



EN

THIS ACTION IS FUNDED BY THE EUROPEAN UNION

ANNEX 7

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 Türkiye for 2024-2025

Action Document for “EU Civil Society Facility and Media Programme for the Republic of Serbia for 2024-2025”

MULTIANNUAL ACTION PLAN

This document constitutes the multiannual work programme in the sense of Article 110(2) of the Financial Regulation, and annual and multiannual action plans and measures in the sense of Article 9 of IPA III Regulation and Article 23(2) of NDICI - Global Europe Regulation.

1. SYNOPSIS

1.1. Action Summary Table

Title	EU Civil Society Facility and Media Programme for the Republic of Serbia 2024-2025 Multi-country multiannual action plan on an EU Civil Society Facility and Media Programme in favour of the Western Balkans and Türkiye for 2024-2025
OPSYS	OPSYS business reference: ACT-62285
ABAC	ABAC Commitment level 1 number: JAD.1299145 (allocation 2024) JAD.1299146 (allocation 2025)
Basic Act	Financed under the Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance (IPA II)
Economic and Investment Plan (EIP)	No
EIP Flagship	No
Team Europe	No
Beneficiar(y)/(ies) of the action	The action shall benefit the citizens, the civil society and independent media organisations in the Republic of Serbia.
Programming document	IPA III Programming Framework
PRIORITY AREAS AND SECTOR INFORMATION	

Window and thematic priority	<i>Window 1: Rule of Law, Fundamental Rights and Democracy</i> Thematic Priority 2: Fight against corruption – 10% Thematic Priority 5: Fundamental rights – 30% Thematic Priority 6: Democracy – 20% Thematic Priority 7: Civil Society – 40% <i>(Partially also Window 3 and 4)</i>			
Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)	Main SDG (1 only): SGD 16 Peace, Justice and 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 <i>NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANISATIONS (NGOs) AND CIVIL SOCIETY</i> 60000 - <i>Private sector institution</i>			
Targets	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Climate <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Gender <input type="checkbox"/> Biodiversity			
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 type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Gender equality and women's and girl's empowerment	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" 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 and Tags	Policy objectives	Not targeted	Significant objective
EIP		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

EIP Flagship	YES <input type="checkbox"/>	NO <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
Tags:	YES	NO	
Transport	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Energy	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Environment and climate resilience	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Digital	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
Economic development (incl. private sector, trade and macroeconomic support)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
Human Development (incl. human capital and youth)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Health resilience	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
Migration and mobility	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
Agriculture, food security and rural development	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
Rule of law, governance and Public Administration reform	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Other	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
Digitalisation	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Tags	YES	NO	
digital connectivity	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
digital governance	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
digital entrepreneurship	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
digital skills/literacy	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
digital services	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
Connectivity	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Tags	YES	NO	
digital connectivity	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
energy	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
transport	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
health	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
education and research	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
Migration	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Reduction of Inequalities	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" 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 12 900 000.</p> <p>Total amount of EU budget contribution EUR 12 000 000.</p> <p>The contribution is for an amount of EUR 5 000 000 from the general budget of the European Union for 2024 and for an amount of EUR 7 000 000 from the general budget of the European Union for 2025, 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> <p>This action is co-financed in joint co-financing by:</p> <p>- Beneficiaries and other donors for an amount of EUR 900 000.</p>
MANAGEMENT AND IMPLEMENTATION	
Implementation modalities (management mode and delivery methods)	<p>Direct management through:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Grants - Procurement
Final date for concluding contribution / delegation agreements, procurement and grant contracts	<p>For 2024 Budget: At the latest by 31 December 2025</p> <p>For 2025 Budget: At the latest by 31 December 2026</p>
Indicative operational implementation period	<p>For 2024 Budget: 72 months following the adoption of the Financing Decision</p> <p>For 2025 Budget: 84 months following the adoption of the Financing Decision</p>

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 the conducive environment for civil society,
- Improving cooperation and partnership 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 environment for media pluralism in Serbia via enhancing the capacities of media and organizations to participate in the implementation and independent monitoring of the National Media Strategy, including enhanced media ethics.

1.3 Beneficiar(y)/(ies) of the Action

The action shall be carried out in the Republic of Serbia.

2. RATIONALE

2.1. Context

Civil society

The Treaty on European Union provides the legal basis for any European country to join the EU (Article 49) and the values on which the EU is based (Article 2). In this context the enlargement policy aims to guide, support and monitor changes in countries wishing to join the European Union in line with the values enshrined in the Treaty on European Union, its laws and standards.

These values make a clear reference to a functioning democracy, of which civil society forms an important part as an element providing a voice to the citizens as well as monitoring the works of the authorities.

The IPA III programming framework provides under Window 1 “Rule of Law, Fundamental Rights and Democracy” and the DG NEAR Guidelines for EU support to Civil Society in the enlargement region 2021 – 2027¹, provide a strong emphasis for a strong, independent and capacitated civil society. The EU Guidelines focus in particular on:

1. A conducive environment for civil society to carry out its activities is in place,
2. Strengthened cooperation and partnership between CSOs and IPA beneficiary authorities/institutions,
3. Reinforced CSO Capacity and Resilience to carry out their activities effectively

In relation to the above, the Serbia 2023 annual report of the European Commission² demonstrates the challenges civil society is operating under by stating that “CSOs and human rights defenders continued to raise awareness about civil and political rights. This took place in a polarised environment. Verbal attacks and smear campaigns against several CSOs and their financing continued, including by high-level officials. Serbia started implementing the 2022-2030 Strategy and action plan for creating a stimulating environment for the development of civil society, but measurable progress has yet to be demonstrated. A council for cooperation and development of civil society was established, as foreseen in the action plan, in September 2023. [...] In terms of public funding of civil society, the transparency and fairness of award procedures need to be significantly improved. Some of the key challenges acknowledged in the aforementioned strategy include the lack of consultations with CSOs when planning priority activities, discretionary decisions of managers in funding procedures, the lack of transparent criteria for approving financial and non-financial support to CSOs or for selecting independent experts in evaluation commissions, and insufficient transparency of public authorities in the reporting of spent funds on an annual basis”.

¹ https://neighbourhood-enlargement.ec.europa.eu/dg-near-guidelines-eu-support-civil-society-enlargement-region-2021-2027_en

² SWD (2023) 695 final. COMMISSION STAFF WORKING DOCUMENT “Serbia 2023 Report Accompanying the document Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions 2023 Communication on EU Enlargement policy”, Brussels, 8.11.2023

Media

The EU enlargement policy makes clear reference to freedom of expression as a key indicator of a country's readiness to become part of the EU. Freedom of expression as well as media freedom are pillars of democracy, being essential components of open and free debate as well as strong contributing factors to a conducive environment for economic and social development as well as innovation.

The IPA III programming framework provides under Window 1 “Rule of Law, Fundamental Rights and Democracy” a strong emphasis on the need to safeguard freedom of expression and independence of media.

The Serbia report of the 2023 Enlargement package of the European Commission assessed that *“Serbia has some level of preparation concerning freedom of expression. Overall, limited progress was made on the recommendations from last year, which therefore remain valid. The police and the prosecution service reacted swiftly to several cases of attacks and threats, working with the standing working group on the safety of journalists. However, cases of threats, intimidation, hate speech and violence against journalists remain a concern, as is the increase in strategic lawsuits against public participation (SLAPP), notably launched by members of national and local authorities, that may produce a chilling effect including self-censorship. (...) Serbia continued implementing the media strategy action plan. Several processes were relaunched after the formation of the new government in October 2022, after increasing delays. Consultations resumed in November 2022 on amending the Law on public information and media. Following public consultations, consultations with media associations and hurried consultations with the European Commission amendments were adopted to the laws on public information and media and on electronic media in October 2023 before the dissolution of parliament. Overall, the new laws will strengthen the independence of the regulatory body for electronic media (REM). They also codify the role of the Press Council and render the process of public co-funding more transparent and accessible. In the context of elections, the ban on media coverage of officials who are also candidates taking part in official gatherings organised for the opening of infrastructure or other facilities was extended to 30 days, which is an improvement of the current situation. However, the legislative process was not finalised fully in line with the EU acquis and European standards. The ownership of media by state-owned enterprises was prominent in deliberations. An important step was taken with respect to the application of criteria aligned with the EU acquis to the assessment of state aid, while it should be clarified that antitrust and merger control rules apply to the media sector and safeguards to protect media pluralism and editorial independence remain to be improved. The implementation of such safeguards will need to be closely monitored in practice. In August 2022, REM published a call for the allocation of a fifth media service licence with national frequency, which has still not been awarded, without credible justification. Political and economic influence on the media remains a source of concern. Serbia needs to take urgent action to counter anti-EU narratives propagated by numerous media outlets, and to counter foreign information manipulation and interference, most obviously in the context of Russia’s war of aggression against Ukraine”*.

The proposed action is fully in line with the priorities of the EU Enlargement Policy, the IPA III Programming framework as well as with addressing the findings of the Serbia 2023 report of the European Commission in terms of strengthening freedom of expression in various fields such as supporting the implementation of the media strategy as well as enhancing the safety of journalists. There is complementarity of funding between direct support via action grants as well as the continuation of a well-established core support programme via regional programmes. Furthermore, the support to organisations ensuring the strengthening of media ethics and combatting hate speech is fully in line with the relevant findings as outlined above.

2.2. Problem Analysis

Area of support #1: Civil society in Serbia

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 transparent and sustainable financing of civil society and further efforts are needed to ensure systematic cooperation.

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 1990s 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 uneven quality. There is a strong need for reinforced 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.

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. A particular focus will include philanthropy, cooperation at local level and volunteerism.

Main stakeholders

The main stakeholders are:

- Civil Society Organisations (CSOs)³, whose main organisational/capacity issues are:
 - shrinking civic space, limiting the actual implementation of freedom of association, expression and peaceful assembly,
 - limited capacities and opportunities to engage in policy dialogue and policy making processes,

³ Civil society is highly heterogeneous and encompasses a wide range of actors and aims. The EU considers civil society organisations to embrace a wide range of actors with multiple roles and mandates which includes all non-State, not-for-profit, independent and non-violent structures, through which people organise to pursue shared objectives and ideals, whether political, cultural, religious, environmental, social or economic or related to health [...] They include, but are not limited to: Nongovernmental organisations, organisations representing indigenous peoples, women's and youth organisations, diaspora organisations, migrants' organisations, local traders' associations and citizens' groups, cooperatives, employers' associations and trade unions (social partners), organisations representing economic and social interests, organisations fighting corruption and fraud and promoting good governance, civil rights organisations and organisations combating discrimination, local organisations (including networks) involved in decentralised regional cooperation and integration, consumer organisations, environmental, teaching, cultural, research and scientific organisations, universities, churches and religious associations and communities, philosophical and non-confessional organisations, the not-for-profit media and any non-governmental associations and independent foundations, including independent political foundations. This definition is established in the Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument (NDICI) Thematic Programme for Civil Society Organisations - Multi Annual Indicative Programme 2021-2027.

- weak financial and organisational sustainability. They will be extensively involved as implementing partners and target groups of the activities funded under this action.
- IPA beneficiary policy- and decision-makers, who have limited capacities in setting up effective cooperation and dialogue mechanisms with CSOs. They will be mainly involved as target groups of the activities funded under this action.

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 COVID-19 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 continuous independent monitoring and lobbying activities also since there are numerous delays in various activities.

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 war in Ukraine has exposed an unprecedented level of disinformation, also on national frequencies.

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.

Main stakeholders

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. Serbia does not have independent media of a wide outreach on a national level.

2.3. Lessons Learned

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

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

NEAR) covering CSF portfolio of 2011-2016, published on 1 December 2017, whose conclusion are still valid with regards to the reality on the ground, 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.”

There has been notable progress in the variety of support provided to civil society in Serbia and the practices within CSF 2021 – 2023 focused on targeting organisations at local level both as intermediary organisations to manage the FSTP as well as recipients at local level. An effective distribution and enabling mechanism to small CSOs including informal groups in regions outside the capital have also been at the focus. However, despite the effort, 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 2023:

1. The need to continue and expand the sizes of 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, a comprehensive platform of 800 CSOs, strongly advocating for accession of Serbia to the EU supported by an ongoing CSF grant also proved to be an effective monitoring mechanism on accession reforms while also raising the awareness on the benefits of Serbia becoming a member state of the EU among the citizens.

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.

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.

The rationale of continuing with grants to media organisations is still valid with a view to support the implementation of an adopted governmental strategy 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 were 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 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.

The EU Delegation has in 2022 launched a call for proposals in the field of support to organisations monitoring and contributing to the implementation of the media strategy of Serbia and as a result signed seven new grant agreements with a range of independent media and media organisations. This is a direct long-term support via actions to various relevant organisations and complements the ongoing core support programme via the European Endowment that provides a more flexible and in many cases more short term support. The two combined types of support are essential for the implementation of a comprehensive media support programme in Serbia.

The Press Council is the only media ethics watchdog organisation of Serbia. It 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.

The Press Council has been consistently supported by EU funding to perform and expand their functions, there is currently an ongoing agreement running until 2026. Given the importance of their function, further support is being planned under this AD given the high political priority.

3. DESCRIPTION OF THE ACTION

3.1. Intervention Logic

The Overall Objective/Impact of this action is to strengthen participatory democracy and the EU integration and approximation process in Serbia, through an enhanced contribution by civil society and media.

The Specific Objectives/Outcomes of this action is:

1. Strengthened and more gender-responsive civil society organisations through a more conducive environment, a strengthened cooperation and partnership between CSOs and public institutions at all levels, and reinforced CSO capacity and resilience.
2. Environment for Media pluralism in Serbia strengthened via enhancing the capacities of media and organizations to participate in the implementation and independent monitoring of the national Media strategy of including enhanced media ethics.

The Outputs to be delivered by this action contributing to the corresponding Specific Objectives (Outcomes) are:

1.1 Contributing to Outcome 1 (or Specific Objective 1):

Increased capacities of the Serbian CSOs in advocacy and monitoring to address Serbia's reform process and EU integration process via operating grants.

1.2 Contributing to Outcome 1 (or Specific Objective 1):

Coaching, technical and financial support provided 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 via action grants.

1.3 Contributing to Outcome 1 (or Specific Objective 1):

Increased funding and communication capacity of civil society is achieved while the Council for Civil Society is well capacitated. For this purpose, technical support is provided for:

- the Council of cooperation between Government and CSO,
- transparency and development of public financial resources for the civil society,
- better communication and visibility of the civil society in the country.

1.4 Contributing to Outcome 1 (or specific objective 1):

Continuous support to the national Convent (800 organisations) providing civil society oversight of the EU-Serbia accession negotiations (direct grant to the National Convent).

2.1 Contributing to Outcome 2 (or Specific Objective 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 via action grants media.

2.2 Contributing to Outcome 2 (or Specific Objective 2):

The Press Council effectively performing its media ethics watchdog functions via direct grant media.

The underlying intervention logic for this action is that:

Support to CSOs create engagement opportunities for them in policy- and decision-making processes helping improve CSOs experience and organisational capacity. This contributes to a more conducive environment, a strengthened cooperation and partnership between CSOs and public institutions leading to better overall policy making, and reinforced CSO capacity and resilience.

Support to media creates a more diversified media landscape in Serbia, contributing to the independent monitoring of media strategy, and strengthening the resilience of independent media actors.

3.2. Indicative 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.

- **Support to CSOs via operating grants linked to FPAs**

Activities to sustain and strengthen CSOs via operating grants linked to FPAs in sectors relevant to the EU accession process. 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.

Activities under Output 1.2 – Support is provided to increase capacities of the Serbian CSOs in advocacy and monitoring to address reforms and Serbia’s EU integration process via action grants

- **Support to CSOs via medium size action grants**

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, youth and local economic and social development, while also supporting the under-developed civil society in sectors where the EUNRC (EU national resource centre) is delivering on first seed support. 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. The call for proposal will also target civil society at local level outside Belgrade.

- **Support to civil society via use of financial support to third parties mechanisms**

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 and youth. 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 dialogue in support of the reforms. Special attention will be provided to philanthropy and volunteerism.

- **Support to advocacy for diversifying the sources of income for CSOs**

Continuation of the 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.

Activities under Output 1.3 - Increased public funding to and communication capacity of civil society is achieved while the Council for Civil Society is well capacitated.

- **Support provided to the Council for Civil Society**

Technical Assistance is provided to the Council for Civil Society, which is being established, that will assist in improving the enabling environment for CS, dialogue between CS and authorities and increasing of CSO capacity and resilience.

- **Support provided to the CSOs for accessing more public financing**

Technical assistance is provided as regards public financing of civil sector resulting in strengthening of a diverse financial source base for civil society.

- **Support provided to the CSOs for improvement of their communication and visibility**

Technical assistance is provided to support better communication and visibility of civil society organisations.

Activity under Output 1.4 – Providing support to the National Convention on European Union

One directly awarded grant (for 2024 – 2025) 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.

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 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 professionals.

3.3. Mainstreaming

Environmental Protection, Climate Change and Biodiversity

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.

Gender equality and empowerment of women and girls

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

As per OECD Gender DAC codes identified in section 1.1, this action is labelled as G1. This implies that gender equality is mainstreamed throughout the action and will be mainstreamed throughout all the contracts, in line with the approach outlined in the EU Gender Action Plan (GAP III) 2021-2025.

The Action is contributing to the objectives of the EU's Action Plan on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment in External Action 2021–2025 (GAP III) and Country Level Implementation Plan for GAP III which focuses on achieving women’s empowerment in all sectors of society and equal representation in decision-making positions, including political appointments.

The Action will enhance the capacities of civic actors to engage diverse women and girls, enhance the participation of women organisations in policy dialogue, and adopt a gender responsive approach throughout their activities. Furthermore the Action will ensure to increase the participation and access of women to expression and decision-making in and through media and new technologies of communication and to promote a balanced and non-stereotyped portrayal of women by the media. All contracts will include gender analysis and gender sensitive and sex disaggregated indicators to the extent possible.

Human Rights

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. In this regard, all civil society and media activities will put an emphasis on engaging, representing and reporting on the rights of most vulnerable groups, including people living in poverty, vulnerable women, children, persons with mental and/or physical disabilities, Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities as well as other minority groups. The Action will contribute to improve the social inclusion of the above-mentioned vulnerable groups and fight racism and all forms of discrimination, including antigypsyism.

Disability

As per OECD Disability DAC codes identified in section 1.1, this action is labelled as D0. This implies that the action does not target to address disability as a principal objective.

Democracy

The Action targets primarily strengthening civil society which is an undismissible part of a functioning democratic society, bringing a voice to the citizens and ability to influence their very own future. The empowerment of the citizens increases both the quality of decisions taken as a society as well as the commitment of all stakeholders.

3.4. Risks and Assumptions

Category	Risks	Likelihood (High/ Medium/ Low)	Impact (High/ Medium/ Low)	Mitigating measures
External environment	Further shrinking of space for civil society and attempts that hinder their operational space and capacity increase.	M	H	Ensure open dialogue with the authorities on the need for a healthy environment for civil society to operate. Key stakeholders need to develop and improve the legal strategic and financial framework for the development of civil society and actively follow the implementation of

				the Strategy for enabling environment for development of CSOs in Serbia which was adopted in 2022.
External environment	Strengthening and further funding of CSOs unnaturally close to authorities through official funding	M	H	Continue CS efforts for transparency of funding from various levels of governments. Support establishment of a Council with independent CSO members.
External environment	Decrease in government's commitment to the EU accession process	L	H	Government commitment to the EU accession is expected to remain unchanged, as well as political will to strengthen the cooperation mechanisms with civil society.
External environment	Deterioration of the environment for freedom of expression in Serbia due to continuously high levels of disinformation as well as discriminatory narratives	M	H	Continued support to independent media and close follow up with all stakeholders

External Assumptions

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 CSOs to cooperate within the framework of FPAs.

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.

Output 3 of outcome 1: Assumption – The beneficiaries of technical assistance continue to interact and use the output.

Output 4 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, government support for establishing a functioning Council for CS and effective management of the National Convent on the EU.

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.

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

3.5. Indicative Logical Framework Matrix

Results	Results chain: Main expected results	Indicators	Baselines (values and years)	Targets (values and years)	Sources of data	Assumptions
Impact	Strengthened participatory democracy and the EU integration and approximation process in Serbia, through an enhanced contribution by civil society and media.	1 Value of V-Dem Participatory Component Index ⁶ disaggregated by IPA Beneficiary 2 No. of closed chapters in EU Accession Negotiations	1 (2022) RS: 0.57 2 (2021) RS: 2	1 (2030) At least 0.64 2 (2030) RS: 30	1 V-Dem Annual Democracy report 2 European Commission Annual Reports	<i>Not applicable</i>
Outcome 1	1. Strengthened and more gender-responsive civil society organisations through a more conducive environment, a strengthened cooperation and partnership between CSOs and public institutions at all levels, and reinforced CSO capacity and resilience.	1.1 DG NEAR Guidelines Assessment Report: conducive environment index ⁷ 1.2 1.2 DG NEAR Guidelines Assessment Report: CSO – public institution cooperation index disaggregated by IPA Beneficiary 1.3 DG NEAR Guidelines Assessment Report: CSO capacity and accountability index disaggregated by IPA Beneficiary	1.1 (2021) RS: 3.21 1.2 (2021) RS: 1.33 1.3 (2021) RS: 3.20	1.1 (2030) RS: at least 3.8 1.2 (2030) RS: at least 3.8 1.3 (2030) RS: at least 3.8	1.1, 1.2, 1.3 DG NEAR Guidelines for EU Support to Civil Society in WBT Baseline Assessment report and Assessment report for subsequent years	Political stability and EU accession process continued

⁶ The Participatory Component Index is one of the indexes that compose the V-Dem liberal democracy index. The latter is made up of 5 components: ELECTORAL DEMOCRACY INDEX (EDI); LIBERAL COMPONENT INDEX (LCI); EGALITARIAN COMPONENT INDEX (ECI); PARTICIPATORY COMPONENT INDEX (PCI); DELIBERATIVE COMPONENT INDEX (DCI). For more information, <https://www.v-dem.net/publications/democracy-reports/>

⁷ The proposed index is based on the quantitative values allocated to selected indicators in the Assessment reports against the DG NEAR Guidelines for EU Support to Civil Society. Enabling environment index: simple average of allocated score (1 = low, 5 = high) for Guidelines indicators 1.1.a 1.2.a 1.2.b 1.3.a 1.4.a 1.5.a 1.5.b 1.6.a 1.7.a 1.7.c 1.7.d 1.7.e 1.7.f 1.8.a 1.9.a 1.10.a 1.10.b.

Outcome 2	2. Media strategy of Serbia independently monitored including enhanced media ethics	European Commission annual report, political criteria and fundamental rights	no progress	limited progress	European Commission Annual Report	The Government of Serbia is serious about the implementation of the media strategy and does not put any obstacles to independent monitoring
Output 1 related to Outcome 1	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.	1.1.1 Proportion of CSOs benefiting from relevant activity which claim an improvement in their financial and organisational sustainability	1.2.1 n/a 1.2.2 (2021) RS: 3.5	1.2.1 (2029) At least 80% 1.2.2 (2030) RS: 4.5	1.2.1 Project reports 1.2.2 DG NEAR Guidelines for EU Support to Civil Society in WBT Baseline Assessment report and Assessment report for subsequent years indicators 3.7a and 3.7b	Political stability and EU accession process continued. Continued interest on behalf of the authorities to cooperate with civil society.
Output 2 related to Outcome 1	1.2. Support is provided to increase capacities of the Serbian CSOs in advocacy and monitoring to address reforms and Serbia's EU integration process via action grants.	1.2.1 Proportion of CSOs benefiting from relevant activity which claim an improvement in their financial and organisational sustainability	1.2.1 n/a 1.2.2 n/a 1.2.3 (2021) RS: 3.5	1.2.1 (2029) At least 80% 1.2.2 (2029) At least 80%	1.2.1 and 1.2.2 Project reports 1.2.2 DG NEAR Guidelines for EU Support to	Political stability and EU accession process continued. Continued interest on behalf of the authorities to cooperate with civil society.

		<p>1.2.2 Proportion of CSOs and FSTP beneficiaries (formal and informal) benefiting from relevant activity which claim an improvement in their overall, financial and organisational sustainability</p> <p>1.2.3 DG NEAR Guidelines Assessment Report: CSO funding sources index</p>		1.2.3 (2030) RS: 4.5	Civil Society in WBT Baseline Assessment report and Assessment report for subsequent years indicators 3.7a and 3.7b	
Output related outcome 1	3 to 1.3 Increased funding and communication capacity of civil society is achieved while the Council for Civil Society is well capacitated.	<p>1.3.1 The percentage of CSOs showing satisfaction regarding the capacity of the Council for CS to address relevant issues.</p> <p>1.3.2. The percentage of public funding accessed by CSOs.</p> <p>1.3.3 The recognition by public about the value-add of civil society's work.</p>	<p>1.3.1 n/a</p> <p>1.3.2 n/a</p> <p>1.3.3 n/a</p>	<p>1.3.1 At least 75%</p> <p>1.3.2 tbd</p> <p>1.3.3 At least 30%</p>	<p>1.3.1. Survey made by TACSO</p> <p>1.3.2 tbd</p> <p>1.3.3 Relevant TACSO and CS own reports as well as surveys made by the EUDEL.</p>	Civic space does not deteriorate further and ideally improve allowing the space to operate for the civil society

Output 4 related Outcome 1	to 1.4. National Convention on European Union is supported.	1.4.1 Contribution of the NCEU to progress in EU Accession process of Serbia. 1.4.2 Number of policy meetings at ministerial and above level per annum.	1.4.1 n/a 1.4.2 One	1.4.1 (2029) tbd 1.4.2 Two	1.4.1 EUDEL reports 1.4.2 NCEU activity report	Political stability and EU accession process continued. Continued interest on behalf of the authorities to cooperate with civil society.
Output 1 related Outcome 2	to 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	2.1.1 Number of impactful media and media organisation's activities in implementing and monitoring the media strategy of Serbia	2.1.1 7 (2024)	2.1.1 10 (2026)	2.1.1EAMR	Media and media organisations continued capacity and interest to monitor the implementation of the media strategy
Output 2 related Outcome 2	to 2.2 Support is delivered to the media organisations performing media ethics watchdog functions”	2.2.1 Percentage of complaints being investigated - including gender equality related ones (disaggregated by sex) 2.2.2 Number of impactful activities supporting media ethics	2.2.1 120	2.2.1 140	2.2.1 Press Council official statistics	No deterioration in the Press Council's capacity to function as a media ethics watch dog organisation

4. IMPLEMENTATION ARRANGEMENTS

4.1. Financing Agreement

In order to implement this action, it is not envisaged to conclude a financing agreement with the Republic of Serbia.

4.2. Indicative Implementation Period

The indicative operational implementation period of this action, during which the activities described in section 3 will be carried out and the corresponding contracts and agreements implemented, is 72 months from the date of adoption by the Commission of this Financing Decision.

Extensions of the implementation period may be agreed by the Commission's responsible authorising officer in duly justified cases.

4.3. 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 measures⁸.

4.3.1. Direct Management (Grants)

4.3.1.1. Grants

Support to CSOs via operating grants linked to FPAs

(a) Purpose of the grant(s)

The grants will contribute to achieving the output 1.1, thus contributing to the outcome 1 of the Action.

(b) Type of applicants targeted

- be legal persons, and
- be non-profit-making, and
- be non-governmental organisations or a consortium of non-governmental organisations, and
- be established in the Republic of Serbia.

4.3.1.2. Grants

Support is provided to increase capacities of the Serbian CSOs in advocacy and monitoring to address reforms and Serbia's EU integration process via action grants

⁸ [EU Sanctions Map](#). 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.

(a) Purpose of the grant(s)

The grants will contribute to achieving the output 1.2, thus contributing to the outcome 1 of the Action.

(b) Type of applicants targeted

- be legal persons, and
- be non-profit-making, and
- be non-governmental organisations or a consortium of non-governmental organisations.

4.3.1.3. Grants

Provision of direct award grant to the National Convention on European Union

(a) Purpose of the grant(s)

The directly awarded grant (for 2024 – 2025) to the National Convention on European Union (NCEU) will cover capacity building, advocacy to increase local CSOs/citizens participation in the EU accession process with Serbia based on the NCEU's status as collaborative network of civil society organisations (CSOs) established in 2014 when Serbia officially started the negotiations for EU accessions. The NCEU is the institutionalized 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.

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.

(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 European Union. Under the responsibility of the Commission's authorising officer responsible, the grant may be awarded without a call for proposals 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 National Convention on European Union is mandated specifically as a consultative body of CSOs for the positions of the Serbian government on enlargement and its activities can not be subject of a Call for Proposals. The NCEU has been awarded various direct grants until now including one that is on-going till the end of 2023.

The NCEU represents a collaborative network of civil society organisations (CSOs) established in 2014 when Serbia officially started the negotiations for EU accessions. The NCEU is the institutionalized 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.

In this respect, the NCEU is part of regular procedures in the most important aspects of the EU accession process. The procedures enforced by the Government of the Republic of Serbia and the National Assembly, guarantee that National Convention is included in evaluating and assessing the quality of the negotiation positions for each negotiation chapter.

It is therefore considered that the NCEU fully meets the criteria for Prior Approval Case 20 F in terms of having the technical competence and high degree of specialization for the tasks to be performed as a consultation mechanism with civil society on positions regarding negotiating chapters.

4.3.1.4. Grants

Support is delivered through call for proposals to media and media organisations for contributing to the implementation of and for the independent monitoring of the media strategy of Serbia

(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:

- be legal persons, and
- be non-profit-making, and
- be Independent Media and Media organisations established in the Republic of Serbia.

4.3.1.5. Grants

Support is delivered to the media organisations performing media ethics watchdog functions

(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. The Press Council is an independent, self-regulatory body that brings together publishers, owners of print and online media, news agencies and media professionals. It was established to monitor the compliance of the Journalists Code of Ethics of Serbia, analyzing and solving complaints by individuals as well as institutions in relation to content violations, spreading of wrong or biased information, hate speech and inflammatory language and similar.

(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 Press Council. Under the responsibility of the Commission's authorising officer responsible, the grant may be awarded without a call for proposals 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 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, 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.

The part of the action under the budgetary envelope reserved for grants may, partially or totally and including where an entity is designated for receiving a grant without a call for proposals, be implemented in indirect management with an entity, which will be selected by the Commission’s services using the following criteria:

- relevant extensive technical experience in working with CSOs/media organisations and in supporting the civil society and media sectors;
- demonstrated operational capacity to manage projects of similar size, and to ensure a proper implementation of FSTP schemes.

4.3.2. Direct Management (Procurement)

Output 1.3 will be delivered under procurement in direct management. A technical assistance will be procured for delivery support to:

- The council for cooperation between Government and civil society
- More transparent financing of civil society from state budget
- Better communication and visibility of the civil society

4.4. 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, subject to the following provisions. The geographical eligibility for civil society organisations is the territory of Serbia.

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 (Article 28(10) NDICI-Global Europe Regulation).

4.5. Indicative Budget

Indicative Budget components	EU contribution 2024 (amount in EUR)	EU contribution 2025 (amount in EUR)	Indicative third-party contribution (amount in EUR)*
Methods of implementation – cf. section 4.3			
Outcome 1 Strengthened and more gender-responsive civil society organisations	5 000 000	5 000 000	800 000

through a more conducive environment, a strengthened cooperation and partnership between CSOs and public institutions at all levels, and reinforced CSO capacity and resilience, composed of:			
<i>Grants (direct management) – cf. section 4.3.1</i>			
Operating grants via Framework Partnership Agreements	500 000	500 000	100 000
Support is provided to increase capacities of the Serbian CSOs in advocacy and monitoring to address reforms and Serbia's EU integration process.	2 500 000	4 500 000	700 000
Provision of direct award grant to the National Convention on European Union	500 000	0	0
<i>Procurement (direct management) – cf. section 4.3.2</i>			
Increased public funding to and communication capacity of civil society is achieved while the Council for Civil Society is well capacitated.	1 500 000	0	0
Outcome 2 [media] composed of:		2 000 000	100 000
<i>Grants (direct management) – cf. section 4.3.1</i>			
Support is delivered to media and media organisations for the independent monitoring of the media strategy of Serbia		1 500 000	100 000
Support is delivered to the media organisations performing media ethics watchdog functions		500 000	0
Grants – total envelope under section 4.3.1	3 500 000	7 000 000	
Procurement – total envelope under section 4.3.2	1 500 000		
Evaluation – c.f. section 5.2 Audit – c.f. section 5.3 Strategic Communication – c.f. section 6	N.A.	To be covered by another Decision	N.A.
Totals	5 000 000	7 000 000	900 000

* co-funding from the beneficiaries (either own sources or other donors)

4.6. Organisational Set-up and Responsibilities

The actions will be implemented under Direct Management mode through grants and procurement. Main counterparts are Civil Society Organisations and Media/Media organisations.

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

As part of its prerogative of budget implementation and to safeguard the financial interests of the Union, the Commission may participate in any of the above governance structures set up for governing the implementation of the action.

5. PERFORMANCE MEASUREMENT

5.1. Monitoring and Reporting

The day-to-day technical and financial monitoring of the implementation of this action will be a continuous process, and part of the implementing partner's responsibilities. To this aim, the implementing partner shall establish a permanent internal, technical and financial monitoring system for the action and elaborate regular progress reports (not less than annual) and final reports. Every report shall provide an accurate account of implementation of the action, difficulties encountered, changes introduced, as well as the degree of achievement of its Outputs and contribution to the achievement of its Outcomes, and if possible at the time of reporting, contribution to the achievement of its Impacts, as measured by corresponding indicators, using as reference the log frame matrix.

The Commission may undertake additional project monitoring visits both through its own staff and through independent consultants recruited directly by the Commission for independent monitoring reviews (or recruited by the responsible agent contracted by the Commission for implementing such reviews).

Arrangements for monitoring and reporting, including roles and responsibilities for data collection, analysis and 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 for the Western Balkans and Turkey 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) 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.

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.

5.2. 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. The evaluation will analyse the support to civil society and media in Serbia under the civil society facility including decisions related to previous years with the purpose to identify learnings or make corrections during the implementation where appropriate.

The Commission shall form a Reference Group (RG) composed by representatives from the main stakeholders at both EU and national (representatives from the government, from civil society organisations (private sector,

NGOs, etc.), etc.) levels. If deemed necessary, other donors will be invited to join. 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 Beneficiary and other key stakeholders following the best practice of evaluation dissemination. The implementing partner and the Commission shall analyse the conclusions and recommendations of the evaluations and, where appropriate, in agreement with the 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.

5.3. Audit and Verifications

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 audit or verification assignments for one or several contracts or agreements.

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

6. STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION AND PUBLIC DIPLOMACY

All entities implementing EU-funded external actions have the contractual obligation to inform the relevant audiences of the Union's support for their work by displaying the EU emblem and a short funding statement as appropriate on all communication materials related to the actions concerned. To that end they must comply with the instructions given in the 2022 guidance document [*Communicating and raising EU visibility: Guidance for external actions*](#) (or any successor document).

This obligation will apply equally, regardless of whether the actions concerned are implemented by the Commission, the Beneficiary, service providers, grant beneficiaries or entrusted or delegated entities such as UN agencies, international financial institutions and agencies of EU Member States. In each case, a reference to the relevant contractual obligations must be included in the respective financing agreement, procurement and grant contracts, and contribution agreements.

7. 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.

Appendix 1: IDENTIFICATION OF THE PRIMARY INTERVENTION LEVEL FOR REPORTING IN OPSYS

A Primary intervention (project/programme) is a coherent set of results structured in a logical framework aiming at delivering development change or progress. Identifying the level of the primary intervention will allow for:

- ✓ Differentiating these Actions or Contracts from those that do not produce direct reportable development results, defined as support entities (i.e. audits, evaluations);
- ✓ Articulating Actions and/or Contracts according to an expected common chain of results and therefore allowing them to ensure a more efficient and aggregated monitoring and reporting of performance;
- ✓ Having a complete and exhaustive mapping of all results-bearing Actions and Contracts.

The present Action identifies as

Group of contracts level (i.e: i) series of programme estimates, ii) cases in which an Action Document foresees many foreseen individual legal commitments (for instance four contracts and one of them being a Technical Assistance) and two of them, a technical assistance contract and a contribution agreement, aim at the same objectives and complement each other, iii) follow up contracts that share the same log frame of the original contract)		
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Group of contracts	<p>Outcome 1 (Strengthened and more gender-responsive civil society organisations through a more conducive environment, a strengthened cooperation and partnership between CSOs and public institutions at all levels, and reinforced CSO capacity and resilience)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Contract 1 - Contract 2 <p>Outcome 2 (Media)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Contract 1 - Contract 2