

ANNEX 1

to the Commission Implementing Decision on the financing of the multi-country multiannual action plan on an EU Civil Society Facility and Media Programme in favour of the Western Balkans and Turkey for 2021-2023

Action Document for “EU Civil Society Facility and Media Programme Multi-country 2021-2023”

1. SYNOPSIS

1.1. Action Summary Table

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| Title | EU Civil Society Facility and Media Programme - Multi-country for 2021-2023 Multi-country multi-annual action plan on an EU Civil Society Facility and Media Programme in favour of the Western Balkans and Turkey for 2021-2023 |
| CRIS/OPSYS number | IPA III/2021/043-102/01 |
| Basic Act | Financed under the Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance (IPA III) |
| Team Europe Initiative | No |
| Zone benefiting from the action | Western Balkans (Republic of Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo*, Montenegro, the Republic of North Macedonia, and the Republic of Serbia) and the Republic of Turkey |
| Programming document | IPA III Programming Framework |
| PRIORITY AREAS AND SECTOR INFORMATION | |
| Window and thematic priority | Mainly Window 1. Rule of law, fundamental rights and democracy Thematic Priority 5: Fundamental rights (with reference to media - freedom of expression) Thematic Priority 7: Civil Society (Partially Windows 2 and 3) |
| Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) | Main SDG (1 only): SDG 16: Peace and Justice Strong Institutions Other significant SDGs (up to 9) and where appropriate, targets: SDG 01: No Poverty SDG 05: Gender Equality SDG 08: Decent Work and Economic Growth SDG 10: Reduce Inequalities SDG 11: Sustainable cities and communities |
| DAC code(s) | 15150 Democratic participation and civil society – 50% 15153 Media and free flow of information – 50% |
| Main Delivery Channel | 20000 - Non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and civil society 41000 - United Nations agencies |

* 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.

| Markers (from DAC form) | General policy objective | Not targeted | Significant objective | Principal objective |
|--|--|-------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| | Participation development/good governance | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |
| | Aid to environment | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| | Gender equality and women's and girl's empowerment | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| | Trade development | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| | Reproductive, maternal, new-born and child health | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| | Disaster Risk Reduction | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| | Inclusion of persons with Disabilities | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| | Nutrition | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| | RIO Convention markers | Not targeted | Significant objective | Principal objective |
| | Biological diversity | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| | Combat desertification | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| | Climate change mitigation | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| | Climate change adaptation | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Internal markers | Policy objectives | Not targeted | Significant objective | Principal objective |
| | Digitalisation | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| | Migration | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| | COVID-19 | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| BUDGET INFORMATION | | | | |
| Amounts concerned | Budget line: 15.020101.01 Total estimated cost: EUR 99 650 000.00 Total amount of EU budget contribution EUR 93 750 000.00 The EU contribution is for an amount of EUR 39 500 000.00 from the general budget of the European Union for financial year 2021 and for an amount of EUR 12 000.000.00 from the general budget of the European Union for financial year 2022 and for an amount of EUR 42 250 000.00 from the general budget of the European Union for financial year 2023 , subject to the availability of appropriations for the respective financial years following the adoption of the relevant annual budget, or as provided for in the system of provisional twelfths. | | | |
| MANAGEMENT AND IMPLEMENTATION | | | | |
| Type of financing and method(s) of implementation | Project Modality Direct management through: - Grants - Procurement Indirect management with the entity(ies) to be selected in accordance with the criteria set out in section 4.2.3. Indirect management with United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO); United Nations Development Programme (UNDP); German | | | |

| | |
|--|--|
| | Corporation for International Cooperation (GIZ). |
| Relevant priorities and flagships from Economic and Investment Plan for the Western Balkans | Priorities: “Green Agenda”, “Digital Transition”, “Innovation Agenda”, “Human Capital Development”, “Governance, Rule of Law” |
| Final date for concluding contribution / delegation agreements, procurement and grant contracts | For 2021 Budget: At the latest by 31 December 2022 For 2022 Budget: At the latest by 31 December 2023 For 2023 Budget: At the latest by 31 December 2024 |
| Indicative operational implementation period | 72 months following the adoption of the Financing Decision |

1.2. Summary of the Action

In a vision of enhanced regional cooperation, the overall objective of the Action is to strengthen participatory democracies and the EU integration and approximation process in the Western Balkans and Turkey, through a strengthened contribution by civil society and media.

To this end, a variety of activities are foreseen:

- Support to large and small CSO regional networks’ and their capacities and engagement opportunities in policy- and decision making across various thematic areas, including those addressed by the Economic Investment Plan;
- Capacity-building of CSOs’ in crosscutting and thematic areas; support to governments’ provision of an conducive environment for CSOs activities; and a People-to-People programme allowing CSOs in the region to expand their knowledge about the EU and the accession process, and an opportunity to network internationally and regionally;
- Support for improved cooperation between civil society and local authorities, in particular enhancing transparency and impact of local level funding for CSOs;
- Support to Media Information Literacy and media self-regulation; and support to enhanced professional capacity of journalists, media outlets and media institutions
- Support for the economic sustainability of independent media; and support for media initiatives, grass-roots and community based organisations, activists and emerging actors in the region

2. RATIONALE

2.1. Context Analysis

The IPA III Programming framework considers the support to civil society and media as one of the priorities to improve democracy and rule of law. It calls, inter alia for “*particular focus (...) to safeguard the freedom of expression and independence of media as pillars of democracy*”. Gender mainstreaming is relevant across all the windows of the IPA III framework.

The Action will primarily contribute to

Window 1: Rule of law, fundamental rights and democracy:

- **Thematic Priority 5:** Fundamental rights (with reference to media- freedom of expression) mentions that
- **Thematic Priority 7:** Civil Society.

Detailed context analysis by IPA beneficiary is provided in each individual Action Document annexed to the Commission implementing decision (Annex 2 – Annex 8).

2.2. Problem analysis by areas of support

Area of support 1: Civil society and local democracy

An active civil society is a critical component of democratic systems and an important player in reform processes taking place in the Western Balkans and Turkey. An empowered and active civil society is an essential component of any democracy. Civil society organisations (CSOs) can contribute to address many societal challenges, by engaging in policy debates, proposing innovative, sustainable and inclusive solutions and monitoring the results of reform processes at beneficiary, regional and local level.

The 2020 Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions “**Enhancing the accession process - A credible EU perspective for the Western Balkans**” spells out that “*a core objective of the European Union’s engagement with the Western Balkans is to prepare them to meet all the requirements of membership. This includes supporting fundamental democratic, rule of law and economic reforms and alignment with core European values. This will in turn foster solid and accelerated economic growth and social convergence*”¹.

In its **2021 Communication on the Enlargement Strategy**², the European Commission notes that “*Fundamental rights are largely enshrined in the legislation in the Western Balkans but challenges remain in ensuring their effective implementation. Fundamental rights protection by the courts remains insufficient in a number of policy areas. The concerns and recommendations of the previous Commission reports have only been addressed to a limited degree. Overall, there have been limited developments or even stagnation in this area in most of the region.*” It also notes that “*In Turkey, the human rights situation deteriorated further and remains a serious concern.*”

The 2018 Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions on “**A credible enlargement perspective for and enhanced EU engagement with the Western Balkans**”³ (hereafter the Western Balkan Strategy) reconfirms the importance that civil society plays in the enlargement process in the Western Balkans. It underlines in particular the importance of the enabling environment, the need for inclusive structured dialogue between civil society and governments on reform priorities, the empowerment of the civil society, and the inclusion of citizens more broadly.

Additionally, an active civil society relies on active citizens. However, as indicated in the Balkan Barometer 2020⁴, the large majority of citizens in the Western Balkans do not get involved in government affairs.

¹ COM(2020) 57 final. Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions “Enhancing the accession process - A credible EU perspective for the Western Balkans”, Brussels, 5.2.2020

² COM (2021) 644. Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions. “2021 Communication on EU enlargement policy”

³ COM(2018) 65 final. Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions: A credible enlargement perspective for and enhanced EU engagement with the Western Balkans

⁴ <https://www.rcc.int/balkanbarometer/publications>

Local governments across the Western Balkans region provide sizeable public funding to CSOs but they generally face transparency and accountability challenges. Public funding criteria are often questioned, reporting by CSOs on received funding is inadequate, monitoring of awarded funds is not performed, and effects are not measured.

Area of support 2: Media

A free and pluralistic media serves to reveal the multifaceted nature of society and promotes dialogue and tolerance. Critical scrutiny by independent media of the political processes guarantees their transparency and ensures that governments adhere to predictable policies – free from the interests of narrow pressure groups.

The Western Balkans Strategy points to extensive political interference in and control of the media in the region, and underlines the need to safeguard the freedom of expression and independence of media as a pillar of democracy. The **2021 EU Enlargement Communication**⁵ underlines that *“Freedom of expression, media freedom and pluralism are key pillars of a democratic society and must be upheld. In the Western Balkans, there was limited or no progress overall in this regard. Although the media landscape generally allows for freedom of expression, threats, intimidation and violence against journalists as well as derogatory remarks by public officials, continue to cause serious concern. [...]The independence of media regulators and public broadcasters needs to be guaranteed, including through adequate funding and merit-based appointments in management structures. The effective functioning of independent self-regulatory bodies also needs to be further supported. All countries in the region need to increase transparency on media funding and on links between public and private interests that influence editorial lines and lead to self-censorship.”*

Across the world, rapid technological development and the changes in the media consumer behaviour challenges commercial viability of professional journalism. This risk to democracy is also recognised at the EU level, as shown in the recently adopted **European Democracy Action Plan (EDAP)**⁶. To support the implementation, and complement the EDAP, a *Media and Audiovisual Action Plan*⁷ sets out a vision on how to support the transformation of media sector and project it into digital future, notably also by innovative use of EU funding instruments.

As pointed out in the abovementioned EU Enlargement Communication, both civil society and media have important roles to play in promoting confidence building and good neighbourly relations.

The **Economic Investment Plan for the Western Balkans**⁸ mentions, inter alia, that *the rule of law and respect for fundamental rights, functioning of democratic institutions and public administration are not only at the heart of the accession process, but also the main engines for the economic recovery of the region and enhancing resilience to potential future crises and economic shocks. Respect for the rule of law is also necessary to protect EU funds, and ensure that they are used to support the development of the Western Balkans.*

Finally, the proposed action take due account of the relevant macro-regional and sea basin strategies and Interreg IPA programmes, and will contribute to their purposes.

2.3. Relevance and complementarity with strategies supported by key stakeholders

The EU support to civil society within the Enlargement policy will focus on enabling and stimulating participatory democracy and will aim at the following outcomes, in line with the Guidelines for EU support to CSOs in the enlargement region⁹ :

- **A conducive environment for civil society to carry out its activities is implemented**
- **Cooperation between CSOs and IPA beneficiary authorities/institutions is strengthened**

⁵ COM (2021) 644. Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions. “2021 Communication on EU enlargement policy”

⁶ COM(2020) 790 final; https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip_20_2250.

⁷ COM(2020) 784 final; https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/IP_20_2239

⁸ COM(2020) 641 final. Communication on the Economic and investment plan; https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/sites/near/files/communication_on_wb_economic_and_investment_plan_october_2020_en.pdf

⁹ Guidelines for EU support to Civil Society and Media in the enlargement region were in place for the period 2014-2020, and are currently being updated for the period 2021-2027. The actions under the 2021 -2023 CSF are aligned with these documents.

- **CSO capacity and resilience to carry out their activities effectively are reinforced**

These areas of interventions and foreseen results have been designed in a participatory way, with the active involvement of decision makers and CSOs from the Western Balkans and Turkey and are being articulated both at regional and central level. Decision makers in the IPA III beneficiaries shall reflect these Guidelines in their central and local strategies for boosting an enabling environment for CSOs and their cooperation with the CSOs. On the other hand, CSOs from the enlargement region will be cooperating with the EU to monitor the implementation of the Guidelines.

This Action embeds relevant areas of interventions and results of the EU Guidelines for CSOs in the Western Balkans and Turkey.

The EU support to media within the enlargement policy, as described in the Guidelines for EU support to media freedom and media integrity aim to reach the following outcomes:

- **A conducive environment for free expression in media is in place and implemented**
- **Capacities of media outlets for better production, business performance and internal governance improved**
- **Capacity and representativeness of journalist professional organisations strengthened**

2.4. Relevance and complementarity with EU policy and EU and other donors' assistance

The IPA III Programming framework considers the support to civil society and media one of the priorities to improve democracy and rule of law.

The way in which IPA beneficiaries address these issues is a core aspect under the political criteria, on which the Commission elaborates in the context of the annual enlargement package of reports. It is therefore also addressed in the context of accession negotiations, including in the fundamentals cluster of the revised enlargement methodology adopted in 2020 .

The priorities for support to CSOs and media freedom for 2021 - 2027 are guided by two sets of Guidelines. The two documents were prepared through wide consultation with governments, civil society, media and International Organisations within the region and beyond. The guidelines translate the political objectives of the Commission as indicated in the IPA III Programming Framework and in the Enlargement packages into a concrete results' framework with outcomes and indicators

The **2020 Economic and Investment Plan for the Western Balkans** (EIP) emphasizes that *“The rule of law and respect for fundamental rights, functioning of democratic institutions and public administration are not only at the heart of the accession process, but also the main engines for the economic recovery of the region and enhancing resilience to potential future crises and economic shocks. Respect for the rule of law is also necessary to protect EU funds, and ensure that they are used to support the development of the Western Balkans.”* The proposed action would also support the implementation of the EIP priorities related to investing in the digital future, and investing in human capital.

2.5. Lessons learned and links with previous financial assistance

Civil Society

The Civil Society Facility and Media Programme offers a single window of support to civil society and media freedom, bringing together EU support at bilateral and regional level. Under IPA II, a mid-term evaluation of the Civil Society Facility¹⁰ was conducted in 2017. It found that the CSF effectively contributes to addressing the needs and priorities of civil society in the region. However, it also indicated that real cooperation between the central level and civil society remains weak and that the creation of an enabling environment is one of the critical areas that has to be

¹⁰ Mid-term Evaluation of the Civil Society Facility for the Western Balkans and Turkey, Contract N°2016/380154/1. FWC BENEFICIARIES 2013 – LOT 7: GOVERNANCE AND HOME AFFAIRS EuropeAid/132633/C/SER/multi

improved.

Coordination between regional and bilateral level support activities is ensured through the CSF single programming exercise, and through regular exchanges between the relevant stakeholders. Importantly, efforts continue to be taken to complement the financial support to CSO and media actors with direct EU engagement with civil society, through mainstreaming, yearly monitoring meetings and consultations at bilateral level.

Local democracy, civic activism and youth engagement

Robust progress has been made across the Western Balkans region to advance transparent funding of CSOs by local governments through the first two phases of the EU-funded ReLOaD¹¹ program. The program supported successful partnerships with more than 50, or around 10% of the local governments of the region, reinforced by the advancement of regulatory framework. However, the proper implementation of the new standards and best practices of transparency and accountability continue to be challenged by capacities of local authorities and CSOs that remain inadequate, the need for deeper mutual trust and understanding of cooperation benefits, as well as overcoming obstacles related to local political dynamics and affiliations.

Media

One of the key recommendation of the 2019 edition of the annual EU-Western Balkans Media Days was the need to provide more targeted direct support to independent media outlets. Additionally, the Study on the sustainability of professional journalism in the media business environment of the Western Balkans (2019-2020) found that the assistance to independent media should back the development of the capacities of media outlets to efficiently manage the organisation in terms of human resources, business development and new production formats and tools.

The decision to support the expansion of the work of the European Endowment for Democracy (EED) to the Western Balkans and Turkey as of 2018 was highly welcomed by civil society and media actors, in the context of an increasingly fragile and complex environment. The EED demonstrated its capacity to provide financial support to activists, small-scale media outlets and CSOs who cannot benefit from other financial support from the donor community due to the restrictive legal environment, or due to their size and/or legal status (e.g. non-registered entities or individuals). The mid-term Results-Oriented Monitoring exercise carried out in 2019 showed that EED was able to deliver much needed funding that responded to emerging and urgent needs of CSOs, media, activists, academics, etc. in complement with the existing EU civil society and media support programmes.

3. DESCRIPTION OF THE ACTION

3.1. Planned results and intervention logic

By provision of the support indicated in section 3.2, it is expected that the following outputs will materialise: Strengthened CSO capacities and engagement opportunities in policy- and decision making across various thematic areas, including those addressed by the Economic Investment Plan; More capable, transparent, effective and accountable CSOs; Improved systemic conditions for Media Information Literacy, media integrity, and performance of public interest journalism; and Enhanced professional capacity of journalists, media outlets and media institutions to exercise the right to freedom of expression, access to information and to strengthen pluralism; Increased capacity of journalist professional organisations and networks. This in turn will help reach the outcomes, and ultimately the overall objective.

3.2. Indicative type of activities

Output 1 *Strengthened CSO capacities and engagement opportunities in policy- and decision making across various thematic areas, including those addressed by the Economic Investment Plan* and Output 2 *More capable, effective, transparent and accountable CSOs (related to Outcomes 1, 2 and 3)*

- **Activity 1a: Support to regional thematic networks of CSOs** operating in the Western Balkans and Turkey and **activity 1b Follow-up of support to regional thematic networks of CSOs** operating in the Western Balkans and Turkey.

¹¹ Regional Programme on Local Democracy in the Western Balkans

In an overall vision of enhanced regional cooperation, these activities will support regional thematic CSO networks active in various fields to strengthen their capacities to contribute to the decision making process and to a sustainable and inclusive socio-economic development at beneficiary and regional level. Likewise, the established partnerships between the European Commission and the civil society organisations will help achieving the objectives of the Guidelines for EU support to civil society organisations in the enlargement region 2021-2027. In particular, the activities will help an enabling environment for CSOs where their rights are recognised by the IPA III beneficiaries and are enforced (Outcome 1). Additionally thanks to these activities strengthened and empowered civil society organisations will be able to increase their participation in tackling various thematic societal challenges, thus improving the effectiveness of their activities and strengthening their partnership with public authorities and decision-makers (Outcome 2), including on enhancing IPA III beneficiaries' financial and non financial support to CSOs (Outcome 3). This will help to strengthen participatory democracies and the EU approximation process in the Western Balkans and Turkey (Impact).

- **Activity 2: Support to small scale projects in support of good neighbourly relations between Serbia and Kosovo.**

This activity will be implemented as part of activity 1a and will support grass root level actions in the selected region. Financed actions will support CSOs and local authorities in Serbia and Kosovo in tackling common cross-border challenges. This will increase their participation and free expression in the democratic arena (Outcome 1) and in tackling various thematic societal challenges and improve their effectiveness and strengthen their role in the decision making process (Outcome 2). The activity will contribute to the normalisation of relations between the two IPA beneficiaries with a bottom-up approach and to strengthening participatory democracies and the EU approximation process in the Western Balkans (Impact).

- **Activity 3: Provision of regional technical assistance to CSOs (TACSO).**

This activity will enhance civil society capacity in cross-cutting themes such as resilience, management and organisation and thematic sector specific capacity building. Additionally this activity will support a People-to-People programme which offers the opportunity for CSOs in the region to expand their knowledge about the EU and the accession process, as well as the opportunity to network internationally and regionally. The support will improve the ability of CSOs to advocate for their rights and support IPA III beneficiaries in complying and respecting international and domestic standards for an enabling environment (Outcomes 1 and 3). Additionally the activity will boost CSOs' capacities and increase their participation in tackling various thematic societal challenges, improve the effectiveness of their activities and their partnership with IPA beneficiaries' decision makers (Outcome 2). Thus the activity contributes to the achievement of the Impact of the Action.

Output 2: More capable, effective, transparent and accountable CSOs (related to Outcomes 1, 2 and 3)

- **Activity 4: Support to local democracy** (follow up to ReLOaD phase II).

The activity will consolidate the achievements of two previous phases of the ReLOaD programme, implemented by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and focussed on improving the cooperation between civil society and local authorities, in particular enhancing transparent funding of CSOs by local governments.

As in previous phases, the programme will support partner municipalities across the targeted IPA II beneficiaries to institutionalise a transparent and quality-driven process of selecting, financing and monitoring CSO projects at local level. This will be coupled with capacity building for CSOs to be able to take advantage of funding opportunities. Assistance to improving the regulatory framework on a central level will also be provided, adjusted to the specific IPA beneficiary contexts. The activity will include financial support to third parties to incentivize the implementation of CSO-led initiatives at the local level, including, where relevant, women's rights, youth and/or environmental protection organisations. It should include, but not be limited to, training and mentoring support to foster implementation capacities of the local CSOs. Funded projects will directly contribute to legitimate local needs and local development priorities, creating the foundation for effective partnership and dialogue with civil society.

The programme will further engage local governments and CSOs in supporting youth skills development and fostering youth participation in decision-making and community development, as well as improving youth employment outcomes. Local governments and CSOs will also be supported to advance environmental protection initiatives and address other high-priority issues in their communities. The support will enable CSOs to increase their participation in tackling various thematic societal challenges and thus the activity contributes to Outcome 2,

and will contribute to make public financial and non-financial support to CSOs available in IPA beneficiaries, and provided in a transparent, accountable, fair and non-discriminatory manner (Outcome 3) and to the achievement of the Impact of the Action.

Activity 5: Support to small scale regional cooperation projects via the Western Balkans Fund.

In line with the Western Balkan Strategy's focus on good neighbourly relations, this activity will be implemented through support to the Western Balkans Fund. The support will serve to co-finance the WBF calls for proposals for regional projects involving grass-roots CSOs and local authorities from a minimum of three IPA beneficiaries. The support will enable CSOs to increase their participation in tackling various thematic societal challenges and thus the activity contributes to Outcome 2 and to the achievement of the Impact of the Action.

Output 3 (related to Outcome 4) *Improved systemic conditions for Media Information Literacy, media integrity, and performance of public interest journalism*

- **Activity 6: Support to Media Information Literacy and media self-regulation.**

The activity will be a continuation of a long-term engagement with UNESCO, and will further the results previously achieved in promoting the introduction of Media Information Literacy (MIL) in IPA beneficiaries' education and schools in order to help and encourage different social groups – and particularly youth and people living in rural areas – in identifying disinformation. The activities will be based on the outcomes of the current EU-UNESCO partnership and consultations in the region. The initiative will also seek to improve the capacities of independent media committed to uphold professional standards in the context of increasing disinformation/misinformation. It will thus continue to foster the development of media self-regulatory mechanisms present in the region such as press councils, as well as support innovative ideas to advance professional journalism. Through these activities, the action will contribute to a series of improvements which in turn will contribute to Outcome 2 and to the achievement of the Impact of the Action.

- **Activity 7: Support to Public Service Journalism in the Western Balkans .**

In continuation of previous work to provide technical assistance to public service media in the region, this activity will seek to improve the systemic conditions and capacity of public service media and other entities carrying out public service journalism in the Western Balkans. Support will assist them to better their institutional performance, address the needs of their audiences in an accountable and responsive manner, as well as ensure a pluralistic, balanced and high-quality programming. Through these activities, the action will contribute to a series of improvements of the systemic conditions affecting the public service, which in turn will contribute to Outcome 4 and to the achievement of the Impact of the Action.

Output 4 (related to Outcome 4) *Enhanced professional capacity of journalists, media outlets and media institutions to exercise the right to freedom of expression, access to information and to strengthen pluralism*

- **Activity 8: Quality Journalism initiative – Call for proposals (as part of the larger media/Civil Society call)**

The action will provide structural support to media freedom and media integrity in the Western Balkans and Turkey. It will aim to enhance media trust among citizens and create a safe environment for journalists to produce independent news content through trainings, mentoring, technical and financial support, publishing and recognizing best examples of high quality journalism. It is expected to be implemented by an organisation or a network of organisations from the region identified via a call for proposals. Through these activities, the action will contribute to a series of improvements which in turn will contribute to Outcome 4 and to the achievement of the Impact of the Action.

- **Activity 9: Support for the economic sustainability of independent media.**

This initiative aims to enable a range of independent media outlets in the region to improve their economic sustainability and adapt to the changing global and local media landscape. It will provide a combination of

technical assistance and grants to selected independent media outlets in the Western Balkans region, and possibly other business support instruments. Focus areas could include the development organisational capacities of media outlets; digital modernisation; working with advertisement in the new media environment; generating alternative sources of revenue; undertaking reorganisation and business development; improving human resources and talent management; maintaining the engagement of male and female audiences; strengthening their ability to counter disinformation and produce high quality and ethical media products, and, ultimately, better perform their public information function. The activity will also raise awareness and build the capacities of media to promote gender equality, avoid gender stereotypes and cover gender-based violence in an appropriate manner. Through these activities, the action will contribute to a series of improvements which in turn will contribute to Outcome 4 and to the achievement of the Impact of the Action.

- **Activity 10: Support via the European Endowment for Democracy (EED) for media initiatives, grass-roots and community based organisations, activists and emerging actors in the Western Balkans and Turkey.**

Activity 10a: Support via the EED for media initiatives, grass-roots and community based organisations, activists and emerging actors in the Western Balkans and Turkey

Activity 10b: Follow-up support via the EED for media initiatives, grass-roots and community based organisations, activists and emerging actors in the Western Balkans and Turkey

Activity 10c: Operating support to EED for year 2023 to accompany the financial support to grass-roots and community based organisations, activists and emerging actors, as well as to independent mission media actors in the Western Balkans and Turkey

Activity 10d: Operating support to EED for year 2024 to accompany the financial support to grass-roots and community based organisations, activists and emerging actors, as well as to independent mission media actors in the Western Balkans and Turkey

Activity 10e: Operating support to EED for year 2025 to accompany the financial support to grass-roots and community based organisations, activists and emerging actors, as well as to independent mission media actors in the Western Balkans and Turkey

These activities foresee financial and technical support to media initiatives, grass-roots and community based organisations, activists and emerging actors, as well as to independent mission media actors in the Western Balkans and Turkey.

They will seek to empower independent mission media outlets, including bloggers and emerging media actors, in particular small ones, as well as pro-democracy grass-roots and community based organisations, activists and emerging actors, including individuals, and including small scale and emerging unregistered actors in sensitive environments;

These actions will be implemented by the European Endowment for Democracy (EED). The EU financial contribution will cover both direct support to target groups through financial support to third parties (via two action grants awarded directly to EED), and EED’s operating costs for 2023, 2024, and 2025.

The operating support will contribute to the functioning of the EED and implementation of other activities that the EED performs as part of its mandate: seminars, studies, conferences, publications, networking events, workshops, training and visibility activities, capacity building for beneficiaries etc..

Some of the allocations will be specifically earmarked for specific IPA beneficiaries (TK, SRB, MNE)

Output 5 (related to Outcome 4). Increased capacity of journalist and/or professional organisations and networks

- **Activity 11a: Support to Regional CSOs networks promoting media freedom and freedom of expression** (as part of a larger CSF regional call).
- **Activity 11b: Follow up support to Regional CSOs networks promoting media freedom and freedom of expression**

3.3. Risks and assumptions

| Risks | Risk level (H/M/L) | Mitigating measures |
|--|--------------------|--|
| Risk 1 Political instability/lack of political will | M | - Regular inclusive and evidence-based regional political dialogue with the parties concerned; |

| | | |
|--|----------|---|
| | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Continuous monitoring of progress achieved in order to adapt the approach of the action during the implementation phase; - Steering Committees to be set up for the different initiatives established through the action will review information at beneficiary level to assess the potential impact on implementation and suggest further mitigation measures, as required. |
| Risk 2 Lack of cooperation among CSOs and Intitutions | L | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Link projects activities to monitoring and evaluation plan and a risk management plan, to assess the potential impact on implementation and suggest further mitigation measures, as required. - Work on regularise inclusive and evidence-based regional political dialogue with the parties concerned; - Make clear and tangible link of the action to the EU Agenda commitments in the Region |
| Assumptions | | |
| <p>The most significant conditions for implementation of the action are in place because all IPA III beneficiaries have a legal framework ensuring that the exercise of the freedom of association and expression is formally guaranteed, although there are issues of different degrees of seriousness in the implementation of that legal framework. In those cases where the legal framework does not fully guarantee freedom of association and expression, the assumption is that the situation as regards the exercise of fundamental rights will not further deteriorate.</p> | | |

3.4. Mainstreaming

How does this Action contribute to Gender Equality and Women's and Girls' Empowerment (in line with the EU gender equality strategy 2020-2025)?

Gender Equality and Women's and Girls' Empowerment will be promoted throughout the implementation of the action. Gender equality will be explicitly and consistently addressed and gender mainstreaming will be promoted. In particular, attention will be given to mainstreaming the gender perspective, including through use of gender analysis, during the execution of the support to third parties implemented by EED and the WBF and in the support to local public funding of CSOs in cooperation with UNDP. The role of media in gender awareness will also be explored.

How does this Action address Environment and Climate change?

Specific consideration will be granted to the environmental CSOs and to the environmental impact of small scale proposals in the definition of priority areas and in the evaluation of the Calls for proposals launched to provide financial support to third parties foreseen in the different components of the action.

How does this Action address the Rights Based Approach?

This action will be implemented in a non-discriminatory manner and according to equal opportunities principles that guarantee that no distinctions will be made on the basis of race, ethnicity, religion, sexuality, ability or other possible grounds in any aspect.

How does this Action promote the systematic engagement with Civil Society?

By definition, this action is aiming to improve the enabling environment for active citizenship and to strengthen the capacity of organised active citizens and has been designed based on inputs provided by activists and CSO representatives during several consultation processes.

Intervening in different specific frameworks and sectors, this action is broadly aimed at strengthening the role and participation of civil society in policy and decision-making processes through an improved dialogue with all level of governance.

Others (such as Resilience and Conflict Sensitivity, Roma, people with disabilities and other vulnerable groups)

The involvement of minorities and vulnerable groups, and reconciliation are at the very heart of the action, in particular under activities 1a, 1b, 2, 4 and activities under outcome 3 - Gender Action - will include women from vulnerable and marginalised groups.

Through its different components, the action encourages the involvement of vulnerable population and minorities, and the development and mainstreaming of adequate community-based tailored social services implemented by civil society. Although local priorities are detected by the stakeholders in local communities, social inclusion and issues of minorities and vulnerable groups are always given special attention.

3.5. Conditions for implementation

The most significant conditions for implementation of the action are in place. All IPA III beneficiaries have a legal framework ensuring that the exercise of the freedom of association and expression is formally guaranteed, although there are issues of different degrees of seriousness in the implementation of that legal framework. In those cases where the legal framework does not fully guarantee freedom of association and expression, the condition is that the situation as regards the exercise of fundamental rights will not further deteriorate.

3.6. Logical Framework

| Results | Results chain: Main expected results (maximum 10) | Indicators (at least one indicator per expected result) | Baselines (year) | Targets (year) | Sources of data (1 per indicator) | Assumptions |
|------------------|---|--|--|--|--|----------------|
| Impact | In an overall vision of regional integration, to strengthen participatory democracies and the EU approximation process in the Western Balkans and Turkey through a strengthened contribution by civil society and media. | Various indicators are used in different IPA Beneficiaries: i) Beneficiary ranking according to the Bertelsmann Transformation Index (BTI) (Ranking) ii) Beneficiary ranking according to the Freedom House iii) Quality of structures and mechanisms in place for cooperation between CSOs/media and public Institutions iv) Civil Society Participation Index | Baselines are identified in the bilateral Action Documents (Annexes 2 to 8) | Targets are identified in the bilateral Action Documents (Annexes 2 to 8) | BTI Transformation Index 2020 Annual reports published by Freedom House Independent assessments by International Organisations and CSOs World Bank | Not applicable |
| Outcome 1 | A Conducive Environment for Civil Society is implemented. Specifically: All individuals and legal entities in the enlargement region can establish, join and participate in non-formal and/or registered organisations, can assemble peacefully and can express themselves freely | Number of cases of infringement of basic constitutional rights of individuals to express freely, to assemble, to join and/or participate in non-formal and/or registered organisation, and of these, the number of cases duly investigated and sanctioned (disaggregated to show human rights defender cases) by IPA beneficiary Number of cases of grave violation or infringement of the freedom of association, assembly and expression in practice by IPA beneficiary | Relevant baseline values will be identified in the EU Civil Society Guidelines 2021 Assessment Report. | Relevant targets will be identified at bilateral level, following rollouts of the revised Civil Society Guidelines | EU TACSO 3 EU CS Guidelines Assessment Report Annual courts statistics Reports by international, regional and beneficiary human rights bodies and organisations European Court for Human Rights judgments | |

| | | Status of the adoption and implementation of relevant legislation, by IPA beneficiary. | | | | |
|------------------|--|---|--|--|---|--|
| Outcome 2 | Cooperation between CSOs and IPA beneficiary authorities/ institutions is strengthened and CSO capacity and resilience are reinforced | Extent to which laws/bylaws, strategies, other acts of public interest and policy reforms are effectively*consulted with CSOs | Relevant baseline values will be identified in the EU Civil Society Guidelines 2021 Assessment Report. | Relevant targets will be identified at bilateral level, following rollouts of the revised Civil Society Guidelines | EU TACSO 3 EU CS Guidelines Assessment Report Annual reports on public consultations WeBER report (CSOs inclusion in PAR) - Western Balkan PAR Monitor Annual implementation reports of PAR strategies (prepared by the IPA beneficiaries themselves) as well as the Commission's and SIGMA's assessment of PAR implementation | |
| Outcome 3 | A Conducive Environment for Civil Society is implemented. Specifically Public financial and non-financial support to CSOs is available in IPA beneficiaries, and provided in a transparent, accountable, fair and non-discriminatory manner. | CSO's perception of the provision of funds in terms of transparency, fairness and non-discrimination | Relevant baseline values will be identified in the EU Civil Society Guidelines 2021 Assessment Report. | Relevant targets will be identified at bilateral level, following rollouts of the revised Civil Society Guidelines | EU TACSO 3 EU Civil Society Guidelines Assessment Report Project Final Report Annual reports on public funding (if existing) Final account of the beneficiary budget | |
| Outcome 4 | An enabling environment for free expression of media fostered | Existence of freedom of expression and media freedom,(Qualitative) | Relevant baseline values will be identified in the upcoming EU Media Support Guidelines (2021-2027) Assessment | Relevant targets will be identified at bilateral level, following rollouts of the revised EU Media Support | Periodic reports assessing progress under the upcoming EU Media Support Guidelines (2021 – 2027) Reporters without Borders World Press Freedom Index https://rsf.org/en/ranking | |

| | | | Report. | Guidelines (2021-2027) | |
|--|--|---|--|---|---|
| Output 1 related to outcomes 1, 2 and 3 | Strengthened CSO capacities and engagement opportunities in policy- and decision making across various thematic areas, including those addressed by the Economic Investment Plan | <p>Number CSOs initiatives engaging with selected thematic areas</p> <p>Number of CSOs taking part in local, central, regional and international networks and</p> <p>number cases of cross-sectoral partnerships (academia, private sector)</p> | <p>Relevant baseline values will be identified in the EU Civil Society Guidelines 2021 Assessment Report.</p> <p>General situation in 2020: Networking is a common practice in all IPA beneficiaries. Number of networks (2020): AL: approx 27 BiH: approx 20 XK: approx. 70 MNE: 269 MKD: N/A (69-2018) RS: N/A TR: N/A (,247 federations and 103 confederations-2018</p> | <p>Relevant targets will be identified at bilateral level, following rollouts of the revised Civil Society Guidelines</p> | <p>EU TACSO 3 EU Civil Society Guidelines Assessment Report</p> <p>EU TACSO 3 Mapping and Needs Assessment of the Regional Networks and Regional Projects Funded within Civil Society Facility in the Western Balkans and Turkey</p> <p>Project Reports</p> |
| Output 2 related to outcomes 1, 2 and 3 | More capable, effective, transparent | Number of CSO initiatives supported by local governments to | Baseline values will be | Additional 300 CSO | Project Reports |

| | | | | | | |
|--|---|--|--|---|---|---|
| | and accountable CSOs | address local community needs (disaggregated by thematic: e.g. youth, gender-responsive, environment, etc.) | identified at the beginning of the relevant Action. | initiatives (2028) | | |
| Output 3 (related to outcome 4) | Improved systemic conditions for Media Information Literacy, media integrity, and performance of public interest journalism | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Presence of representative self-regulatory bodies and effectiveness of their action - Presence of effective Media Information Literacy initiatives - Public Service Media and other media institutions provide improved public interest journalism services to their audience in an independent and accountable manner | Relevant baseline values will be identified in the upcoming EU Media Support Guidelines (2021-2027) Assessment Report. | Relevant targets will be identified at bilateral level, following rollouts of the revised EU Media Support Guidelines (2021-2027) | EU TACSO 3 EU Civil Society Guidelines Assessment Report Project Reports | Institutional actors and operating environment allow media outlets to use the acquired capacities and resources to improve their economic outlook and provide high quality journalism |
| Output 4 (related to outcome 4) | Enhanced professional capacity of journalists, media outlets and media institutions to exercise the right to freedom of expression, access to information and to strengthen pluralism | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Number of innovative media initiatives supported through sub-granting schemes; - Number of supported media outlets with an improved economic performance; - Number of supported media outlets with improved capacity to provide high quality content, including from a gender perspective, and reach their audience | 0 (relative baseline) | Additional 100 (2027) | Project Reports | |

| | | | | | | |
|--|--|--|-----------------------|----------------------|-----------------|--|
| | | Number of high quality/investigative journalism initiatives realised as a result of EU support | | | | |
| Output 5 (related to outcome 4) | Increased capacity of journalist professional organisations and networks | Number of initiatives by journalist professional organisations implemented, including in relation to safety of journalists | 0 (relative baseline) | 4 initiatives (2025) | Project Reports | |

4. IMPLEMENTATION ARRANGEMENTS

4.1. Financing agreement

In order to implement this action, it is not foreseen to conclude a financing agreement with the partner countries

4.2. Implementation modalities

The Commission will ensure that the EU appropriate rules and procedures for providing financing to third parties are respected, including review procedures, where appropriate, and compliance of the action with EU restrictive measures¹².

4.2.1. Direct Management (Grants)

1. Grants: Activity 1a - Support to regional thematic networks of CSOs in the Western Balkans and Turkey and **Activity 1b** - Follow-up of support to regional thematic networks of CSOs in the Western Balkans and Turkey

(a) Purpose of the grants: Activities 1a Regional thematic networks of CSOs and 1b Follow-up of regional thematic networks of CSOs will contribute to achieve Output 1 and Outcome 1,2 and 3

(b) Type of applicants (i.e. lead applicants and co-applicants) targeted:

- be a legal person and
- be a civil society organisation, or a consortium of civil society organisations, and/or
- be social enterprises

2. Grants: Activity 2 - Support to small scale projects in support of good neighbourly relations between Serbia and Kosovo

a) Purpose of the grants: Activity 2 will contribute to achieve Output 1 and Outcomes 1 and 2.

b) Type of applicants targeted:

- be a legal person and
- be a civil society organisation, or a consortium of civil society organisations; or
- be a local authority.

3. Grants: Activity 5 - Support to small scale regional cooperation in the Western Balkans

a) Purpose of the grants: Activity 5 will contribute to achieve Output 1 and Outcome 2.

c) Justification of a direct grant

Under the responsibility of the Commission's authorising officer responsible, the grant may be awarded without a call for proposals to the Western Balkans Fund. The recourse to an award of a grant without a call for proposals is justified because, in accordance with Article 195 (1) (f) of the Financial Regulation (EU, Euratom) 2018/1046, WBF provides an unique combination of ownership by all the Western Balkans IPA beneficiaries; its mandate to promote regional cooperation; and its focus on providing financial support to grass-roots CSOs and local public authorities, two characteristics which together place the organisation in a position not matched by any other in the region. The establishment of the WBF is considered as a clear sign of a new cooperation spirit taking roots in the Western Balkans at the highest institutional level. The Agreement for the creation of WBF was indeed signed by the Ministers of Foreign Affairs of the six Western Balkans IPA beneficiaries in November 2015 and the WBF became operational in October 2017, after the conclusion of the ratification procedures by all six Parliaments of its constitutive members. The latter equally finance the WBF.

The WBF aims to promote cooperation and common values between local authorities, citizens, and civil society organisations and people to people contacts, by providing funding for small- sized regional projects among local authorities and civil society organisations, in the following key areas:1) sustainable economic

¹² www.sanctionsmap.eu Please note that the sanctions map is an IT tool for identifying the sanctions regimes. The source of the sanctions stems from legal acts published in the Official Journal (OJ). In case of discrepancy between the published legal acts and the updates on the website it is the OJ version that prevails.

development; 2) education exchange and cooperation and 3) cultural cooperation. Youth, cross-border cooperation, European integration and gender are overarching issues, covering all WBF areas of cooperation. The regional and small-size nature of projects funded by the WBF make its activities complementary to the larger-sized regional projects normally financed by the EU in the Western Balkans for civil society organisations and local authorities. Thus it would enable grass-roots organisations and local authorities directly benefitting from EU support and the IPA beneficiaries to stay further engaged in the conducive environment for civil society and regional cooperation.

The WBF possesses the necessary technical competence and the capacity to conduct the proposed calls for proposals due to its previous documented activities. As explained in the previous para, the fact that the organisation is owned and governed by all the Western Balkans IPA beneficiaries places it in a unique position to be able to promote regional cooperation. The type of activities proposed under Activity 5 are closely linked to the WBF mandate to advance regional cooperation and thus fall outside the scope of a call for proposals.

4. Grants: Activity 8 - Quality Journalism initiative

a) Purpose of the grants: Activity 8 will contribute to achieve Outcome 4 and Output 4

b) Type of applicants targeted: The types of applicants targeted should:

- be a legal person and
- be a civil society organisation, or a consortium of civil society organisations

5. Grants:

Activity 10a - Support via the EED for media initiatives, grass-roots and community based organisations, activists and emerging actors in WB and Turkey,

Activity 10b - Follow-up support via the EED for media initiatives, grass-roots and community based organisations, activists and emerging actors in the Western Balkans and Turkey;

a) Purpose of the grants: Activities 10a and 10b will contribute to achieving Output 5 and Outcome 4 by channelling financial support to:

- independent mission media outlets, including bloggers and emerging media actors, in particular small ones
- pro-democracy grass-roots and community based organisations, activists and emerging actors, including individuals, and including small scale and emerging unregistered actors in sensitive environments

c) Justification of a direct grant:

Under the responsibility of the Commission's Authorising office responsible, the grants may be awarded without a call for proposals to the European Endowment for Democracy, aiming to build on its respective mandate, strengths and expertise in the area of financial support to grass-root, community based organisations, small scale media outlets, bloggers, independent media, activists and emerging actors. The direct grants are in accordance with Article 195 (1) (f) of the Regulation (EU, Euratom) 2018/1046 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 18 July 2018 on the financial rules applicable to the general budget of the Union, i.e. "for activities with specific characteristics that require a particular type of body on account of its technical competence, its high degree of specialisation or its administrative powers, on condition that the activities concerned do not fall within the scope of a call for proposals".

Under the responsibility of the Commission's authorising officer responsible, the recourse to the award of a grant without a call for proposals is justified because EED is a body uniquely positioned to respond to the highly specific characteristics of this activity. EED was set up specifically to provide financial support to pro-democratic movements and other pro-democratic actors in favour of a pluralistic multiparty system on democratic ground; social movements and actors; civil society organisations; young leaders; independent media and journalists (including bloggers, social media activists, etc), non-governmental institutions, including foundations and educational institutions functioning also in exile; provided that all the beneficiaries adhere to core democratic values, and human rights as well as subscribe to principles of non-violence. EED is specialised in supporting those among the above stakeholders that have difficulties benefitting from assistance through traditional funding channels due to their size, legal status (e.g. non-registered entities or individuals), geopolitical context (e.g. civil war situation), and particular needs etc. Furthermore, EED offers a unique credibility when carrying out these activities, due to the formal backing it enjoys from a broad European constituency. Launched through a Council Declaration, EED has a distinctive institutional set-up, being steered and monitored by representatives of the European Parliament, the EU Member States, the European External Action Service and the civil society of the region. The specific nature of the proposed Actions 10a, 10 b, which involves sensitive work with media outlets, civil society actors and democracy activists, places it

outside the scope of a call for proposals, as it would need to rely on the unique modus operandi used by EED based on the mechanisms and reasons described above.

This, along with its experience and already established network in the region, allows EED to deliver the needed support to the target beneficiaries, including in sensitive situations, and justifies the direct award. This unique position was recognised by the European Commission in its Action Plan in Support of the Transformation of the Western Balkans¹³ and in the Joint Communication of the Commission and High Representative on tackling disinformation¹⁴. EED's good track-record, also confirmed during a 2019 ROM report, with efficient award procedures (that are compliant with the general principles applicable to the use of public funds) and with a standing good reputation, makes it an adequate vehicle for providing financial support to local beneficiaries at a micro- or mini-scale, allowing beneficiaries such as non-registered associations, political movements, individual activists, bloggers etc. to benefit from the donors community funding where this would not be possible through more traditional funding channels.

6. Grants:

Activity 10c - Operating support to EED for year 2023 to accompany the financial support to grass-roots and community based organisations, activists and emerging actors, as well as to independent mission media actors in the Western Balkans and Turkey

Activity 10d - Operating support to EED for year 2024 to accompany the financial support to grass-roots and community based organisations, activists and emerging actors, as well as to independent mission media actors in the Western Balkans and Turkey

Activity 10e - Operating support to EED for year 2025 to accompany the financial support to grass-roots and community based organisations, activists and emerging actors, as well as to independent mission media actors in the Western Balkans and Turkey

a) Purpose of the grants:

Activities 10c, 10d and 10e (3 yearly operating grants, for year 2023, 2024, and 2025, respectively) will contribute to achieving Output 5 and Outcome 4 by covering parts of the EED's operating costs in 2023, 2024 and 2025 respectively. The operating grants will be combined with resources drawn from NDICI. The operating costs correspond to the functioning of the foundation and to the implementation of the other (beyond financial support to third parties) activities that the EED performs as part of its mandate: seminars, studies, conferences, publications, networking events, workshops, training and visibility activities, capacity building for beneficiaries etc

c) Justification of a direct grant:

Under the responsibility of the Commission's Authorising office responsible, the grants may be awarded without a call for proposals to the European Endowment for Democracy, aiming to build on its respective mandate, strengths and expertise in the area of financial support to grass-root, community based organisations, small scale media outlets, bloggers, independent media, activists and emerging actors. The direct grants are in accordance with Article 195 (1) (f) of the Regulation (EU, Euratom) 2018/1046 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 18 July 2018 on the financial rules applicable to the general budget of the Union, i.e. "for activities with specific characteristics that require a particular type of body on account of its technical competence, its high degree of specialisation or its administrative powers, on condition that the activities concerned do not fall within the scope of a call for proposals".

Under the responsibility of the Commission's authorising officer responsible, the recourse to the award of a grant without a call for proposals is justified because EED is a body uniquely positioned to respond to the highly specific characteristics of this activity. EED was set up specifically to provide financial support to pro-democratic movements and other pro-democratic actors in favour of a pluralistic multiparty system on

¹³ Annex to the Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions - A credible enlargement perspective for and enhanced eu engagement with the western Balkans, Strasbourg, 6.2.2018 COM(2018) 65 final

¹⁴ Joint Communication to the European Parliament, the European Council, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions - Tackling COVID-19 disinformation - Getting the facts right, Brussels, 10.6.2020, JOIN(2020) 8 final

democratic ground; social movements and actors; civil society organisations; young leaders; independent media and journalists (including bloggers, social media activists, etc), non-governmental institutions, including foundations and educational institutions functioning also in exile; provided that all the beneficiaries adhere to core democratic values, and human rights as well as subscribe to principles of non-violence. EED is specialised in supporting those among the above stakeholders that have difficulties benefitting from assistance through traditional funding channels due to their size, legal status (e.g. non-registered entities or individuals), geopolitical context (e.g. civil war situation), and particular needs etc. Furthermore, EED offers a unique credibility when carrying out these activities, due to the formal backing it enjoys from a broad European constituency. Launched through a Council Declaration, EED has a distinctive institutional set-up, being steered and monitored by representatives of the European Parliament, the EU Member States, the European External Action Service and the civil society of the region. The specific nature of the proposed Actions 10a, 10 b, as well as and 10c, 10d, and 10e, which involves sensitive work with media outlets, civil society actors and democracy activists, places it outside the scope of a call for proposals, as it would need to rely on the unique modus operandi used by EED based on the mechanisms and reasons described above.

This, along with its experience and already established network in the region, allows EED to deliver the needed support to the target beneficiaries, including in sensitive situations, and justifies the direct award. This unique position was recognised by the European Commission in its Action Plan in Support of the Transformation of the Western Balkans¹⁵ and in the Joint Communication of the Commission and High Representative on tackling disinformation¹⁶. EED's good track-record, also confirmed during a 2019 ROM report, with efficient award procedures (that are compliant with the general principles applicable to the use of public funds) and with a standing good reputation, makes it an adequate vehicle for providing financial support to local beneficiaries at a micro- or mini-scale, allowing beneficiaries such as non-registered associations, political movements, individual activists, bloggers etc. to benefit from the donors community funding where this would not be possible through more traditional funding channels.

- 7. Grants: Activity 11a** – Support to Regional CSOs networks promoting media freedom and freedom of expression and **Activity 11b** – Follow-up support to Regional CSOs networks promoting media freedom and freedom of expression (as part of the larger CSF regional call or stand-alone),
- a) Purpose of the grants:** Activity 11a and 11b will contribute to achieve Output 6 and Outcome 4
- b) Type of applicants targeted:** The types of applicants targeted should:
- be a legal person and
 - be a civil society organisation, or a consortium of civil society organisations

4.2.2. Direct Management (Procurement)

Procurement will contribute to achievement of Output 1 linked to Outcome 1 and 2 (Activity 3)

4.2.3. Indirect management with entrusted entities

- **Indirect management with the United Nations Development Programme UNDP (b)**

A part of this action, **Activity 4 - Support to local democracy, civic activism and youth engagement** – may be implemented through indirect management with UNDP, the United Nations Development Programme. This implementation entails management and implementation of all aspects of Activity 4 of the action, including budget implementation tasks (procurement and grant award procedures as relevant), to support the achievement of Output 2 and Outcomes 1, 2 and 3 of the present action:

¹⁵ Annex to the Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions - A credible enlargement perspective for and enhanced eu engagement with the western Balkans, Strasbourg, 6.2.2018 COM(2018) 65 final

¹⁶ Joint Communication to the European Parliament, the European Council, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions - Tackling COVID-19 disinformation - Getting the facts right, Brussels, 10.6.2020, JOIN(2020) 8 final

The envisaged entity has been selected using the following criteria: UNDP has relevant extensive technical experience in working with local authorities and local civil society organisations (it implemented the first two phases of the activity in the region); and it has demonstrated operational capacity to manage a project of this size, and to ensure a large component of financial support to third parties.

In case the envisaged entity would need to be replaced, the European Commission's services may select a replacement entity using the same selection criteria given above. If the entity is replaced the decision to replace it needs to be justified

- ***Indirect management with the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO)***

A part of this action, **Activity 6 - Support to Media Information Literacy and media self-regulation** – may be implemented in indirect management with **UNESCO**, the UN agency in charge for freedom of expression, whose programmes cover the promotion of independent media and freedom of the press. The implementation entails management and implementation of all aspects of Activity 6 of the action, including budget implementation tasks (procurement and grant award procedures as relevant), to support the achievement of Output 3 and Outcome 4 of the present action

The envisaged entity has been selected using the following criteria: UNESCO has relevant extensive technical experience in working with beneficiaries and local media organisations/press councils (it implemented the first phases of the activity). It has demonstrated operational capacity to manage a project of this size, and to ensure a proper implementation of the foreseen financial support to third parties.

In case the envisaged entity would need to be replaced, the European Commission's services may select a replacement entity using the same selection criteria given above. If the entity is replaced the decision to replace it needs to be justified

- ***Indirect management with a pillar-assessed entity***

A part of this action, **Activity 7 - Support to Public Service Journalism in the Western Balkans** - may be implemented in indirect management with a pillar-assessed entity. The entity will be selected by the Commission services using the following criteria: presence of specific technical sector/thematic expertise in the field of media and/or in particular public service media, and logistical, financial and management capacities to implement a programme of the foreseen size.

The implementation by this entity entails management and implementation of all aspects of Activity 7 of the action, including budget implementation tasks (procurement and grant award procedures as relevant), to support the achievement of Outcome 5, Output 4 of the present action

If negotiations with the above-mentioned entrusted entity(ies) fail, that part of this action may be implemented in direct management in accordance with the implementation modalities identified in section 4.2.4

- ***Indirect management with an EU Member State Organisation - GIZ***

A part of this action, **Activity 9 - Support for the economic sustainability of independent media** - may be implemented in indirect management with a pillar-assessed EU Member State Organisation – the German Corporation for International Cooperation (GIZ).

The implementation entails management and implementation of all aspects of Activity 9 of the action, including budget implementation tasks (procurement and grant award procedures as relevant), to support the achievement of Output 4 and Outcome 4 of the present action

The entity has been selected by the Commission services using the following criteria: GIZ has relevant sector/thematic expertise in the field of media and/or economic development support, and logistical, financial and management capacities to implement a programme of the foreseen size.

If negotiations with the above-mentioned entrusted entity(ies) fail, that part of this action may be implemented in direct management in accordance with the implementation modalities identified in section 4.2.4.

4.2.4. Changes from indirect to direct management mode (and viceversa) due to exceptional circumstances

Fall back option to the Indirect management with a pillar-assessed entity as described below:

Grant: (direct management) Activity 7 - Support to Public Service Journalism in the Western Balkans

- a) **Purpose of the grant:** Activity 7 will contribute to achieve Output 3 and Outcome 4
- b) **Type of applicants targeted:** The types of applicants targeted should:
 - be a legal person and
 - be a civil society organisation, or a consortium of civil society organisations or
 - be an International Organisation.

Grant: (direct management) Activity 9 - Support for the economic sustainability of independent media

- a) **Purpose of the grant:** Activity 9 will contribute to achieve Output 4 and Outcome 4
- b) **Type of applicants targeted:** The types of applicants targeted should:
 - be a legal person and
 - be a civil society organisation, or a consortium of civil society organisations and/or media development organisations or
 - be an International Organisation.

4.3. Scope of geographical eligibility for procurement and grants

The geographical eligibility in terms of place of establishment for participating in procurement and grant award procedures and in terms of origin of supplies purchased as established in the basic act and set out in the relevant contractual documents shall apply.

The Commission's authorising officer responsible may extend the geographical eligibility on the basis of urgency or of unavailability of services in the markets of the countries or territories concerned, or in other duly substantiated cases where application of the eligibility rules would make the realisation of this action impossible or exceedingly difficult.

4.4. Indicative budget

| | EU contribution 2021 (EUR) | EU contribution 2022 (EUR) | EU contribution 2023 (EUR) | Indicative third party contribution, (EUR) |
|---|----------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|--|
| Budget for Output 1 and Output 2: Total 37 000 000 | | | | |
| <i>Direct management (Grants)</i> | | | | |
| Activity 1a (regional networks): EUR 10 million, allocation 2021 | 10 000 000 | | | 1 000 000 |
| Activity 1b (regional networks): EUR 10 million, allocation 2023 | | | 10 000 000 | 1 000 000 |
| Activity 2 (good neighbourly relations between Serbia and Kosovo): EUR 2 million, | 2 000 000 | | | 200 000 |

| | | | | |
|--|------------|-----------|------------|-----------|
| allocation 2021 | | | | |
| Activity 5 (WBF): EUR 1 million, allocation 2023 | | | 1 000 000 | 100 000 |
| <i>Indirect management</i> | | | | |
| Activity 4 (Reload, Contribution Agreement with UNDP): EUR 10 million, allocation 2023 ¹⁷ | | | 10 000 000 | 1 000 000 |
| <i>Direct management (Procurement)</i> Activity 3 (TACSO IV): EUR 4 million, allocation 2021 | 4 000 000 | | | N/A |
| | | | | |
| Budget for Output 3: 6 000 000 | | | | |
| <i>Indirect management</i> | | | | |
| Activity 6: Media Information Literacy, UNESCO) EUR 3 million, allocation 2022 | | 3 000 000 | | 300 000 |
| Activity 7 (Public Service Media, Indirect management with Member State Organisation) EUR 3 million, allocation 2022 | | 3 000 000 | | 300 000 |
| Budget for Output 4: Total: 42 750 000 | | | | |
| <i>Direct management (Grants)</i> | | | | |
| Activity 8 (Quality Journalism initiative): EUR 2 million, allocation 2022 | | 2 000 000 | | 200 000 |
| Activity 10a (Action Grant with EED): EUR 19.5 million, allocation 2021 | 19 500 000 | | | |
| Activity 10b (Action Grant with EED): EUR 5.25 million, allocation 2023 | | | 5 250 000 | |
| Activity 10c (EED Operating Grant for year 2023) EUR 2 million, allocation 2021 | | 2 000 000 | | |
| Activity 10d (EED Operating Grant for year 2024) EUR 2 million, allocation 2022 | | 2 000 000 | | |

¹⁷ Additional 2 million (allocation 2023) shall be further injected in agreement with the EUD Bosnia Herzegovina

| | | | | |
|---|---------------------------------|---------------------------------|---------------------------------|------------------|
| Activity 10e (EED Operating Grant for year 2025, EUR 2 million, allocation 2023) | | | 2 000 000 | |
| <i>Indirect management</i> | | | | |
| Activity 9: (Economic sustainability of independent media, indirect management with GIZ): EUR 10 million, allocation 2023 | | | 10 000 000 | 1 000 000 |
| Budget for Output 5 Total: 8 000 000 | | | | |
| <i>Direct management (Grants)</i> | | | | |
| Activity 11a (Regional CSOs networks promoting media freedom and freedom of expression) EUR 4 million, allocation 2021 | 4 000 000 | | | 400 000 |
| Activity 11b (Regional CSOs networks promoting media freedom and freedom of expression) : EUR 4 million, allocation 2023. | | | 4 000 000 | 400 000 |
| Grants – total envelope under section 4.3.1 TOTAL: 61 750 000 | 35 500 000 | 6 000 000 | 22 250 000 | TBD |
| Procurement – total envelope under section 4.3.3¹⁸ | 4 000 000 | | | N.A. |
| Totals: 2021 - 2023 EUR 93 750 000 | 2021: EUR 39 500 000 | 2022: EUR 12 000 000 | 2023: EUR 42 250 000 | 5 900 000 |

4.5. Organisational set-up and responsibilities

The main institutional stakeholder involved in the management and implementation process of the action is DG NEAR, Unit D.5 as the contracting authority. Unit D.5 will manage all contracting foreseen. However as a regular practice, Unit D.5 will exchange information and coordinate with the relevant EU Delegations in order to strengthen synergies among the different EU funded actions.

Other institutional stakeholders that will be involved at beneficiary level include:

- For activities 1a and 1b – CSOs.
- For activity 2 – CSOs and local public authorities.
- For activity 3- the contractor, CSOs and central regional and local public authorities.

¹⁸ In order to avoid details on budgets for individual contracts, it is sufficient to indicate the total envelop for procurement. If budgets for individual contracts are public, tenderers tend to orientate themselves on them and not on the terms of reference.

- For activity 4: Local CSOs; local public authorities; WBF contracting parties
- For activities 6 and 7: The contractor, relevant international and regional partners, CSOs, central, regional and local private and public relevant authorities (i.e. Chamber of Commerce, Council fo Social Dialogue and others)
- For activities 8-13 (media): CSOs, media outlets, media and journalist associations, relevant authorities, contracting parties

5. PERFORMANCE/RESULTS MONITORING AND REPORTING -

5.1. Internal monitoring

The methodology for continuous monitoring of the action is based on the *Guidelines for EU support to civil society* and *Guidelines for EU support to media freedom and media integrity* already quoted. These documents are formulated in the form of a results framework which contains results to be achieved by a combination of political and financial support. The selection of results and indicators in the logframe of the present document is therefore consistent with the Guidelines.

Monitoring of the guidelines is supervised by DG NEAR in collaboration with the EU Delegations in the region, international organisations, the regional Technical Assistance to CSOs (TACSO IV) and networks of CSOs. Both qualitative and quantitative data is collected, by means of surveys, peer reviews, independent assessment, etc. The results framework allows for the measurement of progress at IPA III beneficiaries level.

5.2. Roles & responsibilities for data collection, analysis & reporting

The day-to-day technical and financial monitoring of the implementation of this EU financial contribution will be a continuous process and part of the grant beneficiary's responsibilities. To this aim, the implementing partner shall establish a permanent internal, technical and financial monitoring system and elaborate, within the framework of each successive grant, regular reporting, including progress (if considered relevant) and final reports. Every report shall provide an accurate account of implementation of the corresponding work programme, difficulties encountered, changes introduced, as well as the degree of achievement of its results (outputs and direct outcomes) as measured by indicators. The reports shall be laid out in such a way as to allow monitoring of the means envisaged and employed and of the budget details for the implementation of the successive work programmes. The final reports, narrative and financial, will cover the entire financial year of the corresponding work programme.

5.3. Evaluation

Having regard to the importance of the action, a mid-term evaluation will be carried out for this action or its components contracted by the Commission.

It will be carried out for problem solving and learning purposes, in particular with respect to the programming of next Civil Society Facility and Media Programmes on 2024 and onwards.

The Commission shall inform the implementing partner at least 1 month in advance of the dates foreseen for the evaluation missions. The implementing partner shall collaborate efficiently and effectively with the evaluation experts, and inter alia provide them with all necessary information and documentation, as well as access to the project premises and activities.

The evaluation reports shall be shared with the partner beneficiary and other key stakeholders. The implementing partner and the Commission shall analyse the conclusions and recommendations of the evaluations and, where appropriate, in agreement with the partner beneficiary, jointly decide on the follow-up actions to be taken and any adjustments necessary, including, if indicated, the reorientation of the project.

The financing of the evaluation shall be covered by another measure constituting a financing Decision.

6. AUDIT

Without prejudice to the obligations applicable to contracts concluded for the implementation of this action, the Commission may, on the basis of a risk assessment, contract independent audits or expenditure verification assignments for one or several contracts or agreements.

The financing of the audit shall be covered by another measure constituting a financing Decision.

7. COMMUNICATION AND VISIBILITY

Visibility of EU funding and communication about objectives and impact of Actions are a legal obligation for all Actions funded by the EU, as set out in the EU communication and visibility requirements in force.

In particular, the recipients of EU funding shall acknowledge the origin of the EU funding and ensure its proper visibility by:

- providing a statement highlighting the support received from the EU in a visible manner on all documents and communication material relating to the implementation of the funds, including on an official website and social media accounts, where these exist; and
- promoting the actions and their results by providing coherent, effective and proportionate targeted information to multiple audiences, including the media.

Visibility and communication measures shall be implemented, as relevant, by the public administrations (for instance, concerning the reforms linked to EU budget support), entrusted entities, contractors and grant beneficiaries. Appropriate contractual obligations shall be included, respectively, in financing agreements, delegation agreements, and procurement and grant contracts.

The measures shall be based on a specific Communication and Visibility Plan, established and implemented in line with the EU communication and visibility requirements in force. The plan shall include, inter alia, a communication narrative and master messages for the Action, customised for the various target audiences (stakeholders, civil society, general public, etc.)

Visibility and communication measures specific to this Action shall be complementary to the broader communication activities implemented directly by the European Commission services and/or the EU Delegations and Offices. The European Commission and the EU Delegations and Offices should be fully informed of the planning and implementation of the specific visibility and communication activities, notably with respect to the communication narrative and master messages.

If the Action includes Union programmes, visibility and communication measures shall be implemented in accordance with the EU communication and visibility requirements in force and the specific rules of each Union programme. The relevant programme managing entity shall be responsible for monitoring the visibility and communication activities. The European Commission and the EU Delegations and Offices should be fully informed of the planning and implementation of the specific visibility and communication activities.

8. SUSTAINABILITY

Institutional sustainability

The main objective of the action, to stimulate and enabling legal and financial environment for civil society and pluralistic media, aims precisely at achieving long term institutional sustainability for the activities of civil society and media actors in the IPA III beneficiaries. Ultimately this will contribute to strengthen participatory democracies and the EU approximation process in the area of rule of law and good governance in the Western Balkans and Turkey (Impact level-result of the Action).

The activities implemented in the framework of the action will be designed to develop and strengthen existing local resources and reinforce the expertise and capacity of relevant regional actors. The action will help create the conditions for a self-sustainable free civil society and media environment that will be further maintained by the regional, beneficiary level and local stakeholders involved in the project's implementation from the start. The action will be tailored to the specific civil society and media context of each IPA III beneficiary, thereby fostering local ownership. The planned exchanges of good practices and approaches will also encourage the replication and scaling up of actions and open avenues for new complementary partnerships. All activities will build on regional and local networks' capacities and expertise, ensuring that the action results will have a long-term impact in the region and that benefits will be sustained beyond the implementation period.

Financial sustainability

One of the main objectives of the action is to strengthen the financial sustainability of civil society organisations and free media outlets, including through strengthening their resilience and modernising their activities.