

and combatting trafficking in human beings; promoting diversity and equality (members of national minorities and LGBTI persons); quality education for all; and freedom of expression and freedom of the media. EU-funded regional projects also continue supporting the fight to ending violence against women.

5. Multilateral context: Bosnia and Herzegovina continued its dialogue and cooperation with domestic, European and international human rights organisations and monitoring bodies. The absence of a systematic follow-up means that the country still has to address most of the 204 accepted recommendations from the November 2019 Universal Periodic Review (UPR), as well as the seventy nine recommendations and three requests received in October 2021 by the UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights.

The Republic of North Macedonia

1. Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: The legal framework on the protection of fundamental rights is largely in line with European standards. The deinstitutionalisation process is progressing with the resettlement of persons with disabilities to community-based care. Continued improvements can be noted in gender mainstreaming and respect for women's rights. However, all provisions of the Law on prevention and protection from violence against women and domestic violence need to be implemented. The recommendations made by the European Committee for the Prevention of Torture regarding the treatment of detainees and convicts were not adequately addressed. Implementation of the legislation on hate speech and of the national action plan for the Istanbul Convention's provisions need to be improved. Serious efforts are needed to protect and ensure LGBTI persons can exercise their rights. The civilian external oversight mechanism over the police is still not fully functional and it lacks representatives from civil society organisations.

The general context is favourable to media freedom and allows for critical media reporting. Greater transparency is needed regarding media advertising by state institutions and political parties. The authorities need to step up their efforts to reform the public service broadcaster, ensuring its independence, professional standards and financial sustainability. The labour rights of journalists still need to be addressed.

North Macedonia continued its efforts to improve democracy and the rule of law, despite some challenges. The work of Parliament was marred by political polarisation, which delayed the adoption of many pieces of legislation. The Parliament needs to play an active and positive role in the EU accession negotiation process.

For more information, please refer to the [European Commission's 2022 Report on North Macedonia](#).

2. EU action - key focus areas: EU activities concerning fundamental rights focused in 2022 on the advancement of the rule of law and democratic institutions; protecting and empowering

individuals; safeguarding fundamental freedoms, including harnessing the opportunities and addressing the challenges of the new technologies.

3. EU bilateral political engagement: On 19 July 2022, the first Inter-Governmental Conference took place, officially opening the accession negotiations. The same day, the Commission launched the screening process, which is advancing smoothly. Human rights and democracy remained a central focus of the political dialogue with the authorities in 2022, notably in the context of the EU- North Macedonia Stabilisation and Association bodies.

4. EU financial engagement: Under the Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA), the EU for Rule of Law action and the European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights (EIDHR) grant contract “Anti-discrimination Commission that Delivers on its Preventive and Protective Role” strengthened the capacity of the Commission for Prevention and Protection against Discrimination by organising a series of trainings and study visits. Furthermore, the awareness on harmful effects of discrimination was raised during two summer schools for approximately 100 young people. In the area of freedom of expression, EU assistance under IPA 2020 addressed the issues related to economic and social rights of journalists.

In 2022, the NDICI Thematic Programme on Human Rights and Democracy allocated around EUR 1.5 million to seven contracts, aiming to improve the respect of children’s rights, combat discrimination, ensure decent working conditions for women, provide overall monitoring on the respect of human rights in the country, as well as enhancing national protective mechanisms against hate speech.

Under the Civil Society Facility, seventeen contracts were signed in 2022 for EUR 4.4 million. The projects will support civil society organisations and networks/platforms in strengthening the participatory democracy and the EU integration, by contributing actively in the decision-making and in improving freedom of expression and the working environment for civil society. The grant projects will be contributing to the further democratisation of the society, through empowering women and youth, promoting gender equality, enabling advocacy and networking linked to human rights in different areas such as justice, health, education, Roma inclusion, migration and integration of refugees. The EU assistance is supporting the freedom of expression by providing trainings for journalists and media workers to improve their professional standards and increase their EU related knowledge.

The implementation of the EU - Council of Europe Horizontal Facility phase II programme was completed in 2022. It has supported the beneficiary institutions to advance reforms in the field of human rights and rule of law, including the implementation of the recommendations of the Council of Europe’s monitoring bodies. Furthermore, in cooperation with the Council of Europe, authorities and civil society organisations, the European Union supported activities for effective recognition of the rights of LGBTI persons, combating hate speech and discrimination. The EU organised awareness raising events in twelve municipalities to inform local communities on the use and the access to the Free Legal Aid services. It enhanced the Free Legal Aid knowledge among local communities and legal professionals, with a special focus on vulnerable groups, including women and children. The awareness raising campaign “Block the Hatred; Share the Love”, launched in December 2021 as part of a regional project,

continued in 2022 with a series of successful activities aiming to inform young people on the danger of hate speech.

5. Multilateral context: North Macedonia continued to actively cooperate with international organisations, while joining the EU in supporting the decision leading to the cessation of membership of Russia from the Council of Europe. North Macedonia also aligned with all the EU statements submitted at international organisations (UN, OSCE and Council of Europe), including the EU position in UNGA when voting on resolutions regarding Russia's aggression against Ukraine and its humanitarian impact. North Macedonia voted for suspension of Russia from the UN Human Rights Council. The country holds the 2023 Chairpersonship of the OSCE.

Kosovo*

1. Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: The legal framework guarantees the protection of fundamental rights and is in line with European standards. However, additional efforts are still needed to effectively enforce fundamental rights. The government's capacity to streamline and oversee fundamental rights policies and legislation requires improvement, including in coordinating the mechanisms to protect human rights, gender equality and non-majority communities, at both central and local levels. Fundamental rights issues need to feature higher on the political agenda. Human and financial resources remain lacking and relevant authorities are still dependant on donor support and need to assume greater ownership. While the Constitution protects against discrimination based on sexual orientation, general acceptance and public awareness of the rights of LGBTI persons remains low. More needs to be done to ensure gender equality and child protection in practice. Further efforts are needed to effectively guarantee the rights of persons belonging to minorities, including Roma, Ashkali and Egyptians, persons with disabilities and displaced persons. The situation in the north of Kosovo remains challenging, in particular in terms of the adjudication of corruption, organised crime, and the conditions for freedom of expression, including attacks on media professionals. The mass resignation of Kosovo Serbs from public institutions and the following erection of roadblocks negatively affected the security situation and the rule of law in the northern region, where the justice system and police operate with very reduced capacity.

In 2022, Kosovo enjoyed political stability, with the government holding a solid majority in the Assembly. This political environment has been conducive to Kosovo stepping up its efforts to strengthen democracy and the rule of law. Nevertheless, the Assembly's work continued to be negatively affected by a polarised political atmosphere and a lack of decision-making quorum. Kosovo's electoral process still needs strengthening to address weaknesses throughout the electoral cycle, as identified in successive EU election observation missions, and more recently by the EU Election Follow-up Mission, deployed to Kosovo in November 2022.

For more information, please refer to the [European Commission's 2022 Report on Kosovo](#).

*.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.