



STOP THE RULING COALITION IN MONTENEGRO FROM INTRODUCING RESTRICTING REGULATION FOR NGOS

The Western Balkans Strategy Group, working under the auspices of the **Heinrich Boll Stiftung**, expresses grave concern over the call from the **pro-Putin and pro-Vučić coalition Za budućnost Crne Gore (ZBCG)**, which is part of Montenegro's government and parliamentary majority, **for the urgent introduction of a law targeting so-called "foreign agents" in Montenegro**. This development raises significant alarm about the future of civil society and democratic freedoms in the country.

ZBCG claims, without substantiation, that certain organizations, operating under the guise of non-governmental organizations (NGOs), are allegedly acting as foreign agents, exerting influence over Montenegro's internal and foreign policies. **This dangerous rhetoric closely mirrors authoritarian measures seen in Russia and Georgia**, where "foreign agent" laws have severely restricted the work of NGOs, undermining democratic principles, silencing dissent, and curtailing human rights.

We remind that in Russia, the "foreign agent" law, introduced in 2012, initially targeted NGOs receiving foreign funding. By 2022, it was expanded to apply to any individual or group receiving foreign support, labeling them as "foreign agents" if they disseminate information or materials. A similar law in Georgia ignited political unrest earlier this year, forcing organizations that receive more than 20% of their funding from abroad to register as "agents of foreign influence." This law effectively halted Georgia's EU integration process, further isolating the country.

The Western Balkans Strategy Group warns that should such a law be passed in Montenegro, it could have devastating consequences for civil society, which is already operating in an increasingly constrained space. The proposal by ZBCG, which baselessly claims that NGOs operate "above the law" and in service of foreign interests, signals an alarming shift toward those practices which are far away from the founding principles of the EU to which Montenegro is heading. **The timing of this move, right during the Berlin Process**, is also interesting as **it highlights the gap between euphemistic summits and empty declarations**, and the legitimate frustration with actual developments affecting civil society.

The Western Balkans Strategy Group calls on the international community, particularly the EU delegation to Montenegro and European Union institutions, as well as other EU and NATO democratic countries, to act swiftly and vocally in defence of Montenegrin NGOs. A strong, unified response is urgently needed to protect the free and independent work of civil society in Montenegro and to prevent the passage of laws that would jeopardize democratic values, as seen in Russia and Georgia. This proposal not only threatens the critical voices within Montenegro committed to upholding human rights, democracy, and transparency but also risks derailing the EU integration process recently advanced by IBAR which EU granted to Montenegro.