

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 for the Republic of Serbia 2021-2023”

1. SYNOPSIS

1.1. Action Summary Table

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|--|--|-------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| Title | EU Civil Society Facility and Media Programme for the Republic of Serbia 2021-2023 Multi-country multiannual action plan EU Civil Society Facility and Media Programme in favour of the Western Balkans and Turkey for 2021-2023 | | | |
| CRIS/OPSYS number | IPA III/2021/043-102/07 | | | |
| Basic Act | Financed under the Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance (IPA III) | | | |
| Team Europe Initiative | No | | | |
| Zone benefiting from the action | Serbia | | | |
| Programming document | IPA III Programming Framework | | | |
| PRIORITY AREAS AND SECTOR INFORMATION | | | | |
| Window and thematic priority | 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 | | | |
| 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 17: Partnership for the Goals | | | |
| 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 | | | |
| Marker (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 checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input 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 checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input 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 | <p>Budget line: 15.020101.01</p> <p>Total estimated cost: EUR 17 200 000.00</p> <p>Total amount of EU budget contribution EUR 17 200 000.00</p> <p>The EU contribution is for an amount of EUR 3 500 000.00 from the general budget of the European Union for financial year 2021 and for an amount of EUR 6 500 000.00 from the general budget of the European Union for financial year 2022 and for an amount of EUR 7 200 000.00 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.</p> | | | |
| MANAGEMENT AND IMPLEMENTATION | | | | |
| Type of financing and method(s) of implementation | <p>Project Modality</p> <p>Direct management through:</p> <p>- Grants</p> | | | |
| Relevant priorities and flagships from Economic and Investment Plan for the Western Balkans | <p>Priorities: “Human Capital Development”, “Governance, Rule of Law”</p> | | | |
| Final date for concluding contribution / delegation agreements, procurement and grant contracts | <p>For 2021 Budget: At the latest by 31 December 2022</p> <p>For 2022 Budget: At the latest by 31 December 2023</p> <p>For 2023 Budget: At the latest by 31 December 2024</p> | | | |

| | |
|---|--|
| Indicative operational implementation period | 72 months following the adoption of the Financing Decision |
|---|--|

1.2. Summary of the Action

The overall objective of the Action is to strengthen participatory democracies and the EU integration and approximation process in Serbia, through an enhanced contribution by civil society and media.

For Civil Society, the action will focus on:

- Improving policy dialogue between the Civil Society and all levels of the government institutions,
- Increasing capacities and effectiveness of the Serbian Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) to monitor and participate in reform processes and the overall capacities of grassroots movements through flexible financial support to third parties mechanisms in all fields relevant to Serbia's accession to the EU.

For Media, the action will focus on

- Strengthening the independent monitoring of the Media strategy of Serbia including enhanced media ethics

2. RATIONALE

2.1. Context Analysis

An empowered civil society is a crucial component of any democratic system and should be recognised and treated as such by state institutions. Sustainable and inclusive development need a strong, reliable and independent civil society to contribute to the policy making and monitor implementation. It is in the interest of any society to have a strong civil society promoting checks and balances; and demanding transparency, accountability and inclusiveness in the actions of the state and public authorities.

Civil society makes a crucial link between governments and citizens. By articulating citizens' needs and concerns, civil society fosters pluralism and furthers participatory democracy, increasing the hope and participation of the citizens in the future of their society.

As elaborated in detail in the Serbia 2021 report of the European Commission¹ “further efforts are still needed to ensure systematic cooperation between the government and civil society. An enabling environment for developing and financing civil society organisations (CSOs) still needs to be created on the ground, as verbal attacks against CSOs continued, including in Parliament.”

The CSOs and human rights defenders continue to raise awareness about civil and political rights while operating in a polarised environment that is not open to criticism. Some CSOs, including their individual representatives, face negative statements by authorities including MPs at the Parliament debates, echoed by some media about CSOs in general and on the funding of certain associations in particular.

Meanwhile, the Serbian Government in October 2020 has formally stepped up an institutional level for cooperation with the CSOs, as the newly formed Ministry for Human and Minority Rights and Social Dialogue took over the competencies of the Office for Cooperation with Civil Society. The Ministry continues to lead the efforts on the side of authorities to support the civil society with intermittent changes in their approach. Despite efforts for an effective multisectoral policy dialogue, both the institutions and some sectors of the civil society are far from being ready. The feedback collected from civil society is sporadically taken into consideration and public consultations with civil society remain of very uneven quality.

¹ SWD(2021) 288 final, https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/serbia-report-2021_en

In 2020, the government adopted guidelines on the inclusion of CSOs in working groups for drafting regulations and public policies and created a database of ‘CSO focal points’ in public institutions and local self- governments. There is a need for effective implementation of these adopted measures.

The criteria for public financial support for CSOs need to be better defined and implemented to ensure overall transparency, especially at local level. Concerns are regularly voiced about the establishment of organisations close to authorities taking an active role in decision-making processes and distribution of state money while claiming to represent the civic interests.

The COVID-19 pandemic also has a notably negative effect on the sources for and activities of civil society. Reallocation of funds under the state of emergency, suspension of some grant procedures for CSOs at state and local level create the need for further, flexible support especially to smaller to medium sized CSOs for their basic operations.

As also reported in the Monitoring Matrix Serbia report for 2019² developed by the Balkan Civil Society Development Network (BCSDN), other issues of concern related to civil society include a non-favorable framework for individual and corporate giving without proper tax benefits underlying the further growth of giving and a non-stimulating legal framework for volunteering.

Media

Freedom of expression as well as media freedom are pillars of democracy, being essential components of open and free debate. Freedom of expression is a key indicator of a country's readiness to become part of the EU.

The Serbia 2021 report of the European Commission assessed that regarding freedom of expression, limited progress was made by adopting and starting to implement a limited number of measures under the action plan related to the media strategy. However, verbal attacks against journalists by high-level officials continued and cases of threats and violence remain a concern. Most media associations withdrew from the group on the safety of journalists in March 2021, citing hate speech and smear campaigns against journalists and civil society representatives, including by the head of the ruling party caucus in Parliament. These verbal attacks in Parliament took place even after a code of conduct was adopted in December 2020. The overall environment for exercising freedom of expression without hindrance still needs to be further strengthened in practice. Ownership structures in the media market largely favour the promotion of the Government’s point of view while as the COVID-19 pandemics is having a strong impact on the economic survival of independent media especially on a local level.

The COVID-19 pandemics has had a profound impact on the environment in which media operate in Serbia. Even more than before the crisis (with its already significantly distorted media market), independent media outlets struggle to survive with limited financial and human resources, thus further limiting media plurality and diversity in Serbia. With restrictions to the freedom of movement, loss in advertising revenues, loss of other types of business income, increases in production costs and substantial difficulties in revenue creation. There is already a noticeable reduction in the number of printed editions of independent media and this trend is likely to continue. While there are many initiatives to develop more digital formats and platforms as well as other innovative approaches to reach new audiences, the worsening lack of income also has a direct repercussion on journalists activities. Many independent media outlets are facing increasing trouble in maintaining their level of productions and in staying in business over a prolonged period thus seriously jeopardising their economic sustainability with local media being particularly vulnerable.

2.2. Problem analysis by areas of support

AREA OF SUPPORT #1: CIVIL SOCIETY

EU support to Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) aims at building stronger democracies, improving accountability systems and ultimately achieving better policy and economic and social development and social cohesion. As flagged in the annual reports of the European Commission, there are deficiencies in pursuit of establishing a conducive and enabling environment for the development and financing of civil society and further efforts are needed to ensure systematic cooperation.

² https://www.gradjanske.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/CMR-2019- CIVIC_INITIATIVES.pdf

CSOs at every level, around the capital, but particularly in rural areas require continuous capacity building. While some CSOs have a reasonable capacity since the 90s with a notable experience, particularly in the fields of rule of law and democracy, and are well capacitated in terms of overall know-how, they still require support in terms of financial capacity to perform effective interventions. Most of such funding is still dependant on foreign donor support that is received in forms of activity grants. The legal framework is not yet supportive for donations from businesses and individual giving. Medium sized CSOs furthermore require external expertise, knowledge on best-practices regionally and support to their organisational, human resources and project management capabilities, whereas small CSOs and informal groups need both financial and organisational support with a strong mentoring element for their activities. The reach of civil society to their constituency continues to require strengthening.

Policy dialogue with civil society remains weak and participation of civil society is unsystematic while the public consultations continue to remain of very uneven quality. There is a strong need for re-inforced mechanisms to bring in civil society's knowledge and expertise into legislation and related actions. The already existing official policy dialogue structure of the National Convention on the EU needs to be enhanced to the level of a real policy dialogue mechanism. A central strategy and action plan to help create a positive environment for CSOs have still not been adopted. A Council for civil society cooperation has yet to be set up.

The added value of EU support in the area of civil society is to assist further capacity building of CSOs and act as a significant trigger and funder for the civil society, which otherwise are not able to gain access to the necessary funding and capacity building support through government assistance or independent fund raising mechanisms available to them. The EU intervention will serve as an enabler to capacitate the civil society with necessary skills and funding to participate in policy making as referred to in Articles 3, 30 and 34 of the planning system of the Republic of Serbia.

The main stakeholders are citizens, all types of civil society organisations at central and local levels, public and local government authorities, civic or business associations, science and research organisations, and business entities.

AREA OF SUPPORT#2: Media plurality and media freedom in Serbia

In Serbia's distorted media market, independent media in particular at a local level struggle to survive with limited financial and human resources, a problem which the COVID19 pandemic has further aggravated due to the loss of advertising revenues and rising production costs. Furthermore, independent media are under constant pressure including threats, violence and intimidation. This limits media plurality and diversity in Serbia and deprives the local population of access to a variety of more objective information sources.

Serbia adopted a new media strategy in January 2020, which was drafted in a transparent and inclusive manner and identifies the main challenges related to media freedom in Serbia. The new media strategy was drafted by a working group composed of both media associations and public officials. It identifies the main challenges related to media freedom in Serbia and sets out measures to address them. A lot remains to be done to implement it and while this is an important obligation and task for the Government, media and media organisations themselves need to contribute to that. The implementation of the media strategy requires independent monitoring

Continuous lack of ethical standards in print and online media and lack of awareness on the importance of self-regulation among media professionals. Fake news, distortion of reality, direct and unfounded attacks on individuals in print and online media are common and mostly go unpunished.

The added value of EU support in the area of media is to make a major contribution to preserve and develop media plurality in Serbia in a flexible manner responding to the urgent needs of independent media in particular at a local level. Furthermore the EU is well placed to contribute to the independent monitoring of the media strategy and to enhance ethical standards in media.

The main stakeholders are Independent Media outlets and Media organisations at local and central level, including online portals and TV/Radio stations, the Press Council of Serbia.

There is complementarity with the objectives of the media strategy of Serbia, notably with regard to the safety of journalists and a fair and open media market, with media literacy as well as objectivity.

2.3. Relevance and complementarity with strategies supported by key national stakeholders

Strengthening a democratic society and media freedom are among the priorities of Government programme of Serbia presented in October 2020.

In the absence of a Serbian strategy for civil society, the Law on Planning System requiring transparent consultations including with the civil society in its articles 3, 30 and 34, remains the fundamental legal reference in addition to the two guidelines on ‘Inclusion of civil society in working groups for drafting public policy documents and regulations’ and on ‘participation of civil society organisations in procedures of law- and act-making’ and the Law on State Administration that remain relevant to civil society.

Serbia also supports the core values contained in the international Open Government Declaration (OGP) that are in line with the implementation of the general objective of public administration reform. The objectives defined in the PAR Strategy will pursue the cooperation between the public administration and citizens, improvement of transparency, accountability and efficiency of public administration, as well as an international forum for dialogue and exchange of experiences between the administration, civil society organisations, citizens and the private sector.

Media is mentioned in particular as important partners in all reform processes to be carried out.

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

The support to civil society is in line with the the Guidelines for EU support to civil society in enlargement countries³, in contributing to promoting a conducive environment for civil society to carry out its work, promoting a strengthened cooperation between civil society and public authorities, and their involvement in policy dialogue, and reinforcing CSO capacities and resilience.

It is also fully aligned with the overall objective of IPA III Window I concerning strengthening the rule of law, democracy, the respect of human rights and international law, civil society and security, and the programming framework that states “An empowered civil society is a crucial component of any democratic system. It enhances political accountability and social cohesion, deepening understanding and inclusiveness of accession-related reforms, as well as supporting reconciliation in societies divided by conflict. In some cases, a more supportive and enabling environment needs to be developed that improves the conditions for policy dialogue and non-partisan input to the decision making process”.

The area of support to media is also fully in line with Window I of the IPA III programming framework “Rule of Law, Fundamental Rights and Democracy” which states that “Particular focus is needed to safeguard the freedom of expression and independence of media as pillars of democracy.” As also mentioned in the DG Enlargement Guidelines for EU support to media freedom and media integrity in enlargement countries, “Free media come as the principal precondition for freedom of expression” and the Commission will offer a combination of political and financial support to meet these priorities, employing a more strategic, effective and results-focused approach to deliver maximum impact with the limited human and financial resources available.

Support to civil society and media are further in line with the political criteria for EU membership in terms of stable institutions guaranteeing democracy, the rule of law and human rights as well as Chapter 23 of the EU accession negotiations with its specific focus on freedom of expression amongs others.

Serbia will also be associated to the Erasmus+ programme for the new programming period (2021-2027) on an equal footing with EU Member States. Erasmus+ support mobility and cooperation projects at all levels of education (schools, vocational institutions, universities, adult education organisations, youth organisations, sport associations...). Serbian CSOs are involved in international projects strengthening their links to European peers and modernising their working methods thanks to EU funding.

³ Guidelines for EU support to Civil Society 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 both documents. https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/52526/guidelines-eu-support-civil-society-enlargement-countries-2014-2020_en

2.5. Lessons learned and links with previous financial assistance

Civil Society

In the Mid-term evaluation of the Civil Society Facility for the Western Balkans and Turkey⁴ (conducted by the Directorate General for Neighbourhood and Enlargement Negotiations of the European Commission (DG NEAR) covering CSF portfolio of 2011-2016, published on 1 December 2017 it was concluded that CSF financial assistance is particularly relevant with regards to strengthening the enabling environment for civil society and for addressing the capacity-development needs of CSOs, for them to take a more active role in policy processes.

It was noted that CSF financial assistance increased its reach to grassroots and community-based organisations in Serbia through re-granting and support to networks, although the size of re-granting components, and a lack of a focus with this instrument constrains assistance to grassroots and community-based organisations, as they are not able to access funds directly, but only through intermediary organisations. There was an apparent emphasis on provision of support to organisations in the capital, which flags the need to reach out to rural and urban areas outside the capital.

Need for and effectiveness of FSTP mechanism also has been pointed out in the thematic evaluation of DG NEAR ‘Evaluation of the EU’s Engagement with Civil Society in the Enlargement, Neighbourhood regions and Russia over the period 2007-2018⁵’ issued in March 2020. The report concludes with two important recommendations on FSTP among others:

- “EUDs in the Enlargement and Neighbourhood regions should consider permitting FSTP in a greater proportion of Calls for Proposals, extending the use of this modality beyond the governance, human rights and gender equality thematic cluster where it is currently concentrated.”, and
- “DG NEAR should consider encouraging grant beneficiaries to use the modality of FSTP as the main purpose of the action.”

Although there has been notable progress in the variety of support provided to civil society in Serbia, the need for flexible FSTP continues to remain one of the priorities.

Three points of significance emerge as learnings from the experiences in Serbia between 2017 and 2021:

1. The need to continue medium size direct activity grants supporting evidence based policy making in priority sectors,
2. The need to create flexibility in implementation of FSTP grants to allow the final beneficiaries to avoid being obliged to replicate cumbersome and hefty procedures,
3. The need for capacity building as well as mentorship support for smaller organisations along with FSTP,
4. The need for operating grants supporting smaller organisations in their ordinary activities driving from their work plans.

Furthermore, the National Convention on the EU is supported by an ongoing CSF grant and is the largest organised EU supporter in Serbia. NCEU is a comprehensive platform of CSOs, strongly advocating for accession of Serbia to the EU. At the same time, it work on raising the awareness on the benefits of Serbia becoming a member state of the EU. This unique platform is closely monitoring the EU accession process and advocate for European values in Serbia since 2006. This platform managed to become an invaluable part of the EU integration process, is part of the official procedures and influences the elaboration of key documents based on which the process is led.

Media

Until 2020, the media support in Serbia was based on the selection of action grants via restricted call for proposals supporting media productions. This kind of media support programme enabled the production of content that would otherwise not emerge.

⁴ Directorate General for Neighbourhood and Enlargement Negotiations of the European Commission: Mid-term evaluation of the Civil Society Facility for the Western Balkans and Turkey, 1 December 2017

⁵ https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/document/download/0a7ec09e-b56e-48ec-b8cb-f82173d2876d_en

This EU grants programme was highly meaningful. The size of the grants enabled serious outlets to provide original content over a period of years. This not only helped them to survive on the market, but also to provide nourishment to the media landscape, and media pluralism by providing content over a two to three-year period.

Several of those grants are still ongoing and are producing highly publicised content such as the Crime and Corruption Reporting Network KRIK. The rationale of continuing with grants to media and organisations is still there, now more with a view to supporting strategies such as the media strategy of Serbia rather than supporting particular media productions.

However, the COVID-19 pandemic exposed a type of more immediate and short term needs of media outlets that cannot be addressed via traditional European Commission managed call for proposals. Such needs are the provision of short-term assistance via real core support that can cover salaries and running costs and provide an important lifeline to stay in business and continue productions. Furthermore, core support can assistance can cover the introduction of new innovative digital formats to reach out to larger audiences and thus contribute to future business income, build trust with the public as providers of objective information.

In line with the above analyse, the EU Delegation to Serbia signed a direct grant agreement with the European Endowment for Democracy (EED) to set up a specific innovative media support programme in Serbia. This programme started in June 2020 and is successfully providing core support to a big variety of media at the local level and is thus making a direct and strong contribution to media plurality in Serbia in addition to enabling economic survival and maintain financial viability of independent media outlets in order to continue their activities and productions. This new media support has already supported more than twenty local media outlets including TV stations and the funds under this contract are running fast given very high demand.

The economic and financial viability of the independent media in Serbia is a major challenge especially during and in the aftermath of the COVID-19 Pandemic, also for smaller outlets at a local level. In this context, the European Endowment for Democracy (EED) can provide a flexible and rapid funding scheme (including the coverage of running costs) that media can apply for at any moment (ongoing call on a rolling basis). In addition, the EED has a unique mandate, as an independent foundation supported by the European Union and its Member States. It assists independent media organisations regardless of their size or formal status, provided that all the beneficiaries adhere to core democratic values and human rights.

Support through the EED will be continued through the multi-country AD.

During the period 2014-2020 support has also being given to bodies focussing on specific aspects of media freedom, such as the Press Council. The Press Council performs an important function in terms of actively promoting professional and ethical standards in reporting of print and online media in accordance with the Journalist's Code of Ethics and to raise awareness of the importance of media self-regulation among media professionals and the public.

3. DESCRIPTION OF THE ACTION

3.1. Planned results and intervention logic

The overall objective of the Action is to strengthen participatory democracies and the EU integration and approximation process in Serbia, through an enhanced contribution by civil society and media. The action will build capacity of Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) to monitor reform processes and participate in policy dialogue as well as supporting the implementation of the media strategy of Serbia, including media ethics.

The activities are designed in a way to make a direction contribution to professionalising CSOs capacities to play a stronger role in public oversight of reform processes in various sectors in Serbia that are of direct impact to the population (i.e. environmental standards, rule of law etc.). Activities are further designed to provide a more independent monitoring of the media strategy of Serbia, including ethic issues.

As a result, the EU integration process in Serbia is strengthened by better CSO involvement in reform monitoring and policy processes while at the same time, keeping the media landscape broad allowing for citizens to get access to independent information, particularly at the local level.

3.2. Indicative type of activities

Civil Society

Activities under Output 1.1 - Support is provided to increase capacities of the Serbian CSOs in advocacy and monitoring to address reforms and Serbia's EU integration process.

Activities to sustain and strengthen CSOs via grants in sectors of priority in the EU accession process, including but not limited to environment and climate action, all aspects of rule of law, socio-economic development, circular economy, foreign, defence and security sectors. Successful implementation of this intervention will capacity-build and strengthen CSOs allowing them continue their activities in advocacy and monitoring contributing to furthering of the reforms.

Advocacy activities for improvement of the legal framework for access to funding of civil society and its implementation as well as increased abilities of CSO to fund-raise from citizens and different government levels contributing to their long term independent sustainability. Effective implementation and positive result of this intervention will contribute both to longer term sustainability as well as independence of CSOs.

One directly awarded grant to the National Convention on European Union, as an institutional mechanism for participation of CSOs in the negotiation process will cover capacity building, advocacy to increase local CSOs/citizens participation in the process, as well as communication with citizens.

Activities under Output 1.2 – Providing coaching, technical and financial support to smaller CSOs and groups of natural persons (informal groups) to increase their capacity for advocacy and monitoring of reforms and Serbia's EU integration process through grants to established CSOs.

Activities to develop and strengthen CSOs enabling them to support civil society in the form of legal entities as well as natural person(s) through flexible financial support to third parties and resource centre for civil society mechanisms in all sectors related to EU accession, including but not limited to urbanisation, transport, agriculture, energy, competition policies. Successful implementation of this intervention, including through a mentoring component, will help the development and strengthening of civil society and informal groups (natural persons) establishing themselves with higher capacity, delivering activities contributing to advocacy and policy dialoge in support of the reforms.

Media

Activity under Output 2.1 - Support is delivered to media and media organisations for the independent monitoring of the media strategy of Serbia

Activities to support to the thematic areas of the media strategy as a means to strengthen independent media. Activities can cover topics such as safety of journalists, media literacy, promoting a free and fair media market. Activities are geared as a support to the enhanced implementation of an official governmental strategy

Activity under Output 2.2- Support is delivered to the Press Council performing media ethics watchdog functions

Activities will support capacities of the Serbian Press Council to actively promote professional and ethical standards in print and online media and to raise awareness of the importance of media self-regulation among media professional.

3.3. Risks and assumptions

Continued government commitment to the EU accession should remain unchanged, as well as political will to strengthen the cooperation mechanisms with civil society. Key stakeholders need to develop and improve the legal strategic and financial framework for the development of civil society and the Strategy for the Strategy for enabling environment for development of CSOs in Serbia needs to be adopted.

| Risks | Risk level (H/M/L) | Mitigating measures |
|--------------|---------------------------|----------------------------|
|--------------|---------------------------|----------------------------|

| | | |
|---|----------|---|
| Risk 1 – Further shrinking of space for civil society and attempts that hinder their operational space and capacity increase. | M | Ensure open dialogue with the authorities on the need for a healthy environment for civil society to operate. |
| Risk 2 – Strengthening and further funding of CSOs unnaturally close to authorities through official funds. | M | Continue CS efforts for transparency of funding from various levels of governments. Support establishment of a Council with independent CSO members. |
| Risk 3 – Decrease in government’s commitment to the EU accession proces | L | Government commitment to the EU accession is expected to remain unchanged, as well as political will to strengthen the cooperation mechanisms with civil society. Key stakeholders need to develop and improve the legal strategic and financial framework for the development of civil society and the Strategy for enabling environment for development of CSOs in Serbia needs to be developed with a transparent consultation mechanism and adopted. |
| Risk 4 - Further deterioration of the environment for freedom of expression in Serbia | M | Continued support to independent media and close follow up with all stakeholders |

Assumptions (to be reflected in the Logical Framework Matrix above) – grouped by outputs and outcomes

Outcome 1: Assumption - “Political stability and EU accession process continued”

Output 1 of outcome 1: Assumption - “Civic space does not deteriorate further and ideally improve allowing the space to operate for the civil society. Continued interest on behalf of the authorities to cooperate with civil society.”

Output 2 of outcome 1: Assumption - “Civic space does not deteriorate further and ideally improve allowing the space to operate for the civil society. Continued interest on behalf of the authorities to cooperate with civil society. No barriers established for implementation of FSTP”

Outcome 2: Assumption: “The Government of Serbia is serious about the implementation of the media strategy and does not put any obstacles to independent monitoring.”.

Output 1 for Outcome 2: Assumption: Media and media organisations continued capacity and interest to monitor the implementation of the media strategy.

Putput 2 for Outcome 2: Assumption: No deterioration in the Press Council’s capacity to function as a media ethics watch dog organisation.

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)?

How does this Action address Environment and Climate change?

How does this Action address the Rights Based Approach?

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

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

The action will contribute to various elements being mainstreamed through the support provided. Gender will be taken as a cross-cutting element with a gender sensitive focus on all activities including participation of women and girls at different levels of civil society and policy decision making in general.

A branch of activities will target environment and climate action including focus on transition to green and circular economy. Every intervention will follow the “do not harm” principle to avoid any potential impact to the environment.

Additionally all capacity building activities to CSO or to the media will sensitise on the need to assess the potential impact to the environment and to climate change of public policies. At the same time, the programme will promote civil society activism and participation in decision making in sectors directly linked to environment and climate change such as energy, transport, mobility, employment and industrial policies.

Through activities funded under the calls for proposals, the action will likewise address multiple discriminations faced by people in vulnerable situations, respect for human dignity and equality in line with the principles of the rights based approach and thus aim at building inclusive and democratic societies.

Finally the Action has been developed including multiple layers of consultations with civil society both via a structured consultation organised by Technical Assistance for Civil Society Organisations project (TACSO) as well as adhoc inputs received from CSOs on previous CSF programmes as well as needs of the civil society in various sectors.

3.5. Conditions for implementation

None specific.

3.6. Logical Framework for PROJECT MODALITY

| Results | Results chain: Main expected results (maximum 10) | Indicators (at least one indicator per expected result) | Baselines (2020) | Targets (2025) | Sources of data (1 per indicator) | Assumptions |
|------------------|--|---|---|---|---|--|
| Impact | To strengthen participatory democracy and the EU integration and approximation process in Serbia, through an enhanced contribution by civil society and media. | <p><i>Quality assessment of the role of CSOs in reform processes and EU integration.</i></p> <p><i>Global freedom and democracy country scores on Freedom House Index.</i></p> <p><i>Number of independent media continuing and developing their operations</i></p> | <p>64 – freedom score</p> <p>49 – democracy score</p> | <p>70 – freedom score</p> <p>55 – democracy score</p> | <p>Independent assessments by International Organisations (I.O) and CSOs.</p> <p>Annual reports of Freedom House</p> <p>European Commission reports.</p> | <i>Not applicable</i> |
| Outcome 1 | Strengthened capacities and resilience of Serbian CSOs for contributing to and effectively monitoring the reforms and Serbia’s EU integration process, as well as policy dialogue with authorities and other stakeholders at all levels. | <p><i>Advocacy initiatives performed by CSOs on EU accession related reforms, including Green Deal topics.</i></p> <p><i>Percentage of reforms / legislations adopted following incorporation of inputs provided by CSOs.</i></p> <p><i>Law on the planning system applied systematically through all legislative adoptions / amendments.</i></p> <p><i>Established mechanism for permanent dialogue with civil society developed and operational.</i></p> <p><i>Council for civil society established.</i></p> <p><i>Civil society and public institutions work in partnership through dialogue and cooperation based on trust and</i></p> | n/a | Established | <p>Independent assessments by I.O. and CSOs.</p> <p>TACSO reports.</p> <p>European Commission reports.</p> <p>Reports of civil society elucidating cooperation with authorities, in particular invitation to and reception of CS inputs in WGs.</p> | Political stability and EU accession process continued |

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|--------------------------------------|---|--|-----------------------|-----------------------|---|--|
| | | <p><i>mutual acknowledgment of common interests.</i></p> <p><i>Percentage of institutions consulting civil society during policy making.</i></p> <p><i>Strategic framework measures (Strategy) dedicated to civil society drafted in cooperation with CSOs.</i></p> <p><i>Selection of working groups members from CSOs is based on public call, equal treatment and clear criteria ensuring diversity (incl. gender) and balance between quality and quantity representativeness of CSOs. .</i></p> | | | | |
| Outcome 2 | Media strategy of Serbia independently monitored including enhanced media ethics | <i>Media and media organisation's contributions to the independent monitoring of the media strategy</i> | 0 | 4 | <p>European Commission reports</p> <p>Monitoring of the OSCE</p> <p>Media monitoring of the EU Delegation's Press Section</p> | <p>The Government of Serbia is serious about the implementation of the media strategy and does not put any obstacles to independent monitoring</p> |
| Output 1 related to outcome 1 | <i>1.1. Support is provided to increase capacities of the Serbian CSOs in advocacy and monitoring to address Serbia's EU integration process.</i> | <p><i>Percentage of laws annually passed in urgent procedure limiting proper consultation with civil society.</i></p> <p><i>Percentage of EU acquis related laws passed in normal procedure.</i></p> | <p>10%</p> <p>n/a</p> | <p>5 %</p> <p>95%</p> | <p>Independent assessments by I.O. and CSOs.</p> <p>TACSO reports.</p> <p>European Commission reports.</p> | <p>Political stability and EU accession process continued.</p> <p>Continued interest on behalf of the authorities to cooperate with civil society.</p> |

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| | | | | | <p>Reports of the Serbian Parliament.</p> <p>Reports of civil society elucidating cooperation with authorities, in particular invitation to and reception of CS inputs in WGs.</p> | |
| Output 2 related to outcome 1 | <p><i>1.1. Support is provided to increase capacities of the Serbian CSOs in advocacy and monitoring to address Serbia's reforms process.</i></p> | <p><i>Number of CSOs participating in WGs for legislation.</i></p> | n/a | <p>More than 5 per WG</p> | <p>Independent assessments by I.O. and CSOs.</p> <p>TACSO reports.</p> <p>European Commission reports.</p> <p>Reports of the Serbian Parliament.</p> <p>Reports of civil society elucidating cooperation with authorities, in particular invitation to and reception of CS inputs in WGs.</p> | <p>Political stability and EU accession process continued.</p> <p>Continued interest on behalf of the authorities to cooperate with civil society.</p> |
| Output 3 related to outcome 1 | <p><i>1.2. Coaching, technical and financial support is provided to smaller CSOs and groups of natural persons (informal groups) to increase their capacity for advocacy and monitoring of reforms</i></p> | <p><i>Number of CSOs participating in WGs for legislation.</i></p> | n/a | <p>More than 5 per WG</p> | <p>Independent assessments by I.O. and CSOs.</p> | <p>Civic space does not deteriorate further and ideally improve</p> |

| | | | | | | |
|--------------------------------------|---|---|--|--|--|---|
| | <i>and Serbia's EU integration process through grants to established CSOs.</i> | <p><i>Number of members of Serbian CSOs trained in advocacy and monitoring of reforms</i></p> <p><i>Transparency of processes through which self local governments' funds are awarded.</i></p> <p><i>Number of annual policy contributions created through EU FSTP supports provided through CSF 2021 – 2023.</i></p> | n/a n/a n/a | 70 annually Minimum 60% of local funds awarded in a transparent manner. 40 | <p>Reports compiled and published by the Ministry of Human and Minority Rights and Social Dialogue.</p> <p>TACSO reports.</p> <p>European Commission annual reports.</p> | allowing the space to operate for the civil society. |
| Output 1 related to outcome 2 | <i>2.1 Support is delivered to media and media organisations for contributing to the implementation of and for the independent monitoring of the media strategy of Serbia</i> | <i>Number of media and media organisation's activities in monitoring the media strategy of Serbia</i> | 0 | 4 | <p>Media monitoring of the EU Delegation's Press Section.</p> <p>OSCE reports</p> | Media and media organisations continued capacity and interest to monitor the implementation of the media strategy |
| Output 2 related to outcome 2 | 2.2 Support is delivered to the Press Council performing media ethics watchdog functions | <i>Number and Quality of Press Council investigations in media ethics</i> | 163 investigated complaints (last available date for 2020) | 200 | <p>Media monitoring of the EU Delegation's Press Section.</p> <p>OSCE reports</p> | No deterioration in the Press Council's capacity to function as a media ethics watchdog organisation |

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 country.

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 measures⁶.

4.2.1 Direct Management (Grants)

Grants: (direct management) :

I

(a) Purpose of the grant(s)

The grant will contribute to achievement of **Output 1 for outcome 1 - Support is provided to increase capacities of the Serbian CSOs in advocacy and monitoring to address Serbia's EU integration process**. The purpose of the grant is to support the activities of the National Convention on the European Union as unique institutional mechanism for enabling participation of CSOs in the Serbia's EU accession negotiation process.

(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 National Convention on the European Union (NCEU) in line with article 195 f of the Financial regulation:

"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 proposal"

The NCEU fully meets the above criteria in terms of having the technical competence and high degree of specialisation for the tasks to be performed. It is the only institutionalised permanent consultative mechanism for participation of CSOs in Serbia's EU negotiation process and has regular meetings with the Government of Serbia. It is part of the obligatory procedure on adoption of Negotiating Positions. For this reason, the activities concerned do not fall within the scope of a call for proposal

(d) Exception to the non-retroactivity of costs

The Commission authorises that the costs incurred may be recognised as eligible as of 01 January 2022 to ensure continuity in the monitoring and participation in legislative development processes linked to the EU accession process in Serbia.

II

(a) Purpose of the grant(s)

Operating grants will contribute to achievement of **Output 2 for outcome 1 - Support is provided to increase capacities of the Serbian CSOs in advocacy and monitoring to address Serbia's reforms process**, by supporting advocacy activities for CSOs to increase their abilities for advocacy and monitoring of reforms and participation in reforms and Serbia's EU integration processes while contributing to evidence based policy making.

(b) Type of applicants targeted

Civil society organisations.

III

(a) Purpose of the grant(s)

Action grants will contribute to achievement of **Output 2 for outcome 1 - Support is provided to increase capacities of the Serbian CSOs in advocacy and monitoring to address Serbia's reforms process** by supporting

⁶ 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.

capacity building activities for strengthening of CSOs and for the improvement of the legal framework for access to funding of civil society and its implementation as well as increased abilities to self-fund raise from citizens and different government levels contributing to their long term independent sustainability.

(b) Type of applicants targeted

Civil society organisations.

IV

(a) Purpose of the grant(s)

Grants will contribute to achievement of **Output 3 for outcome 1 - Providing coaching, technical and financial support to smaller CSOs and groups of natural persons (informal groups) to increase their capacity for advocacy and monitoring of reforms and Serbia's EU integration process through grants to established CSOs.** Enable established CSOs to support civil society in the form of legal entities as well as natural person(s) including through flexible financial support to third parties mechanisms and mentoring activities, to increase their capacity for advocacy and monitoring of reforms and Serbia's EU integration process.

(b) Type of applicants targeted

Civil society organisations.

V

(a) Purpose of the grant(s)

Grants will contribute to achievement of **Output 1 for outcome 2: Support is delivered to media and media organisations for the independent monitoring of the media strategy of Serbia** The purpose of the grants is support to the thematic areas of the media strategy such as the open and fair media market, objectivity, safety of journalists as a means to strengthen independent media and increase media plurality in Serbia.

(b) Types of applicants targeted:

Independent Media and Media organisations in Serbia.

VI

(a) Purpose of the grant(s):

Grants will contribute to achievement of **Output 2 for outcome 2 - Support is delivered to the media organisations performing media ethics watchdog functions.** The purpose of the grant is to strengthen capacities of the Serbian Press Council to actively promote professional and ethical standards in print and online media and to raise awareness of the importance of media self-regulation among media professionals. This is foreseen to be a direct award to the Press Council of Serbia, as the only self regulatory organisation actively promoting professional and ethical standards in print and online media.

(b) 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 Press Council of Serbia in line with article 195 f of the Financial regulation:

“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 proposal”

The Press Council fully meets the above in terms of having the technical competence and high degree of specialisation for the tasks to be performed. It is the only available institutionalised mechanism for watching over compliance with the standards of ethical journalism and thus the only self-regulatory body in this respect, and therefore the activities concerned do not fall with the scope of a call for proposal.

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 (amount in EUR) | EU contribution 2022 (amount in EUR) | EU contribution 2023 (amount in EUR) | Indicative third party contribution, in currency identified |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| <i>Output 1 for outcome 1 – “Increased capacities of CSOs in advocacy and monitoring to address Serbia’s EU integration process.”</i> | 500 000 | | | |
| Direct award (Grant to the NCEU) | | | | |
| <i>Output 2 for outcome 1 – “Increased capacities of CSOs in advocacy and monitoring to address reform processes.”</i> | | 2 000 000 | 2 000 000 | |
| Direct management (Grants) | | | | |
| <i>Output 3 for outcome 1 – “Providing coaching, technical and financial support to smaller CSOs and groups of natural persons (informal groups) to increase their capacity for advocacy and monitoring of reforms and Serbia’s EU integration process through grants to established CSOs.”</i> | 1 300 000 | 3 500 000 | 5 200 000 | |
| Direct management (Grants) | | | | |
| <i>Output 1 related to outcome 2 – “Support is delivered to media and media organisations for contributing to the implementation of and for the independent monitoring of the media strategy of Serbia”</i> | 1 000 000 | 1 000 000 | - | |
| Direct management (Grants) | | | | |
| <i>Output 2 related to outcome 2 – “Support is delivered to the media organisations performing media ethics watchdog functions”</i> | 700 000 | - | - | |
| Direct award (Grant to the Press Council) | | | | |
| Total envelope for grants 2021 – 2023: EUR 17 200 000 | Sum 2021 EUR 3 500 000 | Sum 2022 EUR 6 500 000 | Sum 2023 EUR 7 200 000 | |

4.5 Organisational set-up and responsibilities

The actions will be implemented under Direct Management mode.

The Contracting Authority shall be the Delegation of the European Union to the Republic of Serbia.

All components will be implemented through grants.

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 implementing partners will continuously capture, record and track key statistical information on the implementation of activities. Particular emphasis will be placed on systematic collection of data required to track progress on indicators identified in the logical framework. The monitoring methods and sources will include the following as relevant: action records showing details about events held and actions taken; website and social media analysis showing viewership, reach, and engagement of target audiences; visibility and impact of social media campaigns; number of mainstream media stories published using material provided through the action; and feedback from participants through questionnaires designed for the action.

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 Delegation. The European Commission and the EU Delegation 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

Civil Society

The CSOs continue to operate under unfavourable conditions in a shrinking civic space. Smearing campaigns, pressures from multiple levels of government and at times the Parliament do not assist in creating a conducive environment for civil society.

Though most of the legal framework for effective operations of CSOs are in place, challenges remain in transparent financing of the sector from the state budget and institutionalised mechanisms for participation of CSOs in policy dialogue.

Streamlining of the legislation that fosters institutionalised participation of civil society organisations in public administration reform, EU negotiation and other policy making processes remain targets of this action.

The financial support to CSOs will be an important element of the action. As such it will stimulate operations of urban and rural, big and small CSOs throughout Serbia. The Financial Support to Third Parties grants will in particular support smaller organisations and informal groups including expert individuals for selected activities and work programmes. All capacity building activities including the specific activity targeting improvement of the legal framework for funding of the civil society will contribute towards a stronger, more independent and sustainable civil society in Serbia.

Media

The political and economic situation in Serbia is still not conducive to resources being available for independent media and the continuation of the successful core support to media, especially at the local level will be continued through a dedicated Serbia window in the multi-country programme with the European Endowment for Democracy.

The other media programmes as envisaged in this action document will provide substantial support to the implementation of the media strategy in Serbia and its independent monitoring, a crucial element under the fundamentals first approach of the EU enlargement methodology, including watch dog functions on media ethics as performed by the Press Council.