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**THIS ACTION IS FUNDED BY THE EUROPEAN UNION**

**ANNEX**

of the Commission Implementing Decision on the Special Measure in favour of the Republic of Belarus for 2021

**Action Document for EU4Belarus: Reinforcing Resilience and Democratisation**

**SPECIAL MEASURE**

This document constitutes the annual work programme in the sense of Article 110(2) of the Financial Regulation, and action plan/measure in the sense of Article 23(4) of NDICI-Global Europe Regulation.

**1. SYNOPSIS**

**1.1. Action Summary Table**

<b>1. Title</b> <b>CRIS/OPSYS</b> <b>Basic Act</b>	<b>EU4Belarus: Reinforcing Resilience and Democratisation</b> Annual measure in favour of Belarus for 2021 CRIS number: NDICI-GEO-NEAR/2021/043-582 Financed under the Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument (NDICI-Global Europe).
<b>2. Team Europe Initiative</b>	No
<b>3. Zone benefiting from the action</b>	The action shall be carried out primarily in Belarus, in bordering countries and other EU Member States.
<b>4. Programming document</b>	Not available
<b>5. Link with relevant MIP(s) objectives/expected results</b>	Not applicable
<b>PRIORITY AREAS AND SECTOR INFORMATION</b>	
<b>6. Priority Area(s), sectors</b>	Not applicable
<b>7. Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)</b>	Main SDG: <b>SDG 16</b> "Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions" Other significant SDGs (up to 9) and where appropriate, targets: <b>SDG 4</b> "Quality Education" <b>SDG 8</b> "Decent work and economic growth" <b>SDG 5</b> "Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls"

<b>8 a) DAC code(s)</b>	15153 - Media and free flow of information (40%) 11420 - Higher education (20%) 43081 - Multisector education/training (20%) 25030 - Business development services (10%) 16066 – Culture (10%)			
<b>8 b) Main Delivery Channel</b>	Non-governmental organisations and civil society - 20000			
<b>9. Targets</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> Migration <input type="checkbox"/> Climate <input type="checkbox"/> Social inclusion and Human Development <input type="checkbox"/> Gender <input type="checkbox"/> Biodiversity <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Human Rights, Democracy and Governance			
<b>10. Markers (from DAC form)</b>	<b>General policy objective</b>	<b>Not targeted</b>	<b>Significant objective</b>	<b>Principal objective</b>
	Participation development/good governance	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
	Aid to environment	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Gender equality and women’s and girl’s empowerment	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Trade development	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Reproductive, maternal, new-born and child health	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Disaster Risk Reduction	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Inclusion of persons with Disabilities	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Nutrition	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	<b>RIO Convention markers</b>	<b>Not targeted</b>	<b>Significant objective</b>	<b>Principal objective</b>
	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"/>
<b>11. Internal markers</b>	<b>Policy objectives</b>	<b>Not targeted</b>	<b>Significant objective</b>	<b>Principal objective</b>
	Digitalisation Tags: digital connectivity digital governance	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>

	digital entrepreneurship		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	job creation		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	digital skills/literacy		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	digital services		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	<u>Connectivity</u>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Tags: transport		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	people2people		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	energy		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	digital connectivity		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Migration	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Reduction of Inequalities	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	COVID-19	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>BUDGET INFORMATION</b>				
<b>12. Amounts concerned</b>	Budget line: 14.020111 Eastern Neighbourhood Total estimated cost: EUR 15 000 000 Total amount of EU budget contribution EUR 15 000 000			
<b>MANAGEMENT AND IMPLEMENTATION</b>				
<b>13. Implementation modalities (type of financing and management mode)</b>	Project Modality <b>Direct management</b> through: - Grants <b>Indirect management</b> with the entity(ies) to be selected in accordance with the criteria set out in section 4.3.2.			

## 1.2. Summary of the Action

Persistent public disapproval and international condemnation of the falsified Presidential elections in August 2020 have deeply polarised Belarus. The disproportionate repression of mass protests resulted in over 35,000 people arrested and more than 650 political prisoners, many of whom risk several years of detention. Starting late 2020 incumbent authorities undertook systematic efforts to eliminate civic space entirely and disconnect Belarusian society. A large numbers of civil society organisations and independent media, including several partners in EU programmes, had to close down under the pretext to stop them from mobilising the public against the government. Fearing for their personal security and prosecution because of support to the opposition, thousands of civil society activists, media workers, private entrepreneurs, professionals, students, teachers, academics, and representatives of the cultural sector continue to leave Belarus.

The EU responded with the rapid mobilisation of an immediate support package for the victims of the oppression and the provision of core support to independent media and digital outlets. In compliance to the Council Conclusions on Belarus,<sup>1</sup> adopted on 12 October 2020, the EU has recalibrated its cooperation with Belarus. As financial and technical collaboration with central authorities halted, support directly benefitting Belarusian citizens was re-enforced.

<sup>1</sup> Council Conclusions on Belarus, October 2020. <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/46076/council-conclusions-on-belarus.pdf>.

With no realistic perspective on a short-term political resolution to the current crisis, the foremost challenge is in the coordination of organising counter measures. It is necessary to bring together donors and implementers in several areas to ensure continuity of interventions in the most effective way.

With the overall objective to reinforce the resilience and capacity among the Belarusian people affected by the political crisis to achieve democratic changes in Belarus, the action “EU4Belarus: Reinforcing Resilience and Democratisation” will support the following four priorities<sup>2</sup>:

- **Sustain and strengthen independent and diverse news gathering:** by expanding EU support to the systematically repressed independent media in Belarus, the action will help maintain a critical mass of independent Belarusian media capacity, in terms of different outlets as well as individual journalists and other media workers and, to the extent possible, including also inside Belarus. The action will also aim at establishing a donor coordination structure, which would engage non-EU donors.
- **Promote mobility and people-to-people contacts for Belarusian youth, academics and professionals:** by providing opportunities for international mobility, possibilities to study abroad and preserving Belarusian academic community and its integration in common European educational space. The action will also provide support to operations and development of the European Humanities University (EHU).
- **Support Belarusian entrepreneurs and companies forced into exile:** by facilitating the relocation process of companies in exile, to empower ad hoc mechanisms and advisory programmes for the Belarusian entrepreneurs to sustain their business in the host country, also in view a future return to Belarus.
- **Support Belarusian culture and art initiatives:** by setting up mini-grant scheme, including for small initiatives providing opportunities for culture and art actors to carry out cultural and art activities that consolidates Belarusian society, including the diasporas and exiled communities, preserves civic space.

## 2. RATIONALE

### 2.1. Context

Persistent public disapproval and international condemnation of the falsified Presidential elections in August 2020 have deeply polarised Belarus. The disproportionate repression of mass protests resulted in over 35,000 people arrested and more than 650 political prisoners, many of whom risk several years of detention. The Belarusian rule of law system has turned into singular arbitrariness serving the regime to stay in control and leaving aside the protection of the basic rights of citizens. Starting late 2020 incumbent authorities undertook systematic efforts to eliminate civic space entirely and disconnect Belarusian society. A large numbers of civil society organisations and independent media, including several partners in EU programmes, had to close down under the pretext to stop them from mobilising the public against the government. Internationally Belarus virtually transitioned into a rogue state, in which government authorities provoked the hijacking of a passenger airliner, and are openly involved in sending illegal immigrants into bordering EU countries.

Fearing for their personal security and prosecution because of support to the opposition, thousands of civil society activists, media workers, private entrepreneurs, professionals, students, teachers, academics, and representatives of the cultural sector continue to leave Belarus. This not only has severely diminished civic led development of the country and availability of independent coverage and analysis of social, economic and

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<sup>2</sup> Support for human rights and re-enforcement of civil society and grants for community initiatives will be provided through the respective thematic budget lines for which an additional allocation of at least EUR 10 million has been conditionally reserved.

political issues, but also has a major negative impact on parts of the economy, especially affecting the IT sector and Belarus capacity for innovation and research.

The opposition movement has regrouped in exile around the leading former presidential candidate Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya in Vilnius, the National Anti-crisis Management headed by Pavel Latusko in Warsaw and the Coordination Council initially set up in Minsk as a joint platform for all opposition forces. With the public demonstrations inside Belarus having subsided by late 2020, the focus of the opposition shifted to preparation for democratic transition and social and economic reforms in Belarus and pursuing the international agenda advocating for political and economic sanctions against the regime.

In compliance to the Council Conclusions on Belarus, adopted on 12 October 2020, the EU has recalibrated its cooperation with Belarus. As financial and technical collaboration with central authorities halted, support directly benefitting Belarusian citizens was re-enforced. Since then, the Council expanded the EU restrictive measures in view of the situation in Belarus four times, demanding cessation of repression, the release of political prisoners and the organisation of free and fair elections. As of November 2021, EU sanctions targeted 166 individuals and 15 entities. Similar rounds of sanctions were introduced by the United States, United Kingdom and several non-EU member European countries.

The European Investment Bank ceased activities in Belarus, while the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development is limiting its intervention to the private sector only. The World Bank and the International Finance Corporation maintain a low profile in their contacts with the government, continuing with existing programmes and halting the start of new ones. Similarly, the United Nations activities are affected by reduced operational space for civil society partners and reduction in funding.

In response to the international condemnations and sanctions, the government of Belarus significantly reduced its relations with the EU and other Western countries. It refuses to enter into meaningful dialogue with the opposition forces. The government has been intensifying consultations with the Russian Federation, seeking a closer integration under the Union State agreement and additional financial support. Belarus suspended participation in the Eastern Partnership, recalled its ambassador to the EU and asked the EU Head of Delegation to return to Brussels for consultations.

Despite structural problems in the first half 2020 and a significant devaluation of the currency, the Belarusian economy showed a temporary rebound mostly due to favourable export prices. However, unable to withstand the impact of the growing sanction regime, the general expectation is that the Belarusian economy is heading for recession in 2022. Retaliatory measures by Belarusian government blocking transit of goods, searches for alternative markets and increase of taxes on the real economy are mostly ineffective on the expense of the national economy.

## **2.2. Problem Analysis**

### Short problem analysis

The fall out of the political crisis, the all-encompassing repression of opposition forces and civil society and ensuing restrictions on economic activities and movement of people, have a major negative impact on the development and well-being of the people of Belarus. The government is retracting on earlier achieved reforms and modernisations abandoning its long-term strategic goals for sustainable development. Instead, the authorities emphasize intrinsically reactionary measures to defend the outcome of the falsified elections and are not open to any compromise with the opposition and international partners.

With no realistic perspective on a short-term political resolution to the current crisis, the foremost challenge is in the coordination of organising counter measures. Many civil society and media actors have relocated outside Belarus and are in the process of reorganising their activities and outreach. Several international donors and organisations have committed to help Belarusian citizens to overcome the repression and pursue their democratic rights. Beyond the initial emergency response, it is necessary to bring together donors and implementers in several areas to ensure continuity of interventions in the most effective way.

The political crisis in Belarus is threatening to dismantle earlier achievements in human development and gender equality. While considerable progress on gender equality has been achieved in Belarus, deep-rooted gender inequalities still persist. It is crucial that all EU support for the people of Belarus address existing gender gaps and support the force for a gender equal society. Actions under the programme shall be implemented in a way that maximises the contribution to gender equality, empowering girls' and women's organisations, women and girls' human rights, participation, economic empowerment, equal access to financial services, as well as support to women entrepreneurs.

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

- *Journalists and media professionals* remain the main target for the Belarusian authorities, and unprecedented repressions against them are escalating. Personal security is a real concern for most independent journalists. Given the restrictions with distribution faced by the independent media, their financial sustainability is also at risk. Core operating costs are significant; quality journalism, especially investigative journalism, is a resource-intensive and long-term activity. Independent media outlets require skilled employees and expensive technical equipment. Typically, such media have business models that involve subscriptions and/or advertising revenue, but will frequently be heavily reliant on donor support.
- *Students, teachers and researchers* face expulsion from their institutions if they do not want to abandon academic values and high-quality teaching to comply with the regime's requirements. Universities and schools tighten ideological control oppressing freedom of speech and assembly. NGOs providing non-formal education are liquidated and international institutions supporting education and cultural activities are forced to close (e.g. the Polish Institute, Goethe Institute, German Academic Exchange Programme (DAAD) and the Franco-Belarus Academic Programme). These processes contribute to decrease in the availability and access to modern and quality education in the country, decrease number of professionals who bring innovations and lead development of education at all levels. Alternatives need to be found to widen access to institutions outside Belarus, but also in supporting opportunities for on-line programmes inside Belarus. Most important for Belarus is to maintain its human capital to be able to implement reforms when democratic change happens.
- *Private entrepreneurs and companies* that openly supported the democratic opposition often departed fearing imaginary tax related or other regulatory prosecutions. Most affected is the booming IT sector, though which also easily found alternatives in neighbouring countries. According to the recent DEV.by survey (Spring 2021),<sup>3</sup> around 15% of IT developers have left the country, and almost half consider to return if the situation changes, while another 31% of IT developers are looking for opportunities to migrate. Also companies in other sectors have relocated, though re-establishment of activities is often

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<sup>3</sup> Dev.by, April 2021. <https://dev.by/news/relocate-april-2021>.

more complex. Important to maintain the information flow and where possible promote access to business support measures in the respective host countries.

- *Cultural workers and organisations*, many of whom saw their employment and activities terminated and facing severe repression, including arrest and torture of actors, artists, musicians and poets. There are around 40 artists and cultural activists behind bars on political grounds. Cultural activists experience censorship, violation of freedom of creativity and the right to use symbols. Many organisations, associations, initiatives in cultural area have their property confiscated and experience administrative obstacles to the implementation of activities or are forced to liquidate. Limited and selective nature of state support excludes non-state cultural actors from receiving state support. All this destroys independent and creative cultural sector in Belarus.
- *Civil society organisations and independent think tanks* - over a period of 12 months the Belarusian authorities have dissolved over 160 organizations. Closure affected human rights, cultural, environmental, educational, charitable, youth and gender-rights organisations, research and analytical centres (e.g. IPM, SYMPA, Centre for Strategic and Foreign Policy Studies), associations of journalists (e.g. BAJ, Press Club), writers (e.g. PEN Centre, Association of writers), groups for protection of consumers and the rights of people with disabilities. This move is a part of an ongoing restriction of civic space and crackdown on civil society organisations. Trade union representatives have also been targeted.

### **3. DESCRIPTION OF THE ACTION**

#### **3.1. Objectives and Expected Outputs**

The Overall Objective (Impact) of this action is to reinforce the resilience and capacity among the Belarusian people affected by the political crisis to achieve democratic changes in Belarus.

The Specific Objectives (Outcomes) of this action are to

1. Sustain and strengthen independent and diverse news gathering and media programming on Belarus;
2. Promote mobility and people-to-people contacts for Belarusian youth, academics and professionals to benefit from access to higher education and opportunities for lifelong-learning compliant with the EU standards and values.
3. Support Belarusian entrepreneurs and companies forced into exile to bordering countries;
4. Support Belarusian culture and art initiatives with a view to contribute to the preservation of the Belarusian civic space.

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): Platform to promote and coordinate international technical and financial support for independent Belarusian media established;
- 1.2 Contributing to Outcome 1 (or Specific Objective 1): Technical assistance and training for independent Belarusian media and media professionals provided;
- 2.1 Contributing to Outcome 2 (or Specific Objective 2): Academic programme for students (scholarships), academic staff (teaching fellowships) and retraining for professionals implemented;

- 2.2 Contributing to Outcome 2 (or Specific Objective 2): Lifelong learning opportunities for Belarusians through distance learning are available;
- 3.1. Contributing to Outcome 3 (or Specific Objective 3): Advisory services for individual Belarusian entrepreneurs and companies regarding relocation issues provided with support of business associations and advisory programmes;
- 3.2. Contributing to Outcome 3 (or Specific Objective 3): Access to financial institutions and subsidy schemes in host countries promoted;
- 4.1 Contributing to Outcome 4 (or Specific Objective 4): Belarusian culture and art initiatives aimed at consolidating the Belarusian society, including the diasporas and exiled communities funded;
- 4.2. Contributing to Outcome 4 (or Specific Objective 4): Belarusian culture and art actors acquire new skills and cultural professional networks developed.

### **3.2. Indicative Activities**

***Specific objective 1: Sustain and strengthen independent and diverse news gathering and media programming on Belarus:***

The action will expand EU support to the systematically repressed independent media in Belarus, whose staff in large numbers had to relocate outside the country and are seeking to establish alternative ways to continue their work. The overall aim is to help maintain a critical mass of independent Belarusian media capacity, in terms of different outlets as well as individual journalists and other media workers and, to the extent possible, including also inside Belarus.

*Activities related to Output 1.1: Platform to promote and coordinate international technical and financial support for independent Belarusian media established:*

The relentless suppression of any sort of public communication critical of government action continues. This prompts a need to move from the prevailing reactive mode and fractioned support, to a more structured coordination and collaboration among the independent media with the international donors providing financial and technical resources.

- Identification of options for structured coordination and collaborative funding mechanisms for the independent media sector in exile and inside Belarus.
- Designing a structure and areas of involvement for a coordination platform.
- Establishing a donor coordination structure which would engage also non-EU donors.

*Activities related to Output 1.2: Technical assistance and training for independent Belarusian media and media professionals provided:*

Whereas some independent media outlets relocated and continue or intend to continue their work from outside Belarus, several others stopped operating after their staff had to leave the country. The situation on the ground remains fluid as viability of relocated outlets is difficult to assess and frequent changes in staff and regroupings occur. Mostly lacking regular sources of income from advertisements and subscriptions, relocated media and professionals will continue to depend on external funding including international donors and possible contributions from the Belarusian diaspora.

While conventional independent media are largely closed, smaller initiatives based on social media continue to work, often at local level or for specific target groups. Work environment for Belarusian journalists and other media has been changing rapidly. Beyond initial emergency responses, there is need to assist in

redefining professionally how they work, take care of personal security and what they may realistically expect to be able to make a living from their media work.

- Monitoring of financial viability and public outreach of independent media inside and outside Belarus to maintain good overview of the diversity in newsgathering and programming.
- Providing core-funding to sustain a limited number of independent media providers.
- Launching a competitive media content fund to promote independent media production accessible to individual media professionals with backing of established independent media outlets.
- Providing training courses, networking arrangements and help-desk for Belarusian journalists and media workers.

***Specific objective 2: Promote mobility and people-to-people contacts for Belarusian youth, academics and professionals to benefit from access to higher education and opportunities for lifelong-learning compliant with the EU standards and values:***

Providing opportunities for international mobility and study abroad, for consolidating and preserving Belarusian academic community and its integration in common European educational space has become more important than ever before. The political crisis cause Belarus to retract back into the ideological approach to education abandoning the timid progress made in recent years to move towards more open and modern European approach. Critical thinking, essential to democratic development, is suppressed forcing many students and academics to leave their institutions to seek alternatives. Growing limitations on international cooperation and increasing travel restrictions further isolate the country from its neighbours and Europe at large.

*Activities related to Output 2.1: Academic programme for students (scholarships), academic staff (teaching fellowships) and retraining for professionals implemented:*

- Launching and management of a joint academic programme with EU Member States to support expelled and economically deprived Belarusian students. The indicative modus: EU Member States offer opportunities for free access to national universities and educational institutes, while the programme complements support for living cost, travel and possibly language training.
- Support to operations and development of the European Humanities University (EHU) including through mini grants for programme alumni to facilitate networking and create opportunities for joint actions. Establishment of EU Member States coordinated consortia of universities and education institutes that offer free places for enrolment of Belarusian students.
- Providing stipends for academics and professionals expelled from Belarus seeking re-orientation or retraining from EU based higher education institutions.
- Monitoring and coaching of prospective students and academia as well as of programme participants.
- Support to the network of programme participants.

*Activities related to Output 2.2: Lifelong learning opportunities for Belarusians through distance learning are available:*

Increasing the offer of opportunities to enrol in quality distance education adjusted to the needs of citizens of all age groups in Belarus. Builds on existing distance learning system for university courses in the EHU, mobilising expertise of expelled Belarusian teachers and academics and widening involvement of the EU based education institutions.

- Collection and expansion of opportunities for quality distance education.
- Establishment and support to functioning of a Belarusian platform for distance learning bringing together the EHU, various initiatives among Belarusian CSOs and international actors.
- Supporting the networking with Belarusian and international partners, aiming to cooperate in the field of lifelong learning.

***Specific objective 3: Support Belarusian entrepreneurs and companies forced into exile to bordering countries:***

Numerous private sector entrepreneurs from basically all economic segments are closely affiliated to the democratic movements and following the repressions have left Belarus to the neighbouring countries. This relocation process started in September 2020 and is still ongoing. In this regard, companies and entrepreneurs relocating abroad are in need of financial and policy support.

*Activities related to Output 3.1: Advisory services for individual Belarusian entrepreneurs and companies regarding relocation issues provided with support of business associations and advisory programmes:*

To facilitate the relocation process of companies in exile is necessary to empower ad hoc mechanisms and advisory programmes for the Belarusian entrepreneurs to sustain their business in the host country, while supporting the green and digital transition of those businesses – including the application of more circular and sustainable production models –, also in view a future return to Belarus. Advisory programmes shall be run in collaboration with hosting authorities, chambers of commerce, business associations and local authorities.

- Identification of needs assessment of exiled Belarusian business communities in the neighbouring countries.
- Establishment and running of advisory programmes in Latvia, Lithuania, Poland and Ukraine.

*Activities related to Output 3.2: Access to financial institutions and subsidy schemes in host countries promoted:*

Companies relocated in the neighbouring countries shall be fully aware of the available financial support mechanisms provided by international and national financial institutions. Companies and entrepreneurs shall be in a position to access investment facilities to sustain and reform their businesses, also in view of a future return to Belarus.

- Identification and developing of mechanisms to provide financial support to Belarusian companies in exile.

***Specific Objective 4: Support Belarusian culture and art initiatives with a view to contribute to the preservation of the Belarusian civic space:***

Setting up mini-grant scheme, including for small initiatives provides opportunities for culture and art actors to carry out cultural and art activities that consolidates Belarusian society, including the diasporas and exiled communities, preserves civic space and keeps Belarus matters on the agenda. Mobility scheme for individual culture and art actors gives opportunities to improve and acquire new skills and establish networks with professionals and communities across Europe.

*Activities related to Output 4.1: Belarusian culture and art initiatives aimed at consolidating the Belarusian society, including the diasporas and exiled communities funded:*

- Establishment and managing a mini-grant programme for culture and art actors.
- Support the promotion and distribution of programme content across Belarus and abroad.
- Facilitate networking of programme alumni and diasporas.

*Activities related to Output 4.2: Belarusian culture and art actors acquire new skills and cultural professional networks developed:*

- Set up a mobility grant scheme for participation in international circuits: to find and meet partners, join networks, participate in residencies, cross-sectoral initiatives, fairs and festivals, improve or acquire new skills and enhance capacities to nurture talents, face common challenge, innovate, prosper, and generate jobs and growth.
- Assistance to culture and art actors to find performance opportunities abroad.

### **3.3. Mainstreaming**

#### **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 project implementers will consider **gender** issues. Project implementers will develop an agreed anti-discriminatory approach in all the stages of projects. Moreover, they will put in place anti-discriminatory systems. The actions will be coherent with the EU Gender Action Plan III<sup>4</sup>. The evaluation and monitoring framework of the action will consider gender-disaggregated indicators. Actions under the programme shall be implemented in a way that maximises the contribution to gender equality, empowering girls' and women's organisations, women and girls' human rights, participation, economic empowerment, equal access to financial services, as well as support to women entrepreneurs. The action shall also take into account that male students are less active than their female counterparts in pursuing higher education, though more affected by political repressions in Belarus.

#### **Human Rights**

With an underlying objective to contribute towards reinforcing resilience to achieve civic engagement and promote mobility for those hardest affected by the current political events, all activities under this action will be designed and implemented in accordance with the principles of human rights, gender equality, good governance and the inclusion of socially deprived groups. These principles will be promoted consistently and coherently with the EU Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy 2020-2024<sup>5</sup>. Human rights principles will be central in the implementation of the action. All interventions will be delivered to those who are at most risk of being disproportionately affected by the current developments.

#### **Democracy**

Since the falsified Presidential elections in August 2020, Belarus has witnessed disproportionate violence employed by the Belarusian authorities against peaceful protesters, which has resulted (at the time of writing) in over 35,000 people arrested and more than 600 political prisoners, many of whom risk several years of

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<sup>4</sup> EU Gender Action Plan III, November 2020. [https://ec.europa.eu/international-partnerships/system/files/join-2020-17-final\\_en.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/international-partnerships/system/files/join-2020-17-final_en.pdf).

<sup>5</sup> EU Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy 2020-2024, November 2020. <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/46838/st12848-en20.pdf>.

detention. The Belarusian rule of law system has turned into singular arbitrariness serving the regime to stay in control and leaving aside the protection of the basic rights of citizens. Throughout 2020-2021 incumbent authorities undertook systematic efforts to eliminate most forms of the democracy and civic space entirely in the country. This action will complement the EU's efforts to strengthen democratic and civic resilience in Belarus through supporting those that have been affected the most by ongoing regime repressions (namely, CSOs, independent media, cultural actors, etc.).

### 3.4. Risks and Lessons Learned

Category	Risks	Likelihood (High/Medium/Low)	Impact (High/Medium/Low)	Mitigating measures
Dramatic worsening of the political situation in Belarus.	Risk 1	M	M	Established safety nets and contingency plans.
Target groups (journalists, media professionals, students, teachers, cultural actors, entrepreneurs etc.) fear for personal safety/security and do not wish to engage in cooperation with EU; no target audiences can be reached/engaged.	Risk 2	M	H	All correspondence with implementing partners, beneficiaries and target audiences is handled confidentially. All project documentation can be accessed only on a "need to know" - basis and is kept in a safe location.
All meaningful target groups (media outlets, civil society organisations, cultural organisations, businesses etc.) are closed down/cease to exist or cannot be identified/found in their new location abroad, and cannot be engaged in cooperation.	Risk 3	M	H	Constant monitoring of the situation on the ground. Careful handling of the existing communication channels. Establishment of back-up communication channels.
The target groups/beneficiaries fail to cooperate with each other and build up strong and viable sectoral responses.	Risk 4	H	H	Activities aimed at strengthen networking and cooperation between organisations operating with identical issues in order to build up hubs/platforms.
The implementing partners/grantees face problems in managing cash flows and delivering the foreseen support to final beneficiaries, which limits the absorption capacity/speed.	Risk 5	M	M	Implementation is foreseen to be done by organisations with notable experience in working with Belarus, including the current political environment and existing (internal) mechanisms for managing cash flows.

Insufficient proficiency of foreign languages among young Belarusians eligible for a scholarship	Risk 6	M	M	Organise preparatory language courses.
Dropping out of students for reasons other than academic. Any study abroad experience for an extended period of time entails risks of personal anxiety and changes in plans.	Risk 7	M	M	Appointing personal advisers (older students) for Belarusian students at each foreign university, which can help reduce isolation. Acceptable dropout rates can be established before the launch of the action, and intervention plans drafted in case the limits are exceeded.

### Lessons Learned:

EU has supported independent media development in Belarus for many years. Recent developments has proved that the situation on the ground is changing rapidly and previously approved projects face challenges in implementation. Some of the projects had to relocate. All projects reassess the situation to make sure they remain relevant and well targeted. Few years ago, needs of the independent media were completely different than they are now. With many local journalists facing a de facto prohibition to practice, and their foreign colleagues banned from the country, critical coverage of ongoing developments in the country is shrinking.

In the area of culture, Belarus participated in more than 24 cross-border cooperation projects. These projects used be an effective fora for joint actions of local authorities and independent cultural actors. Culture and creativity project implemented in the Eastern Partnership countries reviled a great potential for development of creative sectors in Belarus and its cooperation with the IT sector, demonstrated growing interest in and overall use of Belarusian language, culture and history and willingness of people to participate in crowdfunding activities if organised in a safe environment. Meanwhile, there is lack of entrepreneurial and management skills among creative industries professionals in public and NGO sector hindering their organisational and business development. There is also a need to improve communication and marketing strategies and practices of cultural and creative initiatives, projects and institutions.

EU is currently carrying out an assessment of Belarusian businesses in exile but the lessons learned are not yet available. It appears that one of the challenges is to reach out to the businesses in exile as their location data is not easily available.

Experience of Scholarship programmes supported by EU in 2011 and 2013 (when the political context in Belarus was similar to the one now), shows that such kind of actions should include both offering scholarships for international degree programmes – as well as give opportunities for joint civic actions of alumni of the programme to contribute to the development of civil society of Belarus.

Analysis of selection process of previous Scholarship schemes also recommends that future Actions require documented civic engagement from all applicants, though this would significantly narrow the field of candidates. It also should be taken into account that the most active citizens oriented towards democratic values are not typically those with academic qualifications necessary for commencing advanced studies abroad and not all of them are proficient in foreign languages. Previous scholarship schemes also demonstrated that young women are more active in pursuing higher education than young men. Out of 300 scholarships, there were 37% men and 63% female scholarship recipients.

### **3.5. Intervention Logic**

The underlying intervention logic for this action is a combination of support to individuals directly affected by the repression and the empowerment of civic structures organised by Belarusians to deliver such support and prepare for transition and reforms in a future democratic Belarus. Moving from the initial reactive mode providing emergency assistance, the current action stresses the need for strong coordination and where feasible the establishment of joint funding arrangements among international donors. Special attention will be given in this regard to reinforce the analytical and administrative capacity of the newly emerged democratic forces

The action supports independent media to continue communicating objective information about all developments relevant to Belarus and essential to its democratic formation. Cognisant of the lack of income for the independent media in exile, the action provides to operate a joint donor coordinated funding mechanism to sustain regular and diverse media production outside and inside Belarus enabling Belarusian media workers to remain professionally engaged on Belarusian issues.

In the area of higher education and lifelong learning support in close coordination with EU Member States is pre-dominantly directed to individual Belarusian citizens seeking EU based alternatives to what is on offer from the Belarusian state ideologically driven system. This exposes and helps the formation of a future cadre essential to democratic transition in the country. Institutional support focusses the exiled Belarusian European Humanities University, which provides opportunities for Belarusian students and academics to work in a democratic and value based environment. It serves the wider circle of civic organisations in support of democratic change and preparation for future reform in higher education in Belarus.

Support to exiled Belarusian economic operators focusses on grants for networking and liaison with business development support agencies inside the main host countries Latvia, Lithuania, Poland and Ukraine. Activities address both assistance to restart operations in the host countries, but also exploring business opportunities following return to Belarus.

Exiled cultural workers will be mobilised through grants to promote the cause for a democratic transition in Belarus across Europe, providing them opportunities to continue to be engaged in their profession and benefit from external exposure and learning.

While above described areas of intervention are part of this action, support for human rights and re-enforcement of civil society and grants for community initiatives will be provided through the respective thematic budget lines for which an additional allocation of at least EUR 10 million has been conditionally reserved.

### **3.6. Indicative Logical Framework Matrix**

Results	Results chain: Main expected results	Indicators	Baselines (values and years)	Targets (values and years)	Sources of data	Assumptions
<b>Impact</b>	To reinforce the resilience and capacity among the Belarusian people affected by the political crisis to achieve democratic changes in Belarus.	Democracy Index score (1-10)	2.59 (Authoritarian Regime – 2020)	>4 (2025)	Economist Intelligence Unit	<i>Not applicable</i>
<b>Outcome 1</b>	1. Independent and diverse news gathering and media programming on Belarus sustained and strengthened	Number of independent media supported by the programme	0	10	Project reports	
<b>Outcome 2</b>	2. Mobilities and access to higher education and opportunities for lifelong-learning compliant with EU standards and values for Belarusian youth, academics and professionals carried out and implemented.	<p>2.1 Number of students enrolled to the EHU on annual basis supported by the EU, disaggregated by sex</p> <p>2.2 Number of students successfully completed academic programmes financed by the EU action, desegregated by sex.</p> <p>2.3 Number of teaching stipends/fellowships, desegregated by sex financed by the EU action</p> <p>2.4 Number of students completed distance learning courses</p>	<p>2.1 - 45</p> <p>2.2 - 0 (to be updated based on scholarship call announced from AAP2020)</p> <p>2.3 - 0 (to be updated based on scholarship call announced from AAP2020)</p> <p>2.4 – N/A</p>	<p>2.1 - 55</p> <p>2.2 - 100</p> <p>2.3 -20</p> <p>2.4 - 200</p>	<p>2.1 – EHU enrolment reports</p> <p>2.2</p> <p>Project reports</p>	

<b>Outcome 3</b>	3. Belarusian entrepreneurs and companies forced into exile to bordering countries supported.	<p>3.1 Number of exiled entrepreneurs/companies supported by advisory programs/business associations in host countries. Disaggregated by sex</p> <p>3.2 Number of assisted entrepreneurs/companies sustained their business in bordering countries with the support of access to finance programmes/initiatives. disaggregated by sex</p> <p>3.3 Number of green jobs created/sustained.</p>	<p>3.1 – 0</p> <p>3.2 – 0</p> <p>3.3 – 0</p>	<p>3.1.1-1000 individuals</p> <p>3.1.2-70 companies</p> <p>3.2.1-1000 individuals</p> <p>3.2.2-70 companies</p> <p>3.3.1 – TBC</p>	Project reports	
<b>Outcome 4</b>	4. Belarusian culture and art initiatives, with a view to contribute to the preservation of the Belarusian civic space, supported.	<p>4.1 Number culture and art initiatives</p> <p>4.2 Number of mini-grants</p> <p>4.3 Number of individual mobilities,</p>	<p>4.1 – 0</p> <p>4.2 – 0</p> <p>4.3 – 0 (to be updated on EU4Culture reports)</p>	<p>4.1 – 50</p> <p>4.2 – 4</p> <p>4.3 -100</p>	Project reports	

<b>Output 1 related to Outcome 1</b>	1.1 Platform to promote and coordinate international technical and financial support for independent Belarusian media outlets established	1.1 Platform to promote and coordinate international technical assistance created.	1.1. Existing platform for EaP Media Donor Meeting	1.1 Platform specifically for Belarus set up	Project report	
<b>Output 2 related to Outcome 1</b>	1.2 Technical assistance and training for independent Belarusian media and media professionals provided	1.2.1 Number of independent journalists supported, desegregated by sex. 1.2.2 Number of independent media supported. 1.2.3 Number of media staff trained.	1.2.1 0 1.2.2 0 1.2.3 34	1.2.1 30 1.2.2 20 1.2.3 100	1.2.1- 1.2.31.2.2	
<b>Output 1 related to Outcome 2</b>	2.1 Academic programme for students (scholarships), academic staff (teaching fellowships) and retraining for professionals implemented.	2.1.1 Programme to run scholarships, teaching fellowships and mobility scheme  2.1.2 EHU Trust Fund	2.1.1 Programme in place and operational  2.1.2 To be set up in 2020	2.1.1 Programme in place and operational 2.1.2 Operational	2.1.1 Project reports  2.1.2 Project reports	
<b>Output 2 related to Outcome 2</b>	2.2 Lifelong learning opportunities for Belarusians through distance learning are available.	2.2.1 BY platform for distance learning	2.2.1 Not available	2.2.1 Set up and functions	2.2.1 Project reports	
<b>Output 1 related to Outcome 3</b>	3.1 Advisory services for individual Belarusian entrepreneurs and companies regarding relocation issues provided with support of business associations and advisory programmes.	3.1.1 Number of exiled entrepreneurs/companies supported by advisory programs/business associations in host countries, disaggregated by sex  3.1.2 Number of advisory services supporting Belarusian	3.1.1-N/A  3.1.2-N/A	3.1.1 Between 1000 and 2000 individuals/70 companies  3.1.2 Minimum 4 advisory	Project reports; economic surveys; publications in Belarus and in	

		entrepreneurs established per neighbouring country.  3.1.3 Number of business associations in Belarus and in neighbouring countries supporting Belarusian companies in exile.	3.1.3-N/A	programmes per hosting country  3.1.3 Minimum 4 business association per hosting country.	neighbouring countries.	
<b>Output 2 related to Outcome 3</b>	3.2 Access to financial institutions and subsidy schemes in host countries promoted.	3.2.1 Number of assisted entrepreneurs/companies sustained their business in bordering countries with the support of access to finance programmes/initiatives. disaggregated by sex  3.2.2 Number and type of (national and international) financial institutions providing ad hoc investment support mechanisms to companies in exile.	3.2.1 –N/A  3.2.2-N/A	3.2.1 Between 1000 and 2000 individuals/70 companies.  3.2.2 Minimum 5 financial institutions (national and international) have established ad hoc mechanisms to assist companies in exile.	Project reports; economic surveys; publications in Belarus and in neighbouring countries.	
<b>Output 1 related to Outcome 4</b>	4.1 Belarusian culture and art initiatives aimed at consolidating the Belarusian society, including the diasporas and exiled communities funded.	4.1.1 Grant scheme	4.1.1 Not available	4.1.1. Set up and operational	Project reports	
<b>Output 2 related to Outcome 4</b>	4.2 Belarusian culture and art actors acquire new skills and cultural professional networks developed.	4.2.1 Individual mobility scheme	4.2.1 Not available	4.2.1 Set up and operational	Project reports	

## **4. IMPLEMENTATION ARRANGEMENTS**

### **4.1. Financing Agreement**

In order to implement this action, it is not envisaged to conclude a financing agreement with the partner country.

### **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 60 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 by amending this Financing Decision and the relevant contracts and agreements.

### **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 measures<sup>6</sup>.

#### **4.3.1. Direct Management (Grants)**

##### *4.3.1.1. Grant*

#### **a) Purpose of the grant(s)**

Grant is proposed to achieve specific objective 1 mentioned in section 3.

#### **b) Type of applicants targeted**

Potential applicants for the grants will be international civil society organisations.

##### *4.3.1.2. Grant*

#### **a) Purpose of the grant(s)**

Grant is proposed to achieve specific objective 3 mentioned in section 3.

#### **b) Type of applicants targeted**

Potential applicants for the grants will be civil society organisations.

##### *4.3.1.3. Grant*

#### **a) Purpose of the grant(s)**

Grant is proposed to achieve specific objective 4 mentioned in section 3.

#### **b) Type of applicants targeted**

Potential applicants for the grants will be international civil society organisations.

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<sup>6</sup> www.sanctionsmap.eu. Please note that the sanctions map is an IT tool for identifying the sanctions regimes. The source of the sanctions stems from legal acts published in the Official Journal (OJ). In case of discrepancy between the published legal acts and the updates on the website it is the OJ version that prevails.

### 4.3.2. Indirect Management with a Member State Organisation

A part of this action may be implemented in indirect management with the Lithuanian Central Project Management Agency (CPMA). This implementation entails achieving specific objective 2 mentioned in section 3. The envisaged entity has been selected using the following criteria: extensive experience on working in the sector of education and mobility, proven experience in public policy advice, managing technical assistance projects in the EU Eastern Neighbourhood countries, operational capacity, value added, transparency, and absence of conflict of interest.

The agreement with the entity must include detailed provisions on restrictive measures<sup>7</sup>

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

### 4.3.3. Changes from indirect to direct management (and vice versa) mode due to exceptional circumstances (one alternative second option)

In case implementation modality in direct management as described in 4.3.1 cannot be implemented due to circumstances outside of the Commission's control, these parts of the action may be implemented under indirect management with a Member State Organisation to be selected using the following criteria: extensive experience on working in the sector of education and mobility, proven experience in public policy advice, managing technical assistance projects in the EU Eastern Neighbourhood countries, operational capacity, value added, transparency, and absence of conflict of interest.

### 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

<b>Indicative Budget components</b>	<b>EU contribution (amount in EUR)</b>
<b>Objective 1:</b> Sustain and strengthen independent and diverse news gathering and media programming on Belarus composed of	
Grants (direct management) – cf. section 4.3.1.1.	N.A

<sup>7</sup> EU restrictive measures in relation to Belarus are set out in Council Decision 2012/642/CFSP of 15 October 2012 concerning restrictive measures in view of the situation in Belarus, and its subsequent amendments. At the time of adoption of the present Action Document, the latest such amendments are set out in Council Decision (CFSP) 2021/1031 of 24 June 2021. The consolidated text of Council Decision 2012/642/CFSP can be viewed at <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A02012D0642-20210625>.

<b>Objective 2:</b> Promote mobility and people-to-people contacts for Belarusian youth, academics and professionals to benefit from access to higher education and opportunities for lifelong-learning compliant with EU standards and values composed of	
Indirect management with Member State Organisation – cf. section 4.3.2.	<b>7 000 000</b>
<b>Objective 3:</b> Support Belarusian entrepreneurs and companies forced into exile to bordering countries composed of	
Grants (direct management) – cf. section 4.3.1.2.	N.A
<b>Objective 4:</b> Support Belarusian culture and art initiatives to with a view to contribute to the preservation and of the Belarusian civic space composed of	
Grants (direct management) – cf. section 4.3.1.3.	N.A.
<b>Grants</b> – total envelope under 4.3.1	<b>8 000 000</b>
<b>Evaluation</b> – cf. section 5.2 <b>Audit</b> – cf. section 5.3	N.A. (will be covered by another Decision)
<b>Communication and visibility</b> – cf. section 6	N.A.
<b>Totals</b>	<b>15 000 000</b>

#### 4.6. Organisational Set-up and Responsibilities

Given the diverse nature of the action, involving support to independent non-state media, youth, entrepreneurs and companies and culture, a Steering Committee will be set up per each component/objective of the action to oversee and validate the overall direction and policy. The project Steering Committees shall meet regularly. The composition of the project Steering Committees will be decided at the start of implementation of each of the different components

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 results (Outputs and direct Outcomes) as measured by corresponding indicators, using as reference the logframe 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).

## **5.2. Evaluation**

Having regard to the importance of the action, a final evaluation will be carried out for this action or its components via independent consultants contracted by the Commission.

It will be carried out for accountability and learning purposes at various levels (including for policy revision).

The Commission shall inform the implementing partner at least one month in advance of the dates envisaged 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 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, decide on the follow-up actions to be taken and any adjustments necessary, including, if indicated, the reorientation of the project.

Evaluation services may be contracted under a framework contract.

## **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. COMMUNICATION AND VISIBILITY**

Communication and visibility is a contractual obligation for all entities implementing EU-funded external actions to advertise the European Union's support for their work to the relevant audiences.

To that end they must comply with the instructions given in the [Communication and Visibility Requirements of 2018](#) (or any successor document) notably with regard to the use of the EU emblem and the elaboration of a dedicated communication and visibility plan, to be completed for every action at the start of implementation.

These obligations apply equally, regardless of whether the actions concerned are implemented by the Commission, contractors, grant beneficiaries or entrusted entities. In each case, a reference to the relevant contractual obligations must be included in the respective financing agreement, procurement and grant contracts, and delegation agreements.

Communication and visibility measures may be funded from the amounts allocated to the action. For the purpose of enhancing the visibility of the EU and its contribution to this action, the Commission may sign or enter into joint declarations or statements, as part of its prerogative of budget implementation and to safeguard the financial interests of the Union. Visibility and communication measures should also promote transparency and accountability on the use of funds.

Effectiveness of communication activities on awareness about the action and its objectives as well as on EU funding of the action should be measured.

Implementing partners shall keep the Commission and EU Delegation fully informed of the planning and implementation of specific visibility and communication activities before work starts. Implementing partners will ensure adequate visibility of EU financing and will report on visibility and communication actions as well as the results of the overall action to the relevant monitoring committees.