PROMOTING DIVERSITY AND EQUALITY



Young voices reveal the unequal impact of environmental challenges

“For me, the most important insight was realising that environmental problems are not ‘neutral’, but that they affect certain groups of people much more strongly.” This reflection, shared by Vasilije Keranović from the Panel of Young Advisors to the Protector of Citizens, after working with students on a Council of Europe survey, captures one of the key messages emerging from the new Special Report on Youth and Environmental Rights. Presented in Belgrade, the report sheds light on how young people in Serbia increasingly understand environmental degradation as an issue closely linked to inequality, discrimination and access to rights.

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Young European Ambassadors build bridges against



Inclusion takes centre stage across Bosnia and Herzegovina

discrimination in Venice

As many as 25 Young European Ambassadors from the Western Balkans and Eastern Partnership regions gathered in Venice for the "Closing resident capacity-building for the No-Hate Young European Ambassadors". The three-day event focused on strengthening their skills in promoting inclusive and positive narratives in their communities.

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From 22 to 28 January, thousands of cinema-goers across Bosnia and Herzegovina were greeted with a simple yet powerful message before their films at CineStar cinemas: "Our diversity makes us stronger." This awareness-raising initiative by the EU and Council of Europe offered viewers a moment of reflection, showing that even a few seconds on the big screen can spark dialogue, empathy, and a deeper appreciation of diversity.

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From awareness to action: Reinforcing anti-discrimination policing in Albania

As many as 426 students from all three academic years of the Police Academy of Tirana strengthened their capacities to address hate crimes. This is one of the key results of this year's Anti-Discrimination Week, organised every February by the Commissioner for Protection against Discrimination, with the support of the European Union and Council of Europe joint action on Advancing the Protection from Discrimination in Albania.



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EDUCATION FOR ALL



When inclusion becomes part of everyday university life

When a student feels they truly belong, learning becomes more than lectures and exams, it becomes an opportunity to grow

contribute and thrive. At the University of Donja Gorica (UDG) in Montenegro, this idea is shaping how students with disabilities experience higher education, turning inclusion from a principle into everyday practice. For Prof. Dr. Maja Drakić-Grgur, inclusive education is not an abstract concept but a defining feature of a modern university. “University is not only a place where knowledge is transferred, but also a community where values of openness, mutual respect and equal opportunities are developed,” she explains.

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New postgraduate syllabus promotes democratic culture through intercultural education



A new syllabus for a Masters-level postgraduate module entitled “Developing Competences for Democratic Culture - Culture, Identity and Intercultural learning” has been published offering teacher education institutions a practical resource to strengthen democratic and inclusive education. Developed within the “Quality Education for All” action, the syllabus places intercultural learning at the heart of democratic education.

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FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION AND MEDIA



Albanian and Serbian journalists strengthen trauma-informed and gender-sensitive journalism

Media actors and professionals, conveyed in a workshop in Bogë/Boga on trauma-informed journalism, with a focus on gender and online threats and harassment. Journalists from Albanian and Serbian communities had the opportunity to strengthen their professional skills for reporting in high-pressure environments, while addressing the safety and wellbeing of media professionals

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NEW PUBLICATIONS

Get to know the most recent publications under the Horizontal Facility programme

In this edition of Highlights, we present the main publications produced under the framework of the Horizontal Facility III programme with an aim to enhance knowledge and bring European standards in various areas closer to the beneficiaries in the Western Balkans and in Türkiye.



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