



EN

THIS ACTION IS FUNDED BY THE EUROPEAN UNION

ANNEX 6

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 North Macedonia 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 North Macedonia 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-62284
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 III)
Economic and Investment Plan (EIP)	No
EIP Flagship	No
Team Europe	No (TBC)
Beneficiary(y)/(ies) of the action	The action shall be carried out in North Macedonia.
Programming document	IPA III Programming Framework

PRIORITY AREAS AND SECTOR INFORMATION

Window and thematic priority	<p>Window 1: Rule of Law, Fundamental Rights and Democracy</p> <p>Thematic Priority 5: Fundamental rights (with reference to media-freedom of expression) 40%</p> <p>Thematic Priority 6: Democracy 20%</p> <p>Thematic Priority 7: Civil Society 40%</p> <p>(Partially Windows 2 and 3)</p>			
Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)	<p>Main SDG Goal 16: Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions</p> <p>Others:</p> <p>SDG 01: No Poverty</p> <p>SDG 05: Gender Equality</p> <p>SDG 08: Decent Work and Economic Growth</p> <p>SDG 10: Reduce Inequalities</p> <p>SDG 11: Sustainable cities and communities</p> <p>SDG 17: Partnership for the goals</p>			
DAC code(s)	<p>150150 Democratic participation and civil society (60 %)</p> <p>15153- Media and free flow of information (40%)</p>			
Main Delivery Channel	<p>20000 – Non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and civil society</p> <p>60000 - Private sector institution</p>			
Targets	<p><input type="checkbox"/> Climate</p> <p><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Gender</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Biodiversity</p>			
Markers (from DAC form)	General policy objective	Not targeted	Significant objective	Principal objective
	Participation development/good governance	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
	Aid to environment	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Gender equality and women's and girl's empowerment	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	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	Principal 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 type="checkbox"/>		
	Energy	<input type="checkbox"/>		
	Environment and climate resilience	<input type="checkbox"/>		
	Digital	<input type="checkbox"/>		
	Economic development (incl. private sector, trade and macroeconomic support)	<input type="checkbox"/>		
	Human Development (incl. human capital and youth)	<input type="checkbox"/>		
	Health resilience	<input type="checkbox"/>		
	Migration and mobility	<input type="checkbox"/>		
	Agriculture, food security and rural development	<input type="checkbox"/>		
	Rule of law, governance and Public Administration reform	<input type="checkbox"/>		
Other	<input type="checkbox"/>			
Digitalisation	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" 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 checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>		
digital services	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input 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"/>
	Reduction of Inequalities	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
	COVID-19	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
BUDGET INFORMATION			
Amounts concerned	<p>Budget line: 15.020101.01</p> <p>Total estimated cost: EUR 6 420 000</p> <p>Total amount of EU budget contribution EUR 6 000 000</p> <p>The contribution is for an amount of EUR 3 000 000 from the general budget of the European Union for financial year 2024 and for an amount of EUR 3 000 000 from the general budget of the European Union for financial year 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> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Implementing partners/grant beneficiaries for an amount of EUR 420 000. 		
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 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 democracy in North Macedonia and the EU integration and approximation process through reinforcing capacities and systematic contribution of civil society and media organisations.

The action will support civil society involvement in inclusive policy formulation and decision-making and the enabling environment for civil society and media organisations. The action aims to strengthen the capacities of CSOs of being effective voice of citizens needs in influencing, monitoring and advocating the sector reforms through structured cooperation with public institutions. The action will increase the capacities of media/journalists to contribute to public debate and democratic reforms and for better-informed society for the accession negotiations.

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

The action shall be carried out in North Macedonia.

2. RATIONALE

2.1. Context

The accession to the European Union is a key political objective for North Macedonia. The role and cooperation of the governments, civil society and media organisations in this process is crucial for further progress in the key institutional, political and economic reforms of the country. In mid-2022, North Macedonia made progress towards the EU accession process. Following the 2020 Council decision to open the accession negotiations and the first intergovernmental conference of 19 July 2022, the analytical examination of the EU *acquis* (screening) started immediately and is ongoing.

The opening of the EU accession negotiations process was an important milestone for the country progress and requires mobilisation of the entire society for the demanding sector reforms at many levels. Progressing towards the EU membership requires both political commitment and citizens' support. The effectiveness of civil society is assessed as part of the political criteria and particularly the “*Functioning of Democratic Institutions*” along with the role played by the Parliament and the elections in a functioning democratic society.

Civil society organisations have already proved to be important "agents of change", being a bridge between the EU institutions, national authorities and citizens and preparing the society for EU accession. Their involvement in policy-making is therefore essential but currently needs structural and systematic improvement.

Media also play a key role in providing accurate, reliable information for citizens' understanding and participation in the accession context. Freedom of expression and media freedom are assessed under *Cluster 1 “Fundamentals”*, in particular under Chapter 23 “*Justice and Fundamental Rights*” and also under Chapter 10 “*Information Society and Media*”.

Civil society and media organisations in North Macedonia already contributed to the progress towards democratisation and compliance with international standards, respecting human rights and rule of law, including stronger monitoring and watchdog of the policy implementation, decision-making, transparency and accountability of the institutions. To ensure those results, civil society requires strategic, long-term support that will ensure their uninterrupted operation and constant upgrading of their capacities to fully contribute with their expertise and knowledge to all processes and in all areas covered by the *acquis* from policy formulation to monitoring. Media have to be able to operate freely and independently to contribute in a qualitative way to the public debate and to better inform citizens about the ongoing sector reforms and accession process.

The main national strategic document for the civil society sector is the **Strategy for cooperation with civil society 2022-2024**. The Strategy translates **DG NEAR Guidelines for EU Support to Civil Society** in the Enlargement Region 2014-2020 and 2021-2027¹. It aims at encouraging the development, independence, efficiency and sustainability of civil society activities.

The guiding principle for EU's support to media freedom in the country are contained in the EU legislation related to the media, especially new upcoming regulations (Media freedom act, Digital service act, Anti-

¹ [DG NEAR Guidelines for EU Support to Civil Society in the Enlargement Region 2021-2027 \(europa.eu\)](#)

SLAPP directive, etc.), as well as the European Commission annual reports, which issue specific recommendations to follow for the upcoming reporting period.

In terms of support to specific sectors, this action will address the strategic priorities of **Window 1** - Rule of Law, Fundamental Rights and Democracy -Thematic Priority 5: Fundamental rights; Thematic Priority 6: Democracy; Thematic Priority 7 Civil Society; and **Window 2**: Good Governance EU acquis alignment, good neighbourly relations and strategic communication - Thematic Priority 1: Good governance. By focusing on these sectors, the action is in line with the **EU-Western Balkans Strategy** and the **Flagship Initiative on Rule of Law**. It will also complement the ongoing EU-funded *Regional Programme on Local Democracy in the Western Balkans (ReLOaD)* and *Technical Assistance to Civil Society Organisations (TACSO)* aimed at increasing and improving the capacities, networking, exchange of best practices and democratic role of CSOs at the regional level, as well as support a civil society friendly environment. The action may also reinforce synergies with RCC Youth Lab, RYCO programmes or RELOAD youth component.

This action is not directly linked to the preparation of the Economic Reform Programmes (ERPs) for North Macedonia for strengthening the economic governance and participation in the EU's economic policy coordination procedures in the European Semester. However, the ERPs being a key element of the 'fundamentals first' approach in the EU's enlargement strategy, fostering civil society support through this action may indirectly contribute at improving economic policy planning and steering relevant reforms, including improved conditions for inclusive growth, job creation and social inclusion. In particular, the action could contribute to the implementation of ERP Policy Guidance for the enlargement region², through grants' implementation, related to the ERP priorities.

The action is not directly linked to the new Growth Plan for the Western Balkans³. However, it may contribute to the implementation of the pillar on *Accelerating fundamental reforms*, including on the fundamentals cluster, supporting the Western Balkans' path towards EU membership, improving sustainable economic growth and strengthening regional stability.

Apart from support to civil society in general, this action will focus on a number of specific policy areas in which meaningful and systemic consultation with civil society is important to the EU integration and accession negotiations and/or where the role of civil society and media organisations is fundamental to increase transparency and integrity and/or where the civil society involvement has been weak. Since 2017, North Macedonia has made significant progress in introducing the **sector approach**. Civil Society for the parts related to fundamental rights and Media is embedded in the Sector Working Group (SWG) on Rule of Law and Fundamental Rights, while for all the other aspects is spread in all the other SWGs.

In relation to civil society, the below list of national documents is related to the Action:

- Code of Good Practice for Financial Support to Citizen Associations and Foundations, from 2007⁴
- Code of Good Practices for Participation of the Civil Sector in the Process of Policy Making, from 2011⁵,
- Government Programs for Financial Support to Program Activities of Associations and Foundations⁶,

² <https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-9478-2023-INIT/en/pdf>

Joint Conclusions with the Policy Guidance for the 2023-2025 ERP cycle, adopted 16/05/2023 at the Economic and Financial Dialogue between the EU and the Western Balkans and Türkiye

³ COM (2023) 691 final. COMMUNICATION FROM THE COMMISSION TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT, THE COUNCIL, THE EUROPEAN ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMITTEE AND THE COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS "New growth plan for the Western Balkans", Brussels, 8.11.2023

⁴ <https://rcgo.mk/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/code-of-good-practices-for-financing-cs.pdf>

⁵ https://www.nvosorabotka.gov.mk/sites/default/files/dokumenti/kodeks_na_dobri_praktiki.pdf

⁶ <https://www.nvosorabotka.gov.mk/?q=mk/node/278>

- Strategy of the Government of North Macedonia for Cooperation with and Development of the Civil Sector 2022-2024 (Strategy)⁷,
- Action Plan for implementation of the Strategy of the Government of North Macedonia for Cooperation with and Development of the Civil Sector 2022-2024 ⁸
- Annual and thematic reports published by domestic and international organisations are also basis for monitoring and assessing the enabling environment in the country⁹

In relation to media, the below list of laws/documents is related to the Action:

- Law on Media, Law on audio and audio-visual media services, Electoral Code, the Law on Civil Liability for Insult and Defamation, etc.
- Challenges in the media sector were addressed as part of Recommendations of the Senior Experts' Group on systemic Rule of Law issues published in autumn 2017¹⁰.
- Report from the Peer-review mission on media in North Macedonia was published, providing overview of challenges and recommendations for the media reforms.
- Annual and thematic reports published by domestic and international media associations are also basis for monitoring and assessing the situation on freedom of expression and media in the country.

In terms of complementarity with other donors' assistance in the identified sectors of support, the action will complement the support to the Norwegian regional civil society programme SMART Balkans (2021-2025), the Swedish Development Agency national support in the areas of policy dialogue an EU accession, civil society and gender equality and environment, USAID support in anti-corruption, social inclusion and democracy and the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation's supporting civil society and democracy.

2.2. Problem Analysis

Area of support 1 - Civil Society

Short problem analysis

Civil society continued to play a constructive role in supporting democratic processes and ensuring greater checks and balances in North Macedonia. The civic dialogue on issues important for the civil society development in the country is recently growing but still needs improvements in practice, including institutional dialogue on public policy.

In the 2023 Report¹¹, the European Commission noted that more is still needed to mainstream civil society engagement in priority areas and consultation activities in order to enable CSOs to play their important role in the reform process. CSOs need to be consulted on draft legislation more systematically and meaningfully. The role of civil society in the EU accession negotiation process needs to be strengthened as well. Existing legal and financial frameworks still need to be amended and implemented in practice, notably to provide consistent mechanisms for awarding public funding to CSOs.

The Council for Cooperation between the Government and Civil Society is still the main structural channel

⁷ <https://www.nvosorabotka.gov.mk/sites/default/files/Strategija%20usvoena%2028%2012%202021.pdf>

⁸ <https://www.nvosorabotka.gov.mk/sites/default/files/Akciski%20plan%20usvoen%2028%2012%202021.pdf>

⁹ <https://monitor.civicus.org/explore/expert-body-established-approving-names-associations-lgbtqi-hate-attack/>

https://www.balkancsd.net/novo/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/24-7-North-Macedonia_final.pdf

<https://rcgo.mk/analizi-za-ovozmozhuвачka-okolina-za-go/>

¹⁰ https://neighbourhood-enlargement.ec.europa.eu/system/files/2017-09/2017.09.14_seg_report_on_systemic_rol_issues_for_publication.pdf

¹¹ SWD(2023) 693 final. COMMISSION STAFF WORKING DOCUMENT “North Macedonia 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

for consulting and involving civil society in policy dialogue and decision making. Therefore, the role and operationalisation of the Council and of the relevant unit within the General Secretariat of the government needs to be enhanced.

Hence, an improved legal, financial and policy framework is still needed to strengthen an enabling environment for civil society. In general, the legal framework for civil society is adequate by guaranteeing the freedoms of association, assembly and expression. However, legal solutions are still needed to have a fully enabling legal framework for the civil society in the country, in particular ensuring its long-term financial sustainability. Implementation of the strategy for cooperation with and development of civil society 2022-2024 is ongoing, although an effective monitoring framework is needed to check on its implementation.

The Law on Associations and Foundations specifies that organisations may receive funds from the state budget and the budgets of the municipalities. However, adequate administrative capacity and proper organisational set-up is needed in the Government unit for NGO Corporation. Budget allocations for the annual programme for cooperation with civil society were not reinstated in the supplement to the 2022 budget. This contradicts the policy aims of the strategy of cooperation with civil society 2022-2024.

A number of CSOs are working with insufficient funds, thus the financial sustainability becomes a greater challenge. The annual State funding for civil society is not sufficient to cover the needs of civil society. Civil society mostly relies on foreign donations. Corporate donations remain a modest source of funding and are often provided on ad-hoc basis, but CSOs possess important knowledge on issues of interest to companies and experience on how to address them. There is a need to establish sustainable cooperation between civil society and business community in a way that diversifies CSO funding sources by offering services to the private sector and addressing issues of common interest, such as the consumer protection, fair market relations, etc.

Regarding CSOs' internal capacities and operational structures there are common shortcomings like a) a lack of functional organisational structure, strategic planning and long-term institutional development; lack of professional staff; insufficient accountability; and weak financial management. b) CSOs working on local and grass-root level comparatively have weaker capacities and have less funding possibilities, unfavourable socio-cultural context, weak cooperation with local government and small support from the community. CSOs show limits in their visibility and external communications with stakeholders including constituencies and citizens.

Identification of main stakeholders and corresponding institutional and/or organisational issues (mandates, potential roles, and capacities) to be covered by the action

The General Secretariat of the Government of North Macedonia is responsible for the overall implementation of the Strategy of Cooperation with Civil Society and its monitoring is performed by the Council of Cooperation with Civil Society. Furthermore, the Secretariat for European Affairs is responsible for the structural involvement of CSOs in the accession negotiation and work of the related Sector Working Groups.

Area of support 2 - Freedom of Expression and Media

Short problem analysis

There is a critical need to support civil society and media organisations in enhancing freedom of expression and independence of media, in the context of the EU integration process. The pressure of informed domestic public opinion is a crucial stimulus. A key missing ingredient is a strengthened role for independent watchdog groups, committed to opening up government budgets and policies for public review and discussion.

The last Freedom House Report¹² assesses the situation in North Macedonia as partly free, also finding that while the media are taking part in a vigorous public discourse, journalists and activists face further pressure and intimidation. Law enforcement authorities and the Public Prosecutor's Office have not effectively followed up incidents involving journalists and better coordination between different institutions is needed to act faster on reported violations.

In the 2023 Report, the European Commission noted that the general context is favourable to media freedom and allows for critical media reporting. The amended Criminal Code and Law on civil liability for defamation raised the overall level legal protection for journalists. However, systemic challenges remain to be addressed: deep media polarisation, physical and verbal violence against journalists, working conditions for media workers, especially their labour and social rights. The laws encompassing the functioning of the media need to be implemented. Digital technologies and disruptions on the media market point to the need for a general strategy on reform of media in cooperation with all stakeholders.

A greater transparency is needed regarding media advertising by state institutions and political parties. Reform of the public service broadcaster is required to strengthen its independence, professional standards and financial sustainability. A revision of the legal framework governing the media to bring it into line with the EU acquis and European standard is needed, in particular on competition and state aid rules, intellectual property rights, part of the EU Single Market. Furthermore, progress in implementation of the strategy to reform the public broadcaster and finalise appointments for the public service broadcaster's programme council and the media regulator's council is also needed.

Additionally, political divisions continue to be reflected in the blockages or lack of appropriate debate in the Parliament for issues related to freedom of expression/media. The authorities continue to use discretionary right in the payment of state funding towards the public service broadcaster, media regulator and public broadcasting enterprise.

The country needs to develop and refine electoral observation methodology to monitor and assess the use of social media and other digital technologies during election campaigns against international standards. Disinformation, hate speech, disrespect of professional standards and violations of intellectual property rights are frequent in online media. Self-regulation efforts still need to be intensified to support advancement in professional standards and the quality of journalism. The financial sustainability of media, including independent media and working conditions of journalists remain a challenge for the country. Efforts are needed in strengthening of competitiveness of the audio-visual media market and media digital transformation as a key for unlocking the economic potential.

Identification of main stakeholders and corresponding institutional and/or organisational issues (mandates, potential roles, and capacities) to be covered by the action

The General Secretariat of the Government of North Macedonia is responsible for the overall implementation of the Strategy of Cooperation with Civil Society and its monitoring is performed by the Council of Cooperation with Civil Society. The Ministry of Information Society and Administration is responsible for creation of legal and media policy; The Ministry of Justice is responsible for part of media legislation (Defamation law).

2.3. Lessons Learned

The choice of priority areas for this action and funding modalities were guided by the consultations (online consultations, March 2023) organised by the EU Delegation with local civil society actors, EU member states

¹² <https://freedomhouse.org/country/north-macedonia/nations-transit/2023>

and other civil society donors, government institutions responsible for cooperation with civil society, and colleagues in the Delegation. The upcoming opening of accession negotiations which require CSOs to be effectively included, participating and contributing to the process has also highlighted the need to further support (or to start supporting) civil society in some important policy areas.

So far, throughout the IPA Civil Society Facility (CSF) as the main channel of support for civil society actions were supported in addressing different range of challenges that the enlargement region faces such as the rule of law, economic development, energy efficiency, environmental protection, and social cohesion. The use of action and operating grants to support CS and media organisations have proved to be an efficient tool to strengthen capacities of CSOs working in sectors of strategic importance. This includes also the continuation of the actions towards more CSOs' structured dialogue with public authorities and supporting the EU related key reforms and structures for EU negotiations.

Support to civil society actors requires an efficient mix of funding modalities based on the real needs and absorption capacity of diverse beneficiary organisations, as well as on their management resources to address those needs.

Furthermore, the midterm review of the Civil Society and Media Facility 2016-2017 provided useful recommendations among which the recommendation to support middle-sized CSOs and strike a balance between financial support to small and large CSOs still holds true. The experience of providing financial support to third parties (FTSP), operating grants for institutional support to CSOs, and the recently launched new funding mechanism (EU Civil Resilience Mechanism) proved to be efficient support for the small and grassroots organisations - important for strengthening the societal resilience in a context of frequent social changes as well as increasing citizens' understanding of the accession process and the practical benefits of EU membership.

The use of operating grants to support civil society actors have proved to be a useful tool to strengthen and consolidate their capacities to work in sectors/areas of strategic importance, that requires a long-term approach in order to achieve long lasting impact and results. The first phase of Framework Partnership Agreements and related strategic plans is finishing in 2025 and a new phase will be supported by the present programme.

It is also important to empower and strengthen creative synergies between civil society, media and other stakeholders (private sector, academia, local government) to ensure effective communication, regarding the EU perspective, gender equality, inter-cultural dialogue and green transition.

The most important lessons learnt from the above listed previous actions are the following:

- Civil society cooperation programmes have proven to be a particularly useful tool in:
 - Harmonising the methodologies and outputs for enhancement of Civil Society and media organisations Support;
 - Sharing best practices;
 - Creating networks of experts among the relevant IPA III beneficiaries but also with the Member States' experts;
 - Strengthening the thematic networking among Civil society and media organisations and their increased responsibility in involving grass rooting organisations;
 - Improving the regulatory environment for civil society and media in the country;
 - Promoting CSO's access to EU funding;

The gained experience in the last years has been adequately considered in the preparation of this action.

3. DESCRIPTION OF THE ACTION

3.1. Intervention Logic

The **overall objective/impact of the action** is to enhance participatory democracy in North Macedonia and support the EU accession process through the reinforcement of the role, contribution and capacities of civil society and media organisations.

The **specific objectives/outcomes** of this action are:

1. Strengthened and more gender-responsive civil society organisations;
2. The independence and pluralism of the media fostered.

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

- 1.1 Improved capacities of the civil society to deliver services to citizens and actively contributing and monitoring the accession negotiations;
- 1.2 Technical and financial support provided to smaller CSOs and grass rooting to increase their capacity for advocacy and monitoring of reforms on local level;
- 1.3 Increased funding capacity of civil society is achieved to address the local community needs;
- 2.1 Support is delivered to the media organisations performing media watchdog functions and are engaged in the EU accession;
- 2.2 Pluralism of civil society and media sustained through grants for innovative media initiatives, fringe media, including support for community based organisations (FSTP).

The underlying intervention logic for this action is that if CSO capacities are improved, a more conducive environment for CSOs is ensured and cooperation between CSOs and public institutions is improved, then CSOs will be strengthened and participatory democracy will be enhanced. Moreover, if a more conducive environment for the freedom of expression is ensured and professional and ethical standards are improved, then the independence and pluralism of the media is fostered.

3.2. Indicative Activities

Civil Society

Activities under Outcome 1 and Outcome 2

Activity related to Output 1 of Outcome 1

- **Support to Civil Society Networks for systematic participation in the EU accession process and negotiations**

Activities to sustain and strengthen CSOs networks via grant for further development of CSOs' sectorial networking mechanism, where through structured mechanisms/models, the sector policy dialogue should be improved throughout the twelve IPA sectorial working groups (SWG). The actions should aim at developing CSOs' capacities to further unify their expertise towards strong and structured dialogue with the Government, and for efficient advocacy and monitoring and direct involvement in the accession process.

Activity related to Output 1 of Outcome 1 and Output 1 and 2 of Outcome2

- **Support to Civil society and media organisations across various thematic policy area**

Activities to sustain and strengthen civil society and media organisations via action grants in sector of priority including but not limited to all aspects of rule of law, socio-economic development, circular economy, gender equality, youth, etc.

Civil Society Component

Strong focus will be given to increase CSOs' impact on policies on local level by further increasing capacities for dialogue with decision makers, undertaking "watchdog" role, advocacy and lobbying for citizens' interests and broader issues, building constituency, raising public awareness, mobilising support and building strong partnership on local level, This includes also actions that support provision of services, legal aid and facilitation to access public services, initiatives that contribute to increase employability and models that promote community participation, community mediation and inclusiveness.

Focus will be given to CSO's work to address societal and environmental challenges and to promote participation and empowerment of youth and women as drivers of change, initiatives for addressing fight against corruption and for raising citizens' awareness and intolerance to corruption. The support should also contribute to CSOs internal governance structures being transparent, accountable, use evidence based work, evaluate and communicating results and impact to their direct constituents and wider public.

Media Component

Strong focus will be given to further strengthening of media integrity, digital literacy and upholding journalism quality standards in the country to deliver services for better informed citizens and prepared society for the EU accession. One of the important aspects is the *gender equality in media* sector by promoting gender-sensitive journalism, good practices in tackling online violence of women journalists, capacity building on safety of women journalists, closing the gender gap in newsrooms, etc.

Safety of journalists is another important aspect in respect to addressing properly threats against journalists, online and off-line, follow up by competent authorities and raising awareness on chilling effects from impunity. In respect to the *freedom of expression and digital technologies* addressing the existing challenges online is an imperative, especially among young people, such as: hate speech, disinformation, influence of algorithms in citizens' access to information, trends and data-based analyses, media pluralism and independence.¹³

Successful implementation of this intervention will capacity-build and strengthen CSOs allowing them to continue their activities in advocacy and monitoring contributing to furthering of the reforms.

Activity related to Output 1 and 3 of Outcome 1 and Output 1 of Outcome2

- **Framework Partnership Agreements with associated operating grants**

A call for Framework partnerships and associated operating grants for implementation will be launched at the beginning of 2025 (specific sector/themes will be determined during the preparation of the call) following the rationale of enhancing the expertise, oversight and advocacy of CSOs in key sector reforms, including for improved services to citizens in the selected sector/s. This will enable implementation of CSO's core activities against an agreed work programme in a

¹³ The activities may take into account results of previous EU and other donor-funded projects in this field (ex: <https://euwbmedia.com/about/>)

number of pre-defined sectors, with a main objective of having a positive impact on the lives of citizens and ensuring their active involvement in the sector reforms. This support may in future continue with a maximum of additional 3 years (1+3).

The Operating grants will fund the operationalisation of the annual strategic plans of the selected framework partners.

Activity related to Output 2 and 3 of Outcome 1

- Technical and in-kind financial support to smaller CSOs and grassroots, to increase their capacity to support the EU integration process on local level

Activities to develop and strengthen CSOs enabling them to support civil society through in-kind financial support (continuation of EU Civil Resilience Mechanism)¹⁴ to small and grass-root civil society in all sectors where reforms are needed, including but not limited to citizens' activism, fundamentals, rule of law, freedom expression and media, gender equality, urbanisation, environment protection and energy, competition policies and youth.

Successful implementation of this intervention, including through a mentoring component, will help the development and strengthening of civil society establishing themselves with higher capacity, delivering activities contributing to advocacy and policy dialogue with a focus on philanthropy, volunteerism and sharing with local community the benefits of the EU membership of the country.

3.3. Mainstreaming

Environmental Protection, Climate Change and Biodiversity

All programme activities will be environmental friendly and sensitive to specific challenges that communities face in terms of environment protection, including on transition to green and circular economy. The action will support and empower CSOs and media organisations, through the priority themes of the call for proposals, with a focus on their capacity building activities to 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 linked to environment and climate change such as energy, transport, mobility, green jobs, etc.

Gender equality and empowerment of women and girls

As per OECD Gender DAC codes identified in section 1.1, this action is labelled as G1. This implies that the Action shall support gender equality and women's and girl's empowerment under all activities, thus allowing the professional development and participation of women in all the sectors addressed by this programme. These aspects shall be taken into account under all phases of the implementation and for this reason the guidelines for the calls for proposals resulting from this Action will have for every priority area a specific requirement on gender equality and women's and girl's empowerment (equal access to trainings and other activities for women, etc).

¹⁴ <https://eu4cr.mk/news/eu-civil-resilience-mechanism-for-civil-society-organisations-launched/>

The strategic focus to the gender equality will be included in the call for proposals of the programme as inter-sectoral theme, in line with the *EU Gender Equality Strategy 2020- 2025*¹⁵, the *EU Gender Action Plan (GAP)III*¹⁶, and the *EU Gender Action Plan III: Country-Level Implementation Plan (CLIP) for the Republic of North Macedonia*¹⁷, providing a common approach for all actors at national level in regard to ensuring gender equality and gender mainstreaming into the EU accession of the country.

Human Rights

The programme will contribute to enhance the capacities of civil society to represent and advocate for the rights, needs and positions of their constituencies within policy and decision making. In this regard, all civil society activities will put an emphasis on engaging, representing and reporting on the rights of most disadvantaged groups and involving vulnerable groups (minorities, especially Roma, LGBTIQ and other). 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. Applying the rights-based methodology. The European Consensus on Development commits the EU and its Member States to implementing a rights-based approach (RBA) to development cooperation, encompassing all human rights.

When designing the Call for Proposals under this programme, the RBA will be the working methodology for integrating the norms, standards and principles of international human rights law in each step of the programme cycle – identification, formulation, implementation, monitoring and evaluation. The action will also target freedom of expression under its media and democracy priority area and it will generally apply the human-rights based approach including also through specific capacity building activities.

Disability

As per OECD Disability DAC codes identified in section 1.1, this action is labelled as D1. This implies that accessibility (physical and virtual) for people with different type of disabilities in all project related activities will be ensured.

The strategic focus to the rights of persons with disabilities will be included in the call for proposals of the programme as inter-sectoral theme, in line with the *EU Strategy for the rights of persons with disabilities 2021-2030*¹⁸, ensuring that all persons with disabilities, regardless of their sex, racial or ethnic origin, religion or belief, age or sexual orientation enjoy their human rights, have equal opportunities in society and economy, and experience no discrimination.

Democracy

The Action directly supports democracy by supporting the principles of good governance, notably citizen participation, accountability, transparency and also freedom of expression and media.

¹⁵ COM (2020) 152 final. COMMUNICATION FROM THE COMMISSION TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT, THE COUNCIL, THE EUROPEAN ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMITTEE AND THE COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS “A Union of Equality: Gender Equality Strategy 2020-2025”, Brussels, 5.3.2020

¹⁶ EU GAP III https://ec.europa.eu/international-partnerships/topics/gender-equality-and-empowering-women-and-girls_en#header-5139

¹⁷ EU GAP III CLIP for the Republic of North Macedonia https://www.eeas.europa.eu/delegations/republic-north-macedonia/eu-gender-action-plan-iii-country-level-implementation-plan_en?s=229

¹⁸ EU Strategy for the rights of persons with disabilities 2021-2030 <https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=738&langId=en&pubId=8376&furtherPubs=yes>

3.4. Risks and Assumptions

Category	Risks	Likelihood (High/Medium/Low)	Impact (High/Medium/Low)	Mitigating measures
External environment	<u>Risk 1:</u> the political climate (and/or elections results – in late 2023 or 2024) generates instability and shrinking space for civil society.	Medium	High	The EUD will continuously monitor the situation and seek dialogue with the authorities with the aim to ensure continuous engagement of the civil society, particularly in the accession negotiations process.
External environment	<u>Risk 2:</u> the situation of freedom of expression and pluralistic and independent media further deteriorates	Medium	High	Continuous monitoring of the media environment and support to independent media will be essential, particularly in the accession negotiations process. When not possible, cooperation with the European Endowment for Democracy should be sought.
External environment	<u>Risk 3:</u> Further limitation in human resources capacity and/or shift in mandate and/or strategic orientation of the public stakeholders involved in the priority areas addressed by this action.	Medium	High	As regards human resources development, the EU accession process entails strengthening sector governance structures and processes. The EUD will continuously monitor the situation and seek dialogue with the authorities with the aim to ensure continuous strategic engagement in line with EU requirements in the priority areas addressed by the action.

External Assumptions

The below assumptions are applicable to the outcomes and outputs related to civil society and media organisations:

- Political stability and EU accession process continued.
- Continued interest on behalf of the authorities to cooperate with civil society, government support for making again fully functioning the Government Council for cooperation with civil society.
- Commitment of the authorities to engage in systematic consultation and dialogue with civil society, media and to consider input received for the sector reforms.
- The beneficiaries of technical assistance continue to interact and use the output including for better informed citizens on the EU accession.

The below assumptions is applicable to all outcomes and outputs related to media:

- The pluralistic media environment does not deteriorate.
- Freedom of expression is not restricted or limited by new restrictive measures/legal acts/regulations.
- There are no threats towards journalists.

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	To strengthened participatory democracy and the EU integration and approximation process in North Macedonia, through an advanced and systematic contribution by civil society and media.	1 Value of V-Dem Participatory Component Index ¹⁹	1 (2022) MK: 0.62	1 (2030) At least 0.64	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	1.1 DG NEAR Guidelines Assessment Report: conducive environment index ²⁰ 1.2 DG NEAR Guidelines Assessment Report: CSO – public institution cooperation index 1.3 DG NEAR Guidelines Assessment Report: CSO capacity and accountability index	1.1 (2021) MK: 3.53 1.2 (2021) MK: 1.60 1.3 (2021) MK: 3.20	1.1 (2030) MK: at least 3.80 1.2 (2030) MK: at least 3.80 1.3 (2030) RS: at least 3.80	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

¹⁹ 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/>

²⁰ 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. The independence and pluralism of the media fostered	2.1. MPM Index of fundamental protection 2.2 MPM Index of Market Plurality 2.3 MPM Index of Political Independence	2022 2.1MK 32 2.2 MK 62 2.3MK 49	2030 2.1 at most 30% 2.2 57 2.3 at most 40%	Media Pluralism Monitor from the Center for Media Freedom – Robert Schuman Centre	The freedoms of expression and fundamentals does not deteriorate
Output 1 related to Outcome 1	1.1. Improved capacities of the civil society and media to deliver services to citizens and actively contributing and monitoring the accession process	% of CSOs involved in the monitoring and contribution of accession process No of beneficiary institutions of established CSO services	1.2.1 n/a 1.2.2 (2021) MK: 25	1.2.1 (2030) At least 50 % of active registered CSOs 1.2.2 (2030) 200	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	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. Technical and financial support provided to smaller CSOs and grass rooting to increase their capacity for advocacy and monitoring of reforms on local level.	1.2.1 Proportion of CSOs and beneficiaries benefiting from relevant activity which claim an improvement in their financial and organisational sustainability 1.2.2 DG NEAR Guidelines Assessment Report: CSO funding sources	1.2.1 n/a 1.2.2 (2021) MK a) 51% b) 34%:	1.2.1 (2029) At least 60% 1.2.2 (2030) MK a) 75% b) 55%:	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.

		index indicators 3.7a and 3.7b					
Output related Outcome 1	3 to	1.3 Increased funding capacity of civil society is achieved to address the local community needs	1.3.1. The percentage of beneficiary country public funding accessed by CSOs. 1.3.2 The recognition by public about the value-add of civil society's work.	1.3.1 n/a 1.3.2 n/a	1.3.1 At least 60% 1.3.2 At least 30% of the population in the targeted local communities (final beneficiaries)	1.3.1. Survey made by TACSO 1.3.2 tbd 1.3.3 Relevant TACSO and CS own reports as well as surveys made by the EUD.	Civic space does not deteriorate further and ideally improve allowing the space to operate for the civil society
Output related Outcome 2	1 to	2.1 Support is delivered to the media organisations performing media watchdog functions and are engaged in the EU accession	2.2.1 Number of investigated complaints 2.2.2 The percentage of implemented initiatives related to EU accession	2.2.1 20 out of 109 complaints (2021) 2.2.2. 30 %	2.2.1 75 5 of cases investigated (2027) 2.2.2. 50% (2027)	European Commission Annual Reports CSO and IO reports Contracting reports	No deterioration in media enabling environment
Output related Outcome 2	2 to	2.2 Pluralism of civil society and media sustained through grants for innovative media initiatives, fringe media, including support for community based organisations (FSTP),	No. of implemented innovative media initiatives, fringe media, and community based organisations	30% of awarded grants (2022)	50% (2027)	Contracting reports	No deterioration in media enabling environment, freedom of expression and fundamentals

4. IMPLEMENTATION ARRANGEMENTS

4.1. Financing Agreement

In order to implement this action, it is not envisaged to conclude a financing agreement with North Macedonia.

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 measures²¹.

4.3.1 Direct Management (Grants)

4.3.1.1. Grants

Call for Proposals - Support to Civil Society systematic participation in the EU accession process and negotiations

(a) Purpose of the grant(s): The action grants should contribute to increased capacities of CSOs to systematically and directly engage in the EU accession process. The activity will contribute to achieving the output 1.1, thus contributing to the outcome 1 of the Action.

(b) Type of applicants targeted:

Applicants will have to be

- civil society organisations and networks; and
- legal persons registered at least two years before the call is launched,;
- non-profit-making ; and
- non-governmental organisations.

Details for eligibility and specific requirements for potential applicants will be defined in the Call for Proposals documents.

Call for Proposals - Support to Civil society and media organisations across various thematic policy areas.

(a) Purpose of the grant(s): The action grants will contribute in various thematic areas¹ to achieving the output 1.1, thus contributing to the outcome 1 and output 2.1 and 2.2. Contributing outcome 2 of the Action.

²¹ [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.

(b) Type of applicants targeted:

Applicants will have to be

- civil society organisations and networks; and
- legal persons;
- non-profit-making ; and
- non-governmental organisations.

Call for Proposals- Framework Partnership Agreements with operating grants

(a) Purpose of the grants: The operating grants will support the annual work programmes of civil society and media organisations that will sign Framework Partnership Agreements (FPAs), resulting from a new call for FPA which will be launched in 2025. This activity will contribute to Output 1.1 and 1.3 Outcome 1 and Output 2.1 of Outcome 2

(b) Type of applicants targeted:

Applicants will have to be

- civil society organisation established in North Macedonia;
- legal person registered at least two years before the call is launched;
- non-profit-making; and
- non-governmental organisation.

Details for eligibility and specific requirements for potential applicants will be defined in the Call for Proposals documents.

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)

The activity will contribute to Output 1.2 and of 1.3 of the Outcome 1 will be delivered under procurement in direct management.

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 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 ²² (amount in EUR)
Methods of implementation – cf. section 4.3			
Outcome 1 <i>Strengthened and more gender-responsive civil society organisations</i> and Outcome 2 <i>Independence and pluralism of media fostered</i> composed of	1 200 000	3 000 000	
<i>Grants (direct management)</i> – cf. section 4.3.1			
<i>Call for Proposals</i> - Support to Civil Society systematic participation in the EU accession process and negotiations	1 200 000	-	120 000
<i>Call for Proposals</i> - Civil society and Media Actions across various thematic policy areas.	-	2 400 000	240 000
<i>Call for operating grants</i> via Framework Partnership Agreements	-	600 000	60 000
Outcome 1 <i>Strengthened and more gender-responsive civil society organisations</i> composed of	1 800 000		
<i>Procurement (direct management)</i> – cf. section 4.3.2			
<i>Technical Assistance</i> to small and grassroots including an in-kind grant scheme- EU Civil Resilience Mechanism)	1 600 000	-	n/a
<i>FWC</i> – Supporting measures	200 000	-	n/a
Grants – total envelope under section 4.3.1	1 200 000	3 000 000	
Procurement – total envelope under section 4.3.2	1 800 000		
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	3 000 000	3 000 000	420 000

²² 10% contribution provided by the civil society organisation/s awarded with a grant contract

4.6. Organisational Set-up and Responsibilities

The action will be implemented under Direct management mode, where the Contracting Authority shall be the Delegation of the European Union to North Macedonia. Main counterparts are Civil Society Organisations and Media organisations.

As part of its prerogative of budget implementation and to safeguard the financial interests of the Union, the Commission may participate in 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 logframe matrix (for project modality) and the country partner's strategy for cooperation with civil society.

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:

Monitoring will be carried out by the Delegation of the European Union to North Macedonia, where the Delegation staff will hold regular contacts and carry out monitoring visits to all grant beneficiaries and the technical assistance contractor. The main means of measurement is the level of compliance with the European standards in the area of fundamental freedoms, civil society, freedom of speech and media by the country. Apart from the compliance level indicator, other sources of monitoring can also give a qualitative assessment, such as: the enlargement package, reports from the contracts and grants, sector evaluations, etc.

In this regard, the performance will be measured against the indicators set out in the log frame matrix and the specific indicators laid out in the *DG NEAR Guidelines for EU support to civil society in the enlargement region 2021-2027*, the *Guidelines for EU support to media freedom and media integrity in enlargement countries*, and the *GAP III/CLIP* and *IPA III* indicators whenever applicable.

The monitoring of the Guidelines is supervised by DG NEAR in collaboration with the EU Delegation 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 impact of the programme will be also monitored against the indicators related to the implementation of the Government strategy and action plan for cooperation with civil society for the period 2024-2026. The Strategy and its action plan pursue enabling environment for CSOs, civic participation and engagement of civil society for better governance. The CSOs sectorial mechanism i.e. platform for sectorial dialogue,

regularly monitor the implementation of different pillars of the strategy and sector policies in general, including the sector working groups that will be responsible for EU chapters' negotiations.

5.2. Evaluation

Having regard to the importance of the action, a final 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 organisations in North Macedonia under the civil society facility including decisions related to previous years. It will be carried out for accountability and learning purposes at various levels (including for policy revision), in particular with respect to the next Civil Society Facility and Media Programmes 2026 onwards.

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.

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

In order to achieve sustainability beyond the implementation period, the action is designed in synergy with the overall IPA III programming in the different sectors targeted by the action. The technical assistance and financial support activities to be implemented through this action will produce results on the short run since all relevant structures are in place and the support provided would increase the capacities to meet the challenges ahead of the administration.

Namely, most of the legal framework for effective operations of CSOs are in place, however, challenges remain in transparent financing of the civil society from the state budget and institutionalised mechanisms for participation of CSOs in policy dialogue and EU negotiation process. In this regard, the financial support to CSOs will be an important element of the programme. The assistance will be delivered in an appropriate mix of funding instruments to respond to different types of civil society and media organisations in a flexible, transparent, and cost-effective and results focused manner.

The sustainability of the programme's output will be achieved through strengthened civil society and media coalitions with capacities to implement long-term advocacy actions based on shared goals in cooperation between media, civil society and other actors, such as private sector to promote innovative and sustainable approaches for more effective engagement of citizens through communication, provision of services, volunteering and facilitating access to public information. This approach will include action grants to civil society and media organisations to support long-term partnerships based on mission and shared objectives for supporting the CSOs' enabling environment and the EU related sector reforms. The action grants would include means to reach out to and strengthen community based local organisations through the financial support to third parties. The programme also provides for a technical assistance to continue with the in-kind support (EU Civil Resilience Mechanism) to further secure resources for the smallest grassroots for strengthening the citizens' resilience during frequent social changes and increase citizens' understanding for the accession process and benefits of the EU membership.

Therefore the sustainability of the action will result from the successful implementation of the grant contracts as well as the technical assistance, since its main objective will be the strengthening of the CSOs capacity to become financially sustainable and with improved capacities to articulate the citizens voice and to be constructive partner in the EU negotiations and related sector reforms of North Macedonia.

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)		
☒	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"> - Contracts 1 - Contracts 2 - Contract 3 <p>Outcome 2 (Media)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Contracts 1 - Contracts 2