

Albania: Fundamental Rights and Civic Freedoms Under Serious Threat

Urgent Accountability and Action Needed

Endorsed by 45 Albanian, regional, European and international organisations

We, the undersigned organizations, express grave concern over escalating threats to fundamental rights and civic freedoms in Albania amid the student-led protests that began on 13 October 2026. Documented incidents and serious allegations of excessive police force, ill-treatment, arbitrary detention and violations of children's rights, alongside attacks on journalists and media workers and threatening rhetoric from the highest levels of government, demand urgent, independent investigations and effective institutional accountability.

We also condemn attacks against police officers, arson and damage to public and private property during the protests, which have endangered lives, caused injuries and harmed communities. Such acts must be investigated and addressed through individual accountability and due process. Violence by individuals cannot justify indiscriminate use of force, arbitrary detention or collective punishment.

These concerns go well beyond the management of public order. They raise fundamental questions about the state's obligation to protect life and physical integrity, safeguard personal liberty, uphold the rights to peaceful assembly and freedom of expression, and ensure that everyone can participate in public life without fear of intimidation, punishment or retaliation.

The student-led protests began with [demands concerning university conditions, the cost of higher education, financial support and employment prospects for graduates](#). They take place against the backdrop of more than four months of sustained civic mobilization, known as the *Flamingo Revolution*. Beginning on 31 May, over concerns about protected natural areas, public assets, and contested investment decisions, the mobilization has broadened to encompass grievances about corruption, the concentration of political and economic power, and the functioning of the political system. Demands voiced by citizens protesting have ranged from the resignation of the Prime Minister and an end to the dominance of the two main political parties to wider political, constitutional and electoral reforms.

These developments must also be understood in the context of mounting pressure on civic space. Repeated concerns about [disproportionate policing and restrictions on media freedom](#), [unlawful arrests and police interference with journalists](#), and [smear campaigns targeting public watchdogs](#) have contributed to the growing personal, legal and professional costs of [peaceful dissent and public-interest scrutiny](#).

Against this background, the response of state institutions since 13 October cannot be viewed as a series of isolated incidents, but warrants scrutiny in light of these cumulative concerns about policing, deprivation of liberty and interference with fundamental rights.

Freedom of peaceful assembly and protection against excessive force

Over the past days, police interventions against protesters, bystanders and individuals already under police control have raised serious concerns about the protection of peaceful assembly, physical integrity and human dignity. [Res Publica and partner organisations documented 32 alleged episodes of police violence](#), while an independent legal assessment by lawyer Dea Nini examined 91 evidence items, documenting repeated instances of officers striking, kicking, dragging or restraining people already on the ground or posing no apparent threat. Serious injuries, interventions by masked or unidentified officers, and concerns about the deployment of crowd-control measures, including tear gas and water cannons, raise further questions about the necessity and proportionality of police operations.

Personal liberty, conditions of detention and children's rights

Reported widespread apprehensions and detention practices raise serious concerns about arbitrary deprivation of liberty, ill-treatment and procedural safeguards. [Civil society documentation](#) identifies interventions by unidentified or plainclothes officers, unmarked vehicles, and arrests without clearly communicated grounds for each individual. The [People's Advocate](#) reported contacting 214 persons deprived of liberty and recorded allegations of mistreatment or signs of injuries in 26 cases at the Security Block. The [Albanian Helsinki Committee](#) independently documented overcrowded facilities, visible injuries and detainees' complaints concerning police violence, medical care and access to lawyers and families.

Particularly serious are the [findings concerning children](#), including allegations of physical violence, detention in unsuitable conditions and questioning without required safeguards. Children are rights-holders, entitled to freedom of expression and peaceful assembly as well as heightened protection against violence and ill-treatment. Their participation in protests cannot, in itself, justify detention or punitive measures. Deprivation of liberty must remain a measure of last resort, for the shortest appropriate period, with access to legal assistance, family contact, appropriate professional support and independent review.

Media freedom and safety of journalists

Journalists and media workers covering the protests face repeated physical violence, intimidation, threats of detention, obstruction of filming and interference with equipment, particularly when documenting police operations and the use of force against protesters. Identifiable media crews have been assaulted, exposed to dangerous crowd-control measures and obstructed while questioning police leadership. The [SafeJournalists Network](#) has documented [34 incidents](#) involving journalists and media workers since 13 October. Of these, 31 concern reported actions by State Police officers or individuals suspected of being police personnel, while three involve actions by protesters.

These incidents continue a [pattern recorded since July](#), despite repeated warnings and existing police safety guidelines. The concern extends beyond journalists' physical safety to interference with independent scrutiny of police conduct, the public's right to information and the failure of institutional safeguards to prevent recurring violations.

Political rhetoric, stigmatization and threatened sanctions

In his [19 October address to State Police leadership](#), Prime Minister Edi Rama associated sections of the mobilization with extremism, ANTIFA, Russia, Iran and foreign intelligence services, while making disparaging remarks about young demonstrators, their education and social backgrounds. These statements continue earlier [allegations of foreign manipulation](#), without publicly presented evidence establishing that foreign actors organized or directed the domestic mobilization.

Particularly concerning was the Prime Minister's assertion that individuals remaining at what he described as a violent demonstration could become targets of police action even without personally engaging in violence. He also threatened students accused of attacking police officers with administrative and educational consequences, including loss of free education, scholarships and state financial support; warned that families of minors involved in destruction could face financial liability; and said that teachers accused of encouraging pupils to vandalize school property would be excluded from teaching and other public-sector employment. These announcements require close scrutiny of their legal basis, individualized justification, proportionality and procedural safeguards. His criticism of judicial decisions and public accusations against media outlets raise further concerns about judicial independence, press freedom and the chilling effect on democratic dissent.

Institutional accountability and the responsibility to address civic grievances

The suspension of several officers and announced investigations are initial measures, but questions remain about whether all documented allegations, including potential supervisory and command responsibility, are being effectively investigated. In the [joint open letter of 14 October](#), Albanian, regional and international organizations requested immediate protection, independent investigations, preservation of evidence, parliamentary oversight and public reporting. These requests have yet to receive a comprehensive, case-specific response.

The responsibility to protect fundamental rights, investigate alleged violations, and ensure accountability rests with public institutions and cannot be contingent on dialogue or the conduct of other actors. This statement does not claim to represent the protest movement or speak on its behalf. It reflects a shared commitment to defending fundamental rights, civic freedoms and institutional accountability.

Urgent appeal

We call on all protest participants to refrain from violence, intimidation, arson and damage to public or private property, and on the authorities to exercise restraint, prevent further escalation and protect fundamental rights and civic freedoms.

We stand in solidarity with students, journalists, media workers, freelance reporters, human rights defenders and all those peacefully exercising their fundamental rights, as well as everyone affected by violence, including those injured and those whose livelihoods have been harmed.

We call on:

- 1** **The Government and Prime Minister** to guarantee peaceful assembly, publicly confirm that no one will face reprisals for lawful civic participation, refrain from threatening rhetoric and unsupported collective accusations, and respond substantively to citizens' grievances and demands.
- 2** **The Ministry of Interior and State Police** to immediately enforce clear operational instructions preventing excessive force, ensure identifiable and accountable officers, protect children, journalists and bystanders, and address deficiencies in detention conditions, medical care and procedural safeguards.
- 3** **The competent prosecution authorities** to investigate promptly, impartially and effectively alleged criminal offences, including violence against protesters, journalists and police officers, suspected offences by police personnel, and attacks on institutions and property, establishing individual and potential command responsibility where warranted.
- 4** **The Police Oversight Agency** to investigate alleged police misconduct, ill-treatment, unlawful detention and obstruction of journalists; identify officers and units involved; preserve evidence; examine possible supervisory failures; and refer suspected criminal offences to the prosecution.
- 5** **The Parliament of Albania** to urgently hold public oversight hearings with responsible institutions, the People's Advocate, independent human rights monitors and journalists' representatives; examine police operations, detention conditions, the treatment of children, announced sanctions and investigative responses; and ensure public findings and concrete follow-up.
- 6** **All political actors**, in government and opposition, to reject violence and intimidation, avoid inflammatory rhetoric and the political instrumentalisation of the protests, and respect judicial independence, media freedom and the right to peaceful protest.

We acknowledge the responses of the [EU Delegation](#), [European Commission](#), [United Nations in Albania](#), [European Parliament representatives](#) and OSCE, and urge them, together with the Council of Europe and international partners, to ensure concrete follow-up on documented human rights concerns, engage directly with affected groups and independent monitors, and support institutional accountability, including through Albania's commitments under Cluster 1 – Fundamentals.

We strongly support Albania's path towards EU membership as a commitment to shared democratic values, fundamental rights and rule-of-law standards that must be upheld in practice.

Signatory Organisations

45 organisations

1. Balkan Civil Society Development Network (BCSDN) – North Macedonia
2. Centre for European Volunteering (CEV) – Belgium
3. Centre for Law and Democracy (CLD) – Canada
4. Cooperation for the Development of Emerging Countries (COSPE) – Italy
5. European Centre for Press and Media Freedom (ECPMF) – Germany
6. European Council on Refugees and Exiles (ECRE) – Belgium
7. European Federation of Journalists (EFJ) – Belgium
8. Free Press for Eastern Europe (FPEE) – Czechia
9. Free Press Unlimited (FPU) – Netherlands
10. International Federation of Journalists (IFJ) – Belgium
11. Observatory Balkans Caucasus Transeuropa (OBCT) – Italy
12. Reporters Without Borders (RSF) – France
13. SafeJournalists Network (SJN) – Western Balkans
14. South East Europe Media Organisation (SEEMO) – Austria
15. World Alliance for Citizen Participation (CIVICUS) – South Africa
16. Active Durrës Centre (Qendra "Durrësi Aktiv") – Albania
17. Association of Independent Creators and Activists "Geto" (Udruženje nezavisnih stvaralaca i aktivista Geto) – Bosnia and Herzegovina
18. Association of Journalists of Albania (AJA) – Albania
19. Association of Journalists of Kosovo (AJK) – Kosovo
20. Association of Journalists of Macedonia (AJM) – North Macedonia
21. Balkan Investigative Reporting Network (BIRN) – Bosnia and Herzegovina
22. Centre for Development of Non-Governmental Organisations (CRNVO) – Montenegro

23. Centre for Promotion of Civil Society (CPCD) – Bosnia and Herzegovina
24. Centre for Science and Innovation for Development (SCiDEV) – Albania
25. Civic Resistance (Qëndresa Qytetare) – Albania
26. Croatian Journalists' Association (HND) – Croatia
27. Dignity Humanitarian NGO – Armenia
28. Don Bosko Centre (Don Bosko Centar) – Montenegro
29. ESD Albania – Albania
30. Faktoje – Albania
31. Gender Alliance for Development Center (GADC) – Albania
32. Independent Journalists' Association of Serbia (NUNS) – Serbia
33. Kosovar Civil Society Foundation (KCSF) – Kosovo
34. Kosovo Law Institute (KLI) – Kosovo
35. Legal Aid Society of Moldova – Moldova
36. Legal Centre (Pravni centar) – Montenegro
37. Local Democracy Agency Montenegro (LDA Montenegro) – Montenegro
38. Macedonian Center for International Cooperation (MCIC) – North Macedonia
39. Media Center Ukraine – Ukraine
40. NGO Active Zone – Montenegro
41. NGO Our Action (NVO Naša akcija) – Montenegro
42. Partners Albania for Change and Development (Partners Albania) – Albania
43. Trade Union of Media of Montenegro (SMCG) – Montenegro
44. Transparency International Bosnia and Herzegovina (TI BiH) – Bosnia and Herzegovina
45. Turkey Recap – Turkey