

FULFILLMENT OF THE COPENHAGEN CRITERIA IN THE AREA OF MEDIA FREEDOM IN THE WESTERN BALKANS

ABSTRACT

Freedom of expression and the media is an important part of the Copenhagen political criteria and an essential proof of readiness for membership in the European Union. The paper provides a detailed assessment of the developments in the area of media freedom in the Western Balkans during the last decade, by analysing the European Union's documents, predominantly the European Commission's regular communications on EU enlargement policy and the individual countries' progress reports, as well as documents of the European Parliament and the Council of the EU. The decline in media freedom in the countries of the Union harms its credibility in the context of enlargement policy. The fact that freedom of the media remains largely a national competence has a negative impact on the ability of the EU to foster the required reforms. For the governments of the Western Balkan countries, the political costs of implementing reforms prove to be crucial, as independent media could jeopardise their position of power. Therefore, the necessary political will is missing.

Keywords: media freedom; European Union; Enlargement policy; Western Balkans; Copenhagen criteria.