Press-conference, 7th of December 2016, hotel “Holiday Inn”

# Key regional findings

(based on research in Serbia, Montenegro and Macedonia)

**REFORMS:**

* Reforms are slow, centered on technical issues rather than key democratic standards – independence, integrity, and professionalism in the public sector. Basic issues are back on the agenda, like fair elections. The EU agenda of the governments is mainly declarative only, and can be summed up as “facade reforms”.
  + The reforms seem like “copy-paste”. Unfortunately, sharing bad practices is more often than good ones. Again, Macedonia became “exporter” of the bad practices in the region.
* There is a characteristic trend of “securitization”: migrant crisis and fight against terrorism overshadows democracy and rule of law. This is a negative trend which is unfortunately present in the whole Europe.

**EU:**

* “Fundamentals first” approach is seriously endangered by:
  + The aforementioned trend of securitization;
  + Trans-European party solidarity, which undermines the joint foreign and security policy of the EU – the example of MFA of Austria Sebastian Kurz and the Hungarian Peter Sijarto;
  + The fact of solving bilateral issues (Serbia – Kosovo, Macedonia – Greece) is always preceding all other criteria;
  + Uncertain EU perspective, which discourages the political elites in the region to conduct substantial reforms in the rule of law.

**Civil sector:**

* The civil sector is under pressure; there is a declining trend of cooperation with the government; there is a pressure and stigmatization (labeling as “public enemies”). The level of pressure on the civil sector is differing in the countries.
* Nevertheless, the CSO’s are organizing more on the regional level for joint advocacy.
* Key issue for the CSO’s is mobilizing citizens for reforms.
* In these conditions, the **key message** is that the fight for freedom and democracy is our own, and won’t come from outside.