

Highlights 7 October - December 2024

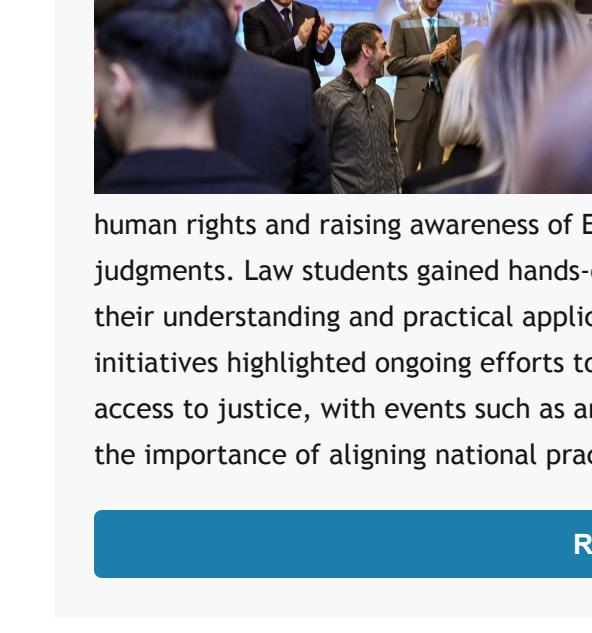


Horizontal Facility achievements and future success - after two years of implementation, partners and beneficiaries discuss key milestones

The EU and Council of Europe's Horizontal Facility programme is crucial in supporting reforms in the Western Balkans and Türkiye, notably in aligning such reforms with European standards in the areas of human rights, rule of law, and democracy. The Beneficiary Steering Committee meetings are a cornerstone of the programme, that provide a platform for direct dialogue, evaluation, and co-ordination among key stakeholders. The 2nd Beneficiary Steering Committee meetings were concluded in Tirana, Belgrade, Pristina, Sarajevo, Podgorica, Skopje and Ankara ensuring that reform priorities are aligned, progress is monitored, and challenges are addressed collaboratively.

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STRENGTHENING JUSTICE



CEPPEJ workshop to improve the efficiency of the civil justice system in Kosovo*

A workshop brought together members of the Kosovo Judicial Council (KJC), along with presidents of the Basic Courts, the Court of Appeals and the Supreme Court. The aim of the workshop was to explore approaches to simplify civil procedures and reduce case processing times in line with the priorities established in the mid-term review of the "Strategic Plan of Rule of Law, 2021-2026". On the basis of European best practices presented by CEPPEJ experts for managing the backlog of civil cases, participants had the opportunity to consider possible improvements in court organisation, early case management techniques, the use of electronic decision-making tools and templates

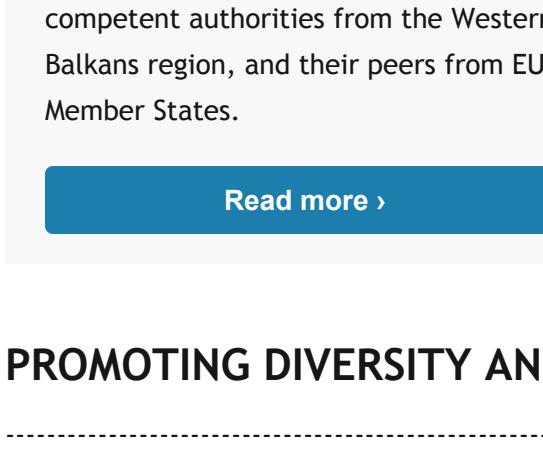
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Strengthening justice transparency in Montenegro

Transparency in the judiciary is not just a principle, it is a fundamental requirement for a functioning democracy - this was the key message voiced at the workshops for courts and prosecution officers dedicated to the development of action plans for the implementation of judicial communication strategies in 2025. These workshops enabled heads of prosecution offices, courts presidents, press judges and press prosecutors to discuss the challenges and effects of action plans in 2024, while outlining a set of priorities and measures for 2025, focusing on media outreach, and community engagement and education to ensure that citizens receive quality information about the work of the judiciary.

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Improving legal access and human rights awareness in the Western Balkans

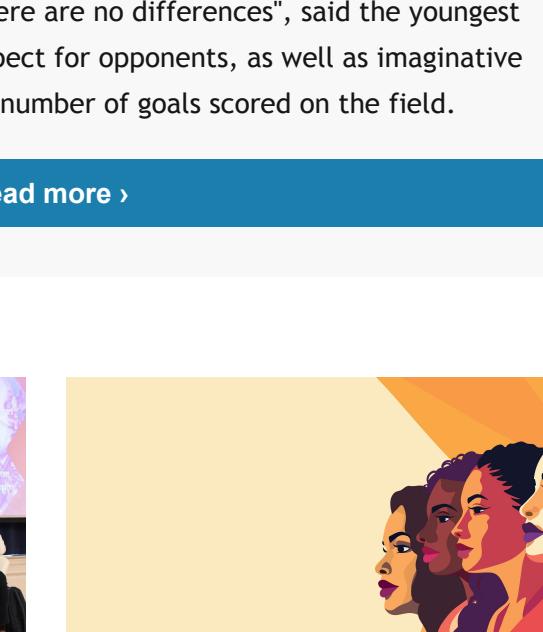
Notable progress was made in promoting human rights and raising awareness of European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) judgments. Law students gained hands-on experience through internships, enhancing their understanding and practical application of legal principles. Awareness-raising initiatives highlighted ongoing efforts to promote property rights and ensure equal access to justice, with events such as art exhibitions and panel discussions emphasising the importance of aligning national practices with European standards.

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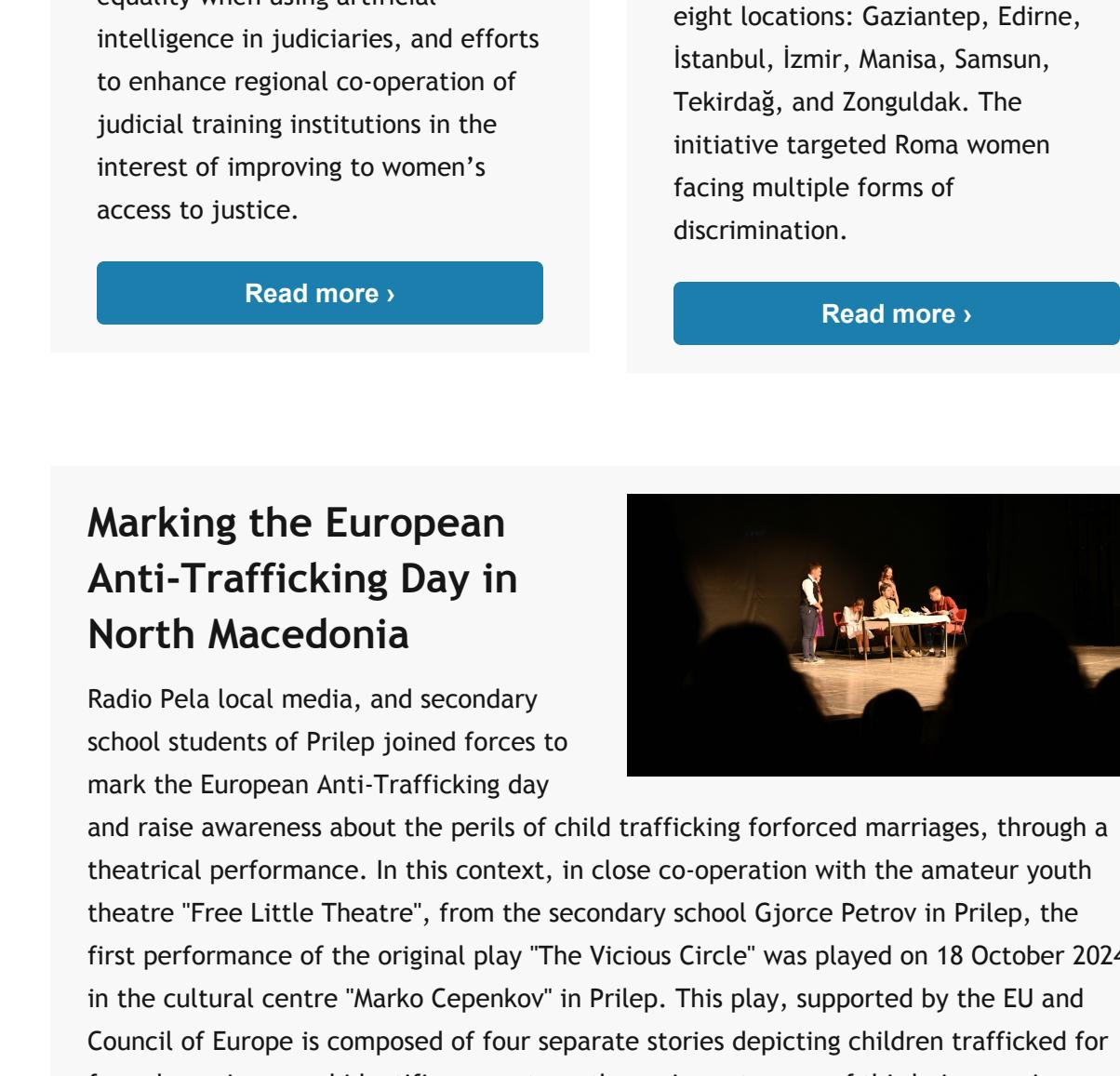
Aligning prison and forensic practices in line with European standards

Recent efforts across the Western Balkans have focused on improving the treatment of individuals within the justice system, particularly those involved in forensic and prison settings. Our initiatives are aimed at aligning domestic practices with European standards in the field, ensuring better conditions for sentenced persons, forensic patients, and those under detention. These actions emphasise the importance of professional development and the integration of European prison rules to enhance the management of correctional facilities.

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FIGHTING ECONOMIC CRIME & CORRUPTION



Countering emerging crime risks linked to innovative technology in financial services in the Western Balkans

In an effort to facilitate and assist the exchange of information at the regional level on managing money laundering and terrorist financing risks associated with innovative technologies in financial services, a regional workshop was organised in Strasbourg with the support of the EU and Council of Europe. The event brought together the anti-money laundering supervisors and other competent authorities from the Western Balkans region, and their peers from EU Member States.

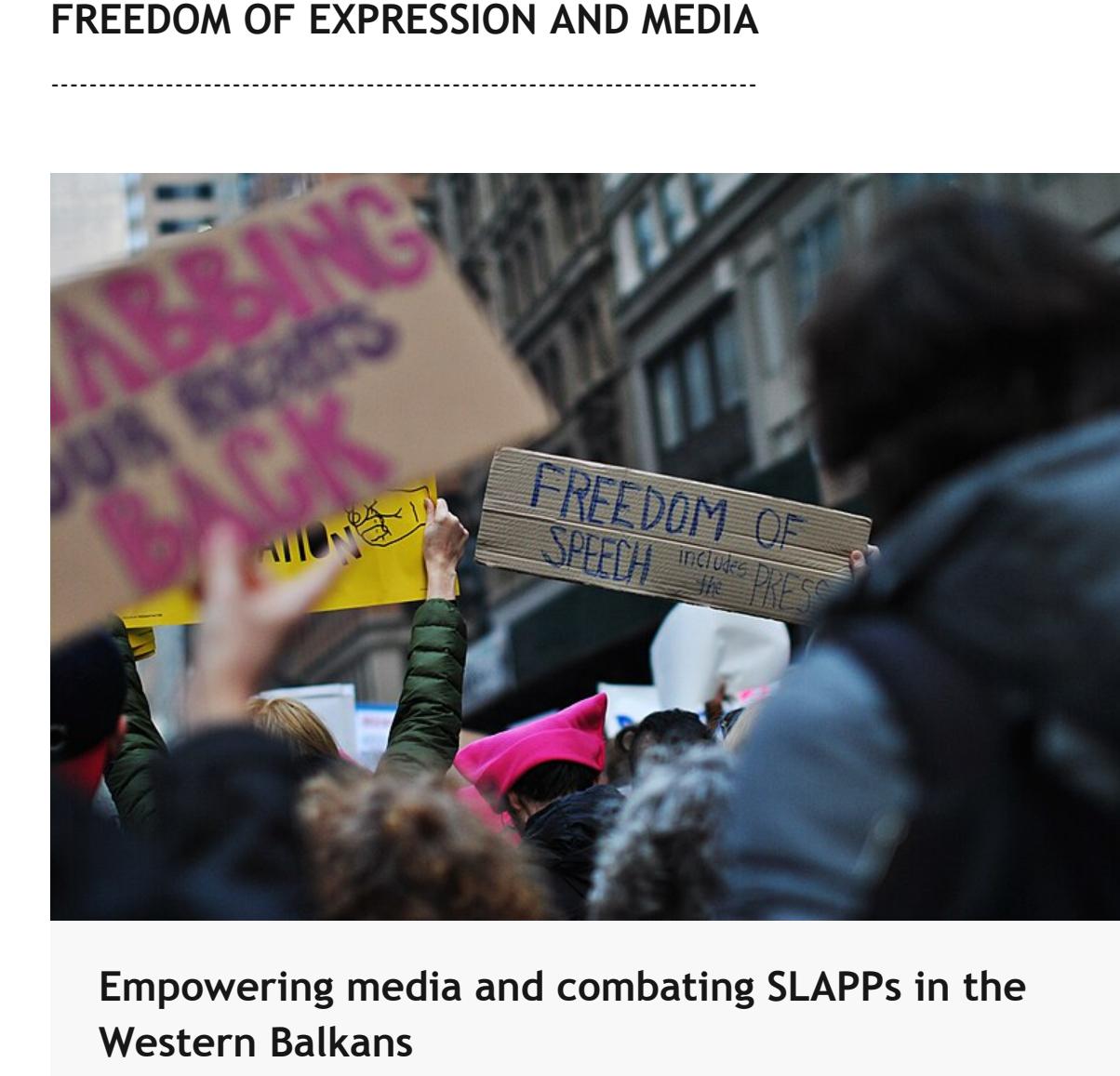
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Egmont Group Strategic Analysis course for Financial Crimes Investigation Board

Twenty-five representatives from Turkey's Financial Crimes Investigation Board (MASAK) have been equipped with advanced skills to strengthen efforts against money laundering and terrorism financing, following a four-day "Egmont Group Strategic Analysis Course" organised by the Council of Europe in Ankara. Delivered by certified trainers, the course aimed to further support the Financial Intelligence Unit of Turkey (FIU) professionals with the essential skills to produce high-quality strategic analysis reports and products.

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PROMOTING DIVERSITY AND EQUALITY



Creating a society of tolerance and inclusion through sports: "Football against discrimination and hate speech"

Fair play starts on the pitch and lasts a lifetime. This is the overall conclusion of the tournament within the project of the Canton Sarajevo Football Association "Football against discrimination and hate speech" that took place at the Sport Centre "Sobol" in Hotonj, which was held on November 16 on International Day for Tolerance, along with a workshop dedicated to tolerance. "There are no differences", said the youngest player at the competition, in which respect for opponents, as well as imaginative messages, was valued, and not just the number of goals scored on the field.

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Promoting gender equality and women's access to justice

Judges, prosecutors and representatives from judicial training institutions across the Eastern Partnership region and Western Balkans met in Tirana, to assess the results of the mentoring programme for legal professionals on women's access to justice.

A series of thematic exchanges were held on technology-facilitated violence against women,

opportunities and risks for gender equality when using artificial intelligence in judiciaries, and efforts to enhance regional co-operation of judicial training institutions in the interest of improving to women's access to justice.

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Empowering Roma women to claim their rights in Türkiye

As many as 130 Roma women across Türkiye have gained the tools and confidence to claim their rights and access essential support services

thanks to a series of trainings held from 6-29 November. These sessions, designed to remove barriers to justice and build trust in the legal system, were organised in co-operation with bar associations and municipalities. They took place in eight locations: Gaziantepe, Edirne, İstanbul, İzmir, Manisa, Samsun, Tekirdağ, and Zonguldak. The initiative targeted Roma women facing multiple forms of discrimination.

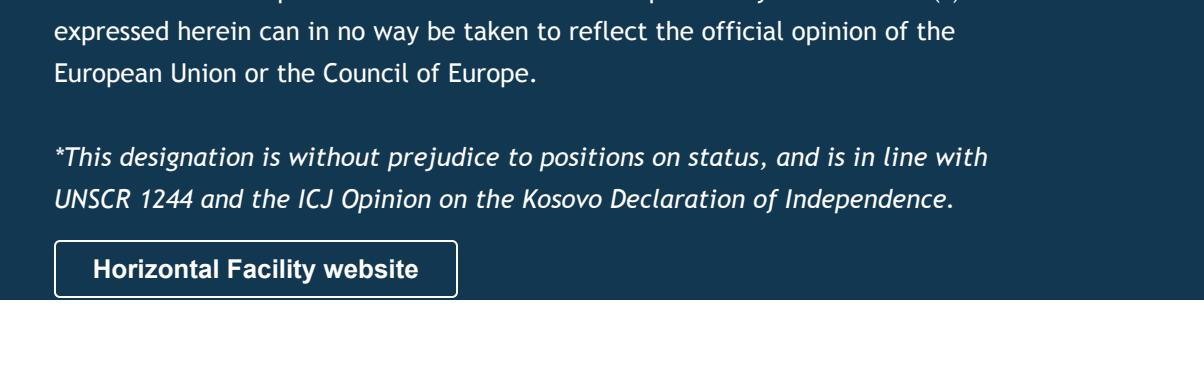
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Marking the European Anti-Trafficking Day in North Macedonia

Radio Pela local media, and secondary school students of Prilep joined forces to mark the European Anti-Trafficking day

and raise awareness about the perils of child trafficking forced marriages, through a theatrical performance. In this context, in close co-operation with the amateur youth theatre "Free Little Theatre", from the secondary school Gjorce Petrov in Prilep, the first performance of the original play "The Vicious Circle" was played on 18 October 2024 in the cultural centre "Marko Cepenov" in Prilep. This play, supported by the EU and Council of Europe is composed of four separate stories depicting children trafficked for forced marriages and identifies poverty as the main root cause of this heinous crime.

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Montenegro's youth drive change with award-winning inclusive tech solutions

In a bid to make schools more inclusive and understanding, high school students from across Montenegro gathered for the "Equal Hack: Code for Equality" hackathon, developing tech-driven solutions to promote equality and respect. Maša Radulović, whose team from Niški clinched first place, aimed to break barriers, and create an inclusive environment for every student. The application is tailored for certain groups of children with disabilities.

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Two new resource centres for democratic school culture opened in Bosnia and Herzegovina

Two more schools in Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Fourth elementary school in Brčko and the Vocational High School in Čelić have officially become resource centres for democratic school culture.

They have become part of a transformative initiative aimed at fostering democratic values and promoting inclusive education. Through this collaboration, the schools developed action plans that engaged students in co-creating and leading various initiatives in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

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FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION AND MEDIA

Empowering media and combating SLAPPs in the Western Balkans

Important interventions were focused on strengthening the protection of journalists, activists, and the media in the Western Balkans, with a primary focus on combating Strategic Lawsuits Against Public Participation (SLAPPs) but also on advancing the role of the media in addressing key social issues. Through collaborative efforts involving legal experts, civil society, and media professionals, these initiatives aim to enhance press freedom, promote public advocacy, and ensure that individuals and organisations can speak out without fear of legal retaliation. Additionally, the media's role in addressing gender-based violence and other societal concerns is being emphasized, fostering an environment where journalism can thrive and contribute to the region's democratic development.

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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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*This designation is without prejudice to positions on status, and is in line with UNSCR 1244 and the ICJ Opinion on the Kosovo Declaration of Independence.

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