

Background Paper: The state of democracy and rule of law in the WB6

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Introduction

In terms of the state of democracy in the Western Balkans, the past years have been marked by either stagnation or fluctuation. According to the Freedom House's global freedom index, the countries are labelled as "partly free" and as "transitional" or "hybrid" regimes according to the democracy index.¹ While there have been some partial improvements in democratic

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standards, causes for concern remain – regarding both the quantity and quality of reforms, and although some are successfully implemented, the existing institutions constantly fail to address mounting social issues. Power often becomes personified, from the municipal level to the highest governing

bodies, and measures empowering the population to participate as an emancipatory actor in the democratization process, dwindles across the region. As the Western Balkan societies are discouraged from participating in the building of their democracies and democratic institutions, civil society and media are also often excluded from the public debate. Paradoxically, although the EU enlargement policy is still the most effective instrument of democratization in these countries, the erosion of democratic ideals and emergence of illiberal and authoritarian models hinders, or at least prolongs the accession process itself. Furthermore, the initiatives which are supposed to promote European integration of the Western Balkans and regional cooperation, at times serve as platforms for exchange of bad practices, with autocratic elites supporting and even learning from each other along the way. Therefore, while these parameters differ from state to state, distinct patterns of democratization emerge as well.

Elections and political pluralism

The WB6 countries have a record of formally competitive elections while maintaining a highly polarized political landscape. There is a tendency to personify positions of power from the municipal to

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¹ According to the Freedom House's 2021 report, combining the political rights and civil liberties scores, Bosnia and Herzegovina has the lowest cumulative score of 53, Kosovo 56, Serbia 62, and Albania, Montenegro and North Macedonia 67. For more details please refer to <https://freedomhouse.org/>

the national level, which are then harder to dissociate from one another. Despite pointing out irregularities, the election monitors usually report rather orderly elections and governance strategies coupled with political pluralism. The opposition, while often marginalized by the monopolization of the institutions and the media by the ruling interest groups, is increasingly vocal and able to exert a limited amount of criticism. This is an especially relevant shift on the local level of governance, where if the opposition won elections, provides a strong and functional counterbalance in the municipal councils. However, the reports also point out overarching inconsistencies such as biased media coverage, clientelism, wiretapping, voter participation tracking, vote buying, voter threatening, and the practice of 'secure votes' in the case of citizens employed in the public sector.

The electoral process and legitimacy of elections have been in the spotlight mostly in Serbia, especially with the parliamentary elections in 2020 boycotted by most of the opposition parties due to the uneven competition. Amidst a wide variety of electoral problems, the Serbian parliament introduced amendments in February 2020, which reduced the threshold to win seats from 5% to 3%, in an attempt to boost the legitimacy of the election result through small and marginal political parties, and introduced a 40% gender quota for party lists.² Nevertheless, due to the opposition boycott, the turnout was only 48.9%, which in 2020 was the lowest since the introduction of multiparty elections in 1990.³ Although the ruling SNS won with more than 60% of the votes, the contested nature of the campaign and the election process during the pandemic sparked mass demonstrations resulting in police violence against protesters, journalists and observers.

In 2021, members of the European Parliament mediated several rounds of inter-party dialogue. The mediation resulted in the proposal of 16 measures intended to address existing deficits in political competition and increase confidence in the electoral process.⁴ In the latest elections in April 2022, SNS secured again the majority with around 60% of the votes but has not formed

² Zorana Dimitrijević. Gender-balanced Serbian government: Step towards gender equality or just a PR move? <https://europeanwesternbalkans.com/2020/11/19/gender-balanced-serbian-government-step-towards-gender-equality-or-just-a-pr-move/>

³ CRTA. Izlaznost na izborima između 48 i 49 odsto. <https://www.slobodnaevropa.org/a/30683012.html>

⁴ EWB. Inter-Party Dialogue in Serbia produces 16 measures, negative reaction of the opposition. <https://europeanwesternbalkans.com/2021/09/20/inter-party-dialogue-in-serbia-produces-16-measures-negative-reaction-of-the-opposition/>

the government yet, making it a new record in Serbia's politics.⁵ Although Ana Brnabić was confirmed as a 'technical' or 'mandated' prime minister several months ago, Serbia has been governed rather informally in the past six months.⁶

However, the persisting uneven playing field benefiting the ruling parties is not a problem only in Serbia. After decades of disputes over electoral reform and unsatisfactory changes to the electoral code, the disputes over the electoral reform remain, marked by former President Ilir Meta controversially cancelling the 2019 local elections, without consultation with other actors or announcing a new date.⁷ In the latest reform, the Albanian parliament established a Political Council in 2020. Conceived as an inter-party body of the three largest political parties, its purpose is to establish a plan to assess electoral reforms recommended by the OSCE.⁸

As with many other issues, elections in Bosnia and Herzegovina are set in the context of the ethnic division of the three constitutive nations and their leading parties. Nevertheless, as much as it secures a balance in political participation, it also hinders it, because it excludes everyone who does not identify with either group. Aside from ethnic groups, such as Roma or Jews or citizens who identify as Bosnians or Yugoslavs, a large variety of minorities cannot run for office. This way, approximately 400,000 citizens, making up 12% of the population, cannot run for public office because of their religion, ethnicity, or where they live.⁹

As pointed out in European and international institutions reports, this discriminatory practice will have to be addressed through constitutional reform in the upcoming years, presenting also the main condition for the country's way to the candidate status for EU membership. Some causes for optimism can be found on the local level. In the 2020 municipal elections, opposition parties won decisively in Sarajevo, Banja Luka, Tomislavgrad, and other municipalities, where

⁵ Nikola Kojić. Ponovo ušli u istoriju: Vučić i Brnabić oborili još jedan rekord.

<https://rs.n1info.com/vesti/ponovo-usli-u-istoriju-vucic-i-brnabic-oborili-jos-jedan-rekord/>

⁶ L.V. Tehnička premijerka sve češće priča o zadacima nove vlade: Da li se Ana Brnabić nudi za novi mandat?

<https://www.danas.rs/vesti/politika/tehnicka-premierka-sve-cesce-prica-o-zadacima-nove-vlade-da-li-se-ana-brnabic-nudi-za-novi-mandat/>

⁷ BTI Transformation Index – Albania Country Report 2022. <https://bti-project.org/en/reports/country-report/ALB>

⁸ Gjergj Erebara. Albania Parties Agree to End Electoral Reform Dispute.

<https://balkaninsight.com/2020/01/14/albania-parties-agree-to-end-political-impasse-over-electoral-reform/>

⁹ Human Rights Watch. Bosnia and Herzegovina: Ethnic Discrimination a Key Barrier

Put Constitutional Reform Back on the Agenda. <https://www.hrw.org/news/2019/12/12/bosnia-and-herzegovina-ethnic-discrimination-key-barrier>

multi-ethnic strategies succeeded to outmanoeuvre the nationalistic rhetoric of the dominant parties.¹⁰

The problem of minorities' involvement in the electoral process remains an issue also in Kosovo where the Serb minority is still not fully politically and institutionally integrated. A serious and ongoing issue is the sabotage and misconduct by the Serb List, the dominant Serb party in Kosovo, which is threatening both rival parties and voters to participate in public life.¹¹ Acknowledging these and other shortcomings, the Kosovo Assembly adopted the second phase of the European Reform Agenda (ERA 2) and its Action Plan in October 2021, including provisions for several electoral reforms.¹²

¹⁰ Srecko Latal. Opposition Takes Key Cities in Bosnia's Local Elections.

<https://balkaninsight.com/2020/11/16/opposition-take-key-cities-in-bosnia-local-elections/>

¹¹ KoSsev. Srpska lista: Zna se zbog koga smo glasali za Osmani i tad nismo bili kriminalci

<https://rs.n1info.com/vesti/srpska-lista-zna-se-zbog-koga-smo-glasali-za-osmani-i-tad-nismo-bili-kriminalci/>

¹² European Commission. Kosovo Report 2021. https://neighbourhood-enlargement.ec.europa.eu/kosovo-report-2021_en

Civil society, media and fundamental rights

There is a wide variety of registered CSOs and NGOs in the Western Balkans, suggesting a high level of associational and organizational rights, and freedom of expression and belief. Nevertheless, due to a reliance on foreign funding on one side and the obstruction of their work by governmental and business actors or their informal proxy groups on the other, the agency and impact of civil society is rather limited. These movements and organizations usually operate on a voluntary basis and struggle with insufficient and irregular funding, unable to reach higher levels of government. In some cases, the CSOs face pressure, intimidation and harassment from the governments and their auxiliary interest groups from the business sector. Like independent journalists, they also have to put up with smear campaigns in the media and even lawsuits in some cases.¹³

A further problem, also prevalent in WB6 countries is the emergence of government-organized non-governmental organizations (GONGO), enabling a parallel civil society, which undermines the role of civil society in democratization and European integration, furthers the interests of the governments and their proxies and confuses the participants of public debates on key issues.

The Pride march still sparks, however, counter-protests and vivid demonstrations of opposing values in Western Balkan capitals.

¹⁴ Serving as a democratic façade and legitimizing the ruling parties, their overwhelming presence in the mainstream media usually marginalizes critical voices. On an overall scale nevertheless, all categories of civil society, including legal environment,

¹³ Kristina Amerhauser – Walter Kemp. Stronger Together – Bolstering Resilience among civil society in the Western Balkans. <https://globalinitiative.net/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/WBalkans-CSOs-web.pdf>

¹⁴ Filip Lukić. GONGOs: A serious obstacle to public debate on EU integration in Serbia. <https://europeanwesternbalkans.com/2019/10/16/gongos-a-serious-obstacle-to-public-debate-on-eu-integration-in-serbia/>

organizational capacity, financial viability and advocacy are sustainably evolving in the WB6.¹⁵ Although most ethnic minorities enjoy relatively uncontested public visibility throughout the WB6, with the possible exceptions of Bosnia and Herzegovina¹⁶ and Kosovo¹⁷, the rights of the LGBTQ+ community are considerably less acknowledged. The Pride parade, and in particular the 2022 Europride Parade in Belgrade, are in the limelight of progressive and conservative elites every year. Although refraining from the organization of the parade during the pandemic, all capitals of the WB6 returned to the practice in 2022. The Pride march still sparks, however, counter-protests and vivid demonstrations of opposing values in Western Balkan capitals¹⁸. In Belgrade, the Euro Pride march was suspended but eventually organized in reaction to international pressure, despite protests.¹⁹ Reports usually highlight, that despite existing strategies and action plans, recognition of rights for this community largely stagnates,²⁰ gaining some negative attention also from the European Parliament.²¹

The Western Balkans have made little tangible progress also in terms of media freedoms. Ranging from informal interference of a wide variety of governmental, business and organized crime actors, to formal subsidies and granting national frequencies to favourable outlets, the evolution of a balanced media market is constantly hindered. Journalists in the WB6 countries are often threatened both verbally and physically, while court proceedings against the offenders are usually slow and mild.²² Nevertheless, there

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¹⁵ 2020 Civil Society Organization Sustainability Index.

<https://www.fhi360.org/sites/default/files/media/documents/csosi-europe-eurasia-2020-report.pdf>

¹⁶ Ibid. <https://www.hrw.org/news/2019/12/12/bosnia-and-herzegovina-ethnic-discrimination-key-barrier>

¹⁷ Xhorxhina Bami – Jakob Weizman. How Multi-ethnic is Kosovo? <https://balkaninsight.com/2020/04/07/birn-fact-check-how-multi-ethnic-is-kosovo/>

¹⁸ For the latest Pride parades in the WB6 please refer to: <https://balkaninsight.com/2021/10/15/montenegrin-pride-organizers-want-same-sex-law-fully-implemented/>, <https://balkaninsight.com/2021/07/01/kosovo-pride-parade-hears-calls-for-freedom-equality/>, <https://balkaninsight.com/2021/08/14/sarajevos-pride-parade-calls-for-more-rights-for-lgbt-community/>, <https://balkaninsight.com/2021/06/26/pride-parade-livens-up-north-macedonias-capital/>

¹⁹ EWB. Belgrade Pride: Serbia will respects the rights of all citizens.

<https://europeanwesternbalkans.com/2017/09/17/belgrade-pride-serbia-will-respects-rights-citizens/>

²⁰ Annual Report of the human rights situation of lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans and intersex people in Europe and Central Asia. 2022. <https://rainbow-europe.org/sites/default/files/annual-report/Annual-Review-Full-2022.pdf>

²¹ EWB. MEPs to Serbian Govt: EuroPride not held in line with Serbia's obligations.

<https://rs.n1info.com/english/news/meps-to-serbian-govt-europride-not-held-in-line-with-serbias-obligations/>

²² For individual countries please refer to: <https://www.evropaelire.org/a/31122629.html>

is an uneven development in the media freedoms of the region, where some scored higher and some lower compared to the previous years.²³ According to the Reporters Without Borders' 2022 World Press Freedom Index Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina dropped significantly, and Montenegro, North Macedonia, Kosovo and Serbia rose in overall scoring.²⁴

In Albania, the majority of the media landscape is owned by eight people.²⁵ Accordingly, the lobby for their interest in the governmental bodies and their manufacturing of public opinion in the wider population is considerable. The concentration and limitation of media diversity is notable also in Serbia. The Serbian agency for the assignment of national frequencies aside from RTS awarded the same four²⁶ television stations with a national reach, all of which are – formally or informally – closely associated with the government, making stations potentially critical to the government marginalized.

On the other side of the spectrum stands North Macedonia with its highly saturated but also ethnically fragmented media landscape. Its media market is one of the most complex ones in the region, along with Bosnia and Herzegovina. Nevertheless, this multitude does neither vouch for a diversity of opinion, nor does it provide a high social or secure financial status for journalists.²⁷ Comparatively, 48% of the population disagrees that the media are independent of political influence and 68% agree that the media are affected by corruption, according to the 2021 Balkan Barometer survey.²⁸

In Bosnia and Herzegovina, the oversaturated and ethno-politically polarised media market still presents a challenge to media freedom. The media landscape is plagued by the near absence of independent media and representation of ethno-political elites' interests on all three sides.²⁹

<https://www.slavkocuruvijafondacija.rs/analiza-scf-veci-broj-mehanizama-zastite-nije-poboljsao-nivo-bezbednosti-novinara/>

<https://www.osce.org/representative-on-freedom-of-media/516234>

²³ Reporters Without Borders. <https://rsf.org/en/index>

²⁴ BIRN. Media Freedom Remains Major Concern in Balkans, Watchdog Says.

<https://balkaninsight.com/2022/05/03/media-freedom-remains-major-concern-in-balkans-watchdog-says/>

²⁵ Media Ownership Monitor – Albania. <http://www.mom-gmr.org/en/countries/albania/>

²⁶ Pink, Happy, Prva, B92

²⁷ Snezana Trpevska - Igor Micevski. Monitoring media pluralism in the digital world. Country report: The Republic of North Macedonia. 2021.

https://cadmus.eui.eu/bitstream/handle/1814/71968/the_republic_of_north_macedonia_results_mpm_2021_cmpf.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y

²⁸ Balkan Business Barometer. <https://www.rcc.int/balkanbarometer/results/1/business>

²⁹ Vedran Ševčuk. Savjet za štampu: BiH nazaduje u pogledu slobode medija.

<https://mondo.ba/Info/Drustvo/a1129868/Sloboda-medija-u-BiH.html>

Exceptions are the professionalized media outlets, such as Al Jazeera Balkans or N1, which in turn often suffer obstructions and violence from the elites of all three constitutive nations.³⁰ There have been, however, also some positive examples. Preceded by pressures from CSOs, the parliament of **Montenegro** adopted changes to the criminal code, enabling better protection for journalists and introducing more severe sanctions if the perpetrator is a public official.³¹ The latest European Commission report notes that the RTCG, the national broadcaster in Montenegro, began featuring more politically diverse content following the appointment of a new public broadcaster council.³² Nevertheless, it also highlighted that a transition from “state television” to “public broadcaster” is still awaited. Despite the common threats and attacks on journalists in Serbia, a positive step is the decision of the working group for the protection and safety of journalists to launch an app and website “Safe journalists”.³³

Rule of Law and Corruption

In the area of rule of law, despite some legislative and technical progress, the situation remains problematic across the Western Balkans. Reports of international actors typically describe the changes as either moderately satisfying or conclude that only limited progress has been made.³⁴ The EU’s support to the rule of law related reforms thus produces ambivalent and insufficient results. The European Court of Auditors published a special report ‘EU support for the rule of law in the Western Balkans’ where they identify the lack of domestic political

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³⁰ <https://ba.n1info.com/vijesti/sloboda-medija-u-bih-n1-jedan-od-najvaznijih-medija/>

³¹ N1 BiH. Sloboda medija u BiH: N1 jedan od najvažnijih medija. <https://www.hraction.org/2021/12/29/skupstina-crne-gore-jednoglasno-usvojila-izmjene-kz-a-u-cilju-jace-krivicnopravne-zastite-novinara/>

³² European Commission Montenegro Report 2021. https://neighbourhood-enlargement.ec.europa.eu/montenegro-report-2021_en

³³ Beta. Utvrđen plan rada Radne grupe, uspostavlja se sajt „bezbedni novinar“ <https://rs.n1info.com/vesti/utvrdjen-plan-rada-radne-grupe-za-bezbednost-i-zastitu-novinara-u-srbiji/>

³⁴ For individual countries, please refer to the Council of Europe – Venice Report: <https://www.venice.coe.int/webforms/documents/?topic=4&year=all>

will as the reason why the efforts materialize only in technical and operational reforms with fundamental rule of law reforms still lacking.³⁵

In terms of justice, the WB6 systems are further undermined by delayed processes, threatening of witnesses, tampering with evidence, or compromised crime scenes. Transparency International reported in 2020 that the criminal justice systems often fail to investigate, prosecute and sanction high-level corruption cases effectively, and even if the person is convicted, the sentences are disproportionately light.

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Governments of the WB6 have passed a wide array of laws favouring cronyism, enabling privileged contracts, industry monopolies and the employment of poorly qualified public officials who facilitate corruption.³⁶

Another factor confirming the unsatisfactory state of the justice systems in the region is the low trust of citizens in the independence of justice. The situation is most dire in North Macedonia where in 2021 75% of citizens stated that they disagree that the judicial system is independent of political influence.³⁷ This is not only the highest result in the WB6 but represents also a 25% increase since 2020. The citizens' trust eroded with the still ongoing or concluded trials of the "Wiretapping Affair" involving

former high-ranking officials³⁸ who were either convicted or escaped abroad. In Albania, the overreach of the authorities during the 2021 leakage of personal data from the government

³⁵ European Court of Auditors. Special Report 2022. EU support for the rule of law in the Western Balkans: despite efforts, fundamental problems persist.

https://www.eca.europa.eu/Lists/ECADocuments/SR22_01/SR_ROL-Balkans_EN.pdf

³⁶ Transparency International. Examining state capture: Undue influence on law making and the judiciary in the western Balkans and Turkey. <https://www.transparency.org/en/publications/examining-state-capture>

³⁷ Balkan Barometer 2021.

https://www.rcc.int/download/docs/Balkan_Barometer_Public_opinion_2021v4.pdf/58fbd4eeb4187c20349f83f23b0048b.pdf

³⁸ Including the prime minister, several ministers, the assembly speaker, the special public prosecutor, and the chief of the secret police.

portal e-Albania for public services further eroded citizens' trust in the country's newly reformed justice system.³⁹

The undue political influence over justice systems remains widespread throughout the region. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, the latest case concerned the Chief Prosecutor who was removed from office in 2021 and was criticized for her alleged bias in refusing to prosecute cases involving the SNSD or HDZ BiH cadres. She was also charged with dereliction of duty for failing to assign cases to other prosecutors, and other counts related to ensuring the proper handling of information that had been deemed secret.⁴⁰ Kosovo was also shaken by leaked audio recordings of high state officials on how to exert influence, most notably a judge and member of the Kosovo Judicial Council, leading to his resignation from both roles.⁴¹ In Montenegro, a wiretapping scandal revealed the deep problems with the independence of the justice system both from other branches of the government, but also from business circles and organized crime.⁴² In Serbia, worryingly little progress has been made in the ongoing trials of several cases involving criminals with documented links to public officials, which revealed not only the highly politicized nature of the justice system but also the structural intertwining of government, business, and organized crime groups.⁴³

Despite the serious issues, limited progress has been made in the Western Balkans in the past years. In North Macedonia, the government has accelerated its anticorruption efforts and provided additional resources to support the work of the State Commission for Prevention of Corruption.⁴⁴ In Montenegro, although controversial, amendments to the Law on State

³⁹ Gentiola Madhi. "Big Brother" privacy scandal exposes the fragility of Albanian democracy.

<https://www.balkanicaucaso.org/eng/Areas/Albania/Big-Brother-privacy-scandal-exposes-the-fragility-of-Albanian-democracy-210103>

⁴⁰ Amer Jahić. Gordana Tadić kažnjena premještanjem sa pozicije glavne tužiteljice.

<https://ba.voanews.com/a/gordana-tadic-tuzilastvo-bih-disciplinski-postupak-vstv/5979332.html>

⁴¹ Liridon Salih. "Audio-incizimet" – Gjyqtari Driton Muharremi jep dorëheqje nga pozita e anëtarit të KGJK-së

<https://www.rolpik.org/audio-incizimet-gjyqtari-driton-muharremi-jep-doreheqje-nga-pozita-e-anetarit-te-kgjk-se/>

⁴² For more details please refer to: <https://balkaninsight.com/2021/10/21/montenegro-ex-intelligence-chief-arrested-for-wiretapping-prosecutor/> and <https://www.vijesti.me/vijesti/crna-hronika/515557/pratili-i-snimali-amfilohija-krivokapica-becica-mandica>

⁴³ For individual cases please refer to <https://www.danas.rs/vesti/politika/aleksic-jovanjica-je-drzavni-posao-u-drzavi-u-kojoj-o-svemu-odlucuje-vucic/> and <https://rs.n1info.com/vesti/dojcinovic-ovo-sto-se-desava-sa-slucajem-saric-nevidjeno-u-svetu/> and <https://rs.n1info.com/vesti/nin-generalni-sekretar-vlade-novak-nedic-stitio-grupu-veljka-belivuka/>

⁴⁴ Uglješa Zvekić – Sunčana Roksandić. Western Balkans anti-corruption pledges monitor.

<https://globalinitiative.net/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/Infrastructure-of-integrity-34-GITOC.pdf>

Prosecution were passed.⁴⁵ Moreover, several ministries have formed special anticorruption departments to investigate their own former affairs and the National Council for the Fight against High-Level Corruption was formed, including civil society representatives.⁴⁶ In Serbia, constitutional reform in alignment with the Chapter 23 requirements has been restarted in 2021. Preceded by a (low turnout) referendum, constitutional changes were made.⁴⁷ Nevertheless, concerns prevail, that these changes do not guarantee the independence of the judiciary from political influence.⁴⁸

Conclusion

Producing insecurities on both sides, the ambiguous nature of the enlargement process resulted in accusations of the EU on double standards, historical prejudices and hitting a condescending note in the negotiations, while the states of the WB6 were often denounced as Eurosceptic, dishonest and introducing reforms only in form, but less in content. This ever-prolonging stagnation of the EU accession process gradually delegitimised progressive political options and strengthened hybrid regimes across the WB6. Usually associated with a single leading figure, reforms to secure the independence of the judiciary, the freedom of the press or the transparency of the elections remained commonly reiterated rhetoric topics in the past years.

As a multidimensional problem, the stagnation of the democratisation processes manifests itself both as a symptom, but also as a means to stay in power. It resurfaces in the controversial court cases, where neither the

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⁴⁵ EWB. Montenegro adopts new Law on State Prosecution, some elements remain controversial.

<https://europeanwesternbalkans.com/2021/05/12/montenegro-adopts-new-law-on-state-prosecution-some-elements-remain-controversial/>

⁴⁶ Predlog za imenovanje Nacionalnog savjeta za borbu protiv korupcije na visokom nivou

<https://www.gov.me/dokumenta/ce127dfd-b292-4512-8ad5-ad0a8b843b42>

⁴⁷ Milica Stojanovic. Serbia Votes 'Yes' to Judiciary Constitution Changes.

<https://balkaninsight.com/2022/01/16/serbia-votes-yes-to-judiciary-constitution-changes/>

⁴⁸ Aleksandar Ivković. Konačna verzija ustavnih amandmana ne oslobađa pravosuđe od političkog uticaja.

<https://europeanwesternbalkans.rs/konacna-verzija-ustavnih-amandmana-ne-oslobadja-pravosudje-od-politickog-uticaja/>

prosecution nor the judiciary can proceed, while the tampering with evidence or the resurfacing of sensitive information in parliamentary debates compromises the investigation. It emerges in police violence during demonstrations, threatening of journalists and the capture of the media. Citizens of the WB6 are confronted with the moderate success these countries have achieved in improving the state of democracy and the rule of law during the past years in almost every election campaign and every election, the independence of the media, the various scandals connected to the Covid19 pandemic or the rapidly enclosing energy crisis. Consequently, reflected in a wide array of reports on the WB6 in the past years, the most commonly repeated phrase in most aspects of democratisation is that only “limited progress” has been made.