

Giving people a bigger stake in justice in the Western Balkans

Memories remain sharp in many parts of former Yugoslavia over past human rights abuses, and this often impedes the search for sustainable peace. Establishing the truth is an essential step in building the reconciliation which the region needs. That is why the EU is backing a project that throws new light into some of the darker corners, and gives the public a sense of engagement in the processes of justice in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Kosovo, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Montenegro, and Serbia.*

ACCURATE REPORTING

Accurate, truthful and professional reporting helps post-conflict countries come to terms with the past. With EU assistance, a dedicated network of journalists is specialising in coverage of local issues related to war crimes. They are producing online news reports, a dedicated radio programme, and a series of television documentaries, in English and in the languages spoken in the Western Balkans. This allows the public to see how prosecutions are being conducted and judgements are reached in the region.

Public scrutiny helps to exert pressure that can make sure processes are fairer to victims. For instance, the news service has highlighted criticism from victims' rights groups of anonymity granted to war crimes indictees and convicts. This led to a recommendation for lifting this protection in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Wider access to impartial and accurate information can expose cover-ups, or ease the passage to restitution and to resumption of social stability – for instance with unbiased reporting about people displaced by conflict. The project's database also covers organ trafficking, missing people, reparation, memorialisation and truth-seeking initiatives.

TRANSITIONAL JUSTICE

This type of impartial public information helps countries and societies that are in transition from conflict to develop justice systems that can deal adequately with their bitter legacy.

It is a contribution towards building a stable and secure future. These attempts to remedy injustices and to build towards democracy, human rights, and rule of law are known as 'transitional justice'. In concrete terms, civil society groups are developing local fact-finding centres and promoting the work of a regional commission on war crimes and violations of human rights. Crucially, the project also engages ordinary citizens, who have so far been excluded from these processes. At the same time, it is also improving the quality of regional media with its locally-based specialist journalists. The establishment of a fully-trained team of professionals with expertise in court reporting, monitoring and analytical journalism is an important influence for the future of regional media coverage.



*This designation is without prejudice to positions on status, and is in line with UNSCR 1244/1999 and the ICJ Opinion on the Kosovo declaration of independence.

"I want to thank the Balkan Investigative Reporting Network again for your writings, because of you, we see now that we are not forgotten, and that there are still some of us who are fighting for justice and truth," said a letter from a woman from Bosnia and Herzegovina who was interned in prison camps during the war and testified as a protected witness in The Hague.

"I'm so grateful that we have an agency like the Balkan Investigative Reporting Network because it allows us victims to follow the paths of justice in Bosnia and the region now. Justice is all we are interested in, day and night." - Bakira Hasecic, President of the association "Women – Victims of war".

PROJECT DETAILS –

Balkan Transitional Justice: BIRN's Unique Multimedia Reporting Project

Partners:

Federal Department of Foreign Affairs of Switzerland
UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office
Robert Bosch Stiftung

Total cost in €:
615,456.74

EU Contribution in €:
465,456.74 (75%)

Start date:
December 2011

End date:
December 2013

Results:

Quality information on transitional justice in the region; stronger civil society engagement; enhanced media skills

Techniques:

Training, funding

Project website:

www.balkaninsight.com/en/page/balkan-transitional-justice-home

