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Statement on Civil Society Situation in the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia

In the last weeks the ruling party VMRO DPMNE scaled up attacks on civil society in the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia. JEF Macedonia and JEF Europe have been directly targeted by these attacks in particular through the so-called Stop Operation Soros (SOS) movement.

A few days after the December elections, former Prime Minister Gruevski gave a speech in front of the State Election Commission, threatening CSOs that receive funds from abroad, saying his party would fight for the desorosozation. His party, VMRO - DPMNE, has also issued a press release statement with which it announced that "the desorosozation process begins". A few days after these statements, the SOS movement was founded by the editor-in-chief of the state-run news agency MIA, Cvetin Cilimanov, one of the editors of the pro-government Republika news portal, Nenad Mircevski, and Nikola Srbov, a columnist for another pro-government news portal, Kurir. The movement, as the founders say, was created to "fight against one-mindedness in the civil sector, which is devised and led by George Soros".

On Saturday, February 4, 2016, during its conference, the SOS founder Cveti Chilimanov called JEF Macedonia the "most controversial organisation" pursuing "deadly and dangerous policies of George Soros". Furthermore, not all of the data presented was correct, hence indicating a potential manipulation of facts.

The European Youth Forum and JEF Europe consider a strong and independent civil society absolutely essential to a well-functioning democracy. We are close partner organisations committed to strengthen independent and active civil society organisations monitoring the governmental actions and serving as countervailing powers daily. The public attacks witnessed these last days on various NGOs in the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, and in particular on youth organisations including JEF Macedonia are a worrying trend we strongly condemn.

JEF Europe and JEF Macedonia are fighting for a free and united Europe, governed according to the principles of democracy and the rule of law, striving to ensure peace, prosperity, security and justice in Europe and in the world. Through their principles and actions, JEF Europe and JEF Macedonia are working towards a deeper European integration of the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia which would hopefully lead to its eventual accession as a full Member State.

We call on the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia authorities to immediately stop this denigration campaign. The government must acknowledge the importance of civil society organisations for the democratic process and democratic quality of a society. We call on the European Commission to engage with the national government on this issue to secure the situation of NGOs in the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia.

Signatories:

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