



**EUROPEAN LEGAL**  
RESEARCH & TRAINING NETWORK

## **EUROPEAN LEGAL ACTION PLAN 2016 - 2018**

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*European Legal Research & Training Network mission, strategy and tools for fulfilling its mission regarding the professional development, improvement and enhancement of young professionals and early career lawyers in the Western Balkan countries.*

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*This Policy describes the main objectives, actions and the tools toward achievement of our mission and vision as organization in the Western Balkan region related to the integration and enhancement of the young professionals and early career lawyers in these countries.*

*In this policy, we seek to bring a clear picture of what European Legal Research & Training Network will do in terms of action and measures to bring improvement and development to the legal profession in the Western Balkans and to the legal system there.*

*At the same time, we believe that this short-term policy is the first step towards achieving great results in approximating our standards as legal professionals and reshaping our professional identity as lawyers within the Western Balkan countries, and the entire Region.*

## FOREWORD

European Legal Research & Training Network was founded in July 2016 in Rotterdam, The Netherlands. Its aim is to improve and increase the professional development of lawyers within the Western Balkan countries (Albania, Macedonia, Kosovo, Montenegro, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Serbia) towards their full professional integration and gradually prepare them for the competitive European job market. European Legal Research & Training Network is an organization that stands for professional growth among young professionals and it strongly supports the idea that the integration of the Western Balkan region cannot be complete without regulating and improving the legal profession by among others increasing the professionalism among lawyers.

The Association rests on three main pillars: Research, Training and Networking and is guided by the principles of respecting diversity of legal traditions and other disciplines, various legal backgrounds, cooperation among lawyers and vocational training. European Legal is a regional organization dedicated to help young lawyers in each of the Western Balkan countries develop and improve by adding values and qualities to their professional lives. In fulfilling these goals, its wish is to see these young professionals come out of their comfort zone, become active and get involved into the process of improving and enhancing the entire legal system in their countries.

Being aware of the many issues and their diverse nature regarding the professionalism in the Western Balkan region, its mission is to further contribute to early career lawyers from any area, through professional behaviour & skills, improvement & capacity building, legal understanding & interpretation research and training opportunities. At the same time, European Legal creates the necessary habitat for lawyers in the region to network and connect to one another on a national and regional level and build a bridge between them.

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## INTRODUCTION

The Western Balkan region is undergoing a challenging process related to the Copenhagen conditionality of harmonizing its standards in alignment with the EU ones, which in terms of the legal criteria is known as the EU *acquis communautaire*. However, the condition to approximate the laws raises the question if legal professionals and the entire legal profession are involved in this broad and complex process so far.

European Legal strongly supports the idea that a strong, effective legal system, consisting of a proper and functional legal profession, is built upon principles and values, standards and behaviours, which when attached to the exercising of such profession decide the preparedness and quality of its functioning. In return, such system needs effective lawyers to shape up the quality of the profession through the application and implementation of certain qualities and skills. Only lawyers with great professional capabilities on top of such system could carry the responsibility to regulate, balance and improve the legal profession together with other entities. Therefore, the first step in achieving the goal of having a strong legal system, is integrating and investing in ourselves and our profession through improvement, development, enhancement and professional growth.

European Legal Research & Training Network is committed to support young professionals and early career lawyers improve their professional backgrounds by creating the right conditions for them. By setting high values at the core of their attitudes and behaviours, we aim to make professionalism a standard instead of an exception for them and thus place a corner stone to the enhancement of the entire legal profession in the respective countries at an early stage of the integration process. Being fully aware that the issues related to the legal profession in the Western Balkans are many and not only related to the need of skills and qualities, attitudes and behaviours among these young professionals – our main goal is to tackle them through a holistic and multi-layered approach and to get to the core of their existence.

## **MISSION**

### *1.1. Increasing professionalism among lawyers in the Region*

For us as organization, the exercise of the legal profession and the concept of professionalism are interchangeable as each one of them is a corner stone contributing to the practice of the legal profession and thus they cannot exist separately from one another. Professionalism is not just about WHAT we do as lawyers, but mainly on HOW we do it, a concept almost lost in the Western Balkan countries.

The legal profession plays an important role that is fundamental to any democracy, which in turn means that its proper functioning depends upon our quality and functioning as legal professionals. European Legal Research & Training Network aims to place high professional behaviour at the core of the legal profession and maintain it by creating opportunities and possibilities for young professionals to grow and improve daily. Mainly through improvement & capacity building, legal understanding & interpretation, soft skills training, legal awareness campaigns, motivation and coaching we can enrich their professional backgrounds at an early stage of the integration process in each one of the above-mentioned countries.

### *1.2. Reshaping the mentality around the legal profession and its functioning*

The challenges related to the legal profession and its practise in the Western Balkans are many and we at European Legal believe that they go beyond the need for professional skills. Being aware that their attitudes and behaviours are crucial in terms of professionalism, we share the concern that adjusting the mindset about the legal profession and who they are as lawyers is crucial at this point. We believe that the issues around the poor academic system, lack of exchanging practices and opportunities, lack of a reading culture and many other issues, are only symptoms of a profound disease, that needs to be urgently dealt with.

The need to gradually implement a legitimate mind-set among young professionals that includes numerous principles based on what the lawyers believe that the legal profession needs to function properly and the necessary actions to keep moving forward – is thus very important. For the Western Balkans, such mind-set means first acknowledging the serious issues attached to the legal profession and its exercising, then accepting and finally taking immediate action in solving them.

### 1.3. *Promoting legal awareness among young professionals*

Promoting legal awareness among legal professionals is a great tool to raise their consciousness about the issues around their professional situation and their relationship with their profession. It is a great mechanism to encourage them to act towards improving the situation in their countries through constant awareness campaigns, legal writing, on job trainings and other tools. We believe that the absence of a reading culture, lack of enthusiasm, lack of interest to grow and develop professionally are some of the challenges that cannot be tackled and solved through training only but need to be considered and evaluated through a softer approach having to do with the promotion of a legal awareness at an early stage of their career.

In terms of the legal profession this means detecting and identifying certain issues that they encounter as legal professionals, evaluating the current situation, analysing and prioritizing the main ones and drawing conclusions and recommendations on each one of them. By applying legal awareness among young professionals, our goal is to remove lawyers from the passive position of a 'spectator' in the integration of their profession and involve them as 'main actors' in improving it.

## STRATEGY

### *2.1. Soft skills trainings for young professionals*

The main issues regarding the legal profession are related to the respective national legislative framework in each one of the Western Balkan countries. With all the good intentions to harmonize the legislation with the EU standards and approximate our professional levels, lawyers in these countries, need to recognize the fact that without clarifying their internal issues regarding the lack of professionalism, need for skills and qualities, poor understanding and relationship with the law – the EU membership will remain a long – term dream for them.

European Legal Research & Training Network's main activities to that end are mainly training and research on analytical skills, legal argumentation, legal writing, legal reasoning, legal understanding and interpretation, and public speaking. Furthermore, European Legal supports the idea that trainings, events, e-learnings, and other related activities in terms of the soft skills are very important for the young professionals since their practice has a direct impact upon their daily functioning. By making above skills a rule in the daily functioning of lawyers instead of an option, a standard instead of an exception, and a priority instead of a choice, we aim to set the first step towards an effective practicing of the legal profession throughout the region.

### *2.2. A professional Network among lawyers in the region*

European Legal promotes a Networking culture, establishing a platform which brings young professionals across the Western Balkan region together, with the aim to promote their achievements, connect with their colleagues and exchange their ideas. By doing so, we build professional bridges and encourage them to share knowledge, exchange experiences through seminars, workshops, on job trainings, conferences and other events – all serving to the same purpose: To bring these young professionals together, connect, learn and grow.

We believe, these sharing and exchange experiences with a learning potential, will help young professionals touch and understand the integration process closely and evaluate the progress in each one of their countries. Besides the fact that today, such regional networking platform is missing, we believe that its presence would be very beneficial for keeping lawyers active, involved, motivated. Furthermore, the opportunities that this idea brings with it, will encourage them to get involved in the integration process of their profession, and constantly contribute to its improvement and growth.

### 2.3. *Motivating and coaching young professionals*

No matter how we look at the professional situation in the Western Balkan countries, we will agree that lawyers have somehow lost their identity as professionals by forgetting that being a lawyer is about a mission. As we look at the professional behaviours and expectations among them, we can see that their attitude as legal professionals is a result of wrong concepts and understanding about who they are as lawyers, and what their mission is through lawyer-ing. That mindset and mentality they have created, keeps feeding their professional experiences and it's the engine that puts to work their daily functioning

Motivating and coaching lawyers is at this point a great tool to redirect lawyers in the right path by re - adjusting the grounds upon which their functionality is build and learn to change or improve what does not serves them anymore. Its purpose is to change lawyers understanding on an emotional and mental level, and to help them make professional changes in their benefit, learn how to turn their strong points into services, be confident to pursue their professional's plans and so forth. In terms of the legal profession that is more of an educational activity, aimed at detecting certain issues, by having a deep understanding of their personal and professional situation and then acting to solve them.

## STATE OF AFFAIRS

### *3.1. Introducing European Legal in the Region*

Introducing a new organization in countries where legal professionals are commonly passive has been for European Legal the first confrontation with the situation regarding the legal professionals in these countries and at the same time our first attempt to get in touch with them. Furthermore, listening to their concerns has been a great way to get closer to their situation and try to understand where their biggest problems in terms professionalism lie.

During our first introduction in 2016 in Albania, Kosovo and Macedonia, we have discussed about the integration of the legal profession, how can they foster their European identity and get unstuck of their current situation. With the help of various surveys prepared specially for young professionals in these countries we had a first glimpse into their main challenges related to their functioning as lawyers and learn about their goals, ambitions as well as expectations from us as organization.

### *3.2. Legal personality in the Western Balkans*

The presence of European Legal in Albania, Kosovo and Macedonia is already a fact. However, since we are an organization dedicated to the enhancement of the professional level of lawyers among all Western Balkan countries, our legal presence in the rest of the region is only a matter of time. Currently, we are working to set our legal personality in Macedonia, Albania and Kosovo and open our first branch offices there.

At the same time, we continue to write and speak about legal issues, and the problems regarding the legal profession throughout our website [www.legislationnet.com](http://www.legislationnet.com) and on our YouTube channel Legally European. This way we are not only aiming to become present in their daily lives throughout the topics we discuss, but also motivate and invite these young professionals to see if their interest and wish are matching our purposes and mission.

Gradually, we are also introducing for the first time in the Western Balkan region the concept of motivation and coaching among lawyers, through the website [www.motivatinglawyers.com](http://www.motivatinglawyers.com) The idea is of course to attach these services to our organization in the near future and make it part of our mechanism towards achieving our goals, being confident that they will be well - received.

## FUNDING

### *4.1. Funding and projects*

European Legal seeks to reach its target and fulfil its goals mainly through funding opportunities. Participating in different projects that fit our agenda and mission and through contributions of donors and sponsors on national, regional and European level and other legal entities across the EU, is a great way to put our vision into practice.

Furthermore, the Network fulfils its mission through revenue generated by the assets from its activities, fees paid by legal activity participations of lawyers, donations or contributions by private or public entities. Any activity including the motivational speaking and coaching for lawyers and the income provided by their implementation in the Western Balkans is also be invested into expanding the services, pursuing the goals and fulfilling our mission as organization, all serving to the needs of the young professionals and early career lawyers in these countries.

### *4.2. Partners and sponsors*

In achieving our goals, we realise that working alone is not easy. Therefore, we strive to create collaborations and cooperation's with other organizations in the region and each one of the EU countries, as well as other entities that can bring us one step closer to our target. European Legal is at the same time aware that the quality of such cooperation work must be of a high level and quality and in line with its objectives and principles.

To meet all these objectives European Legal will continue to collaborate with partners and sponsors from each one of the countries we are established in, as well as with EU and governmental institutions as/if needed. Furthermore, conducting common projects with the academic world where the future young professionals will be informed and prepared for the next step in their career is an option we intend to apply.

## **FUTURE**

European Union integration is a very broad and complicated process that touches not upon one, not two countries but an entire region. And therefore, it is not easy process to generalize it in terms of needs, issues and gaps within the legal profession there. For us, professional integration is a multi-layered process, at the core of which sit high professional standards and values. European Legal was founded to give a chance to young professionals in these countries become part of the EU family with dignity and not as 'second handed citizens' and since the legal profession is a 'ideal oriented profession', that extends beyond the tasks and required professional values to practice such profession.

European Legal is daily working to put all its plans into practice. As we grow and improve, we keep introducing ideas and concepts that are innovative and might benefit young professionals as well as to the legal professionals. Such qualities as our signature, underline our uniqueness as a regional organization whose intentions are to promote innovation, cooperation and enthusiasm among lawyers, with the purpose of bringing benefits to their integration.

Establishing national law reviews and a legal regional magazine for young lawyers for the respective countries is a must in terms of the professional development but also a promotion of a reading culture among them. As we further continue to have these new tools implemented we are confident that European Legal will act not just as a networking platform among lawyers in the region but will grow to become a training academy for young professionals.

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