

Terms of Reference

Subject: Project's Final Evaluation

Project: CDWB – Combatting Disinformation in the Western Balkans

1. Purpose

The European Partnership for Democracy (EPD) is recruiting a consultant or team of consultants (hereafter: the “Evaluator”) to conduct the final evaluation of the ‘CDWB – Combatting Disinformation in the Western Balkans’ (hereafter: the ‘Project’), funded by the European Union (EU). The evaluation is set to take place between December 2024 - March 2025. Under this contract, the Evaluator is expected to conduct an evaluation of the CDWB Project following the DAC criteria. To this end, the evaluation will have two main purposes:

- **Accountability.** The evaluation must ascertain the degree to which the Project has attained the overall and specific objectives established in the Description of the Action and Logical Framework Matrix annexed to the contract with the European Union.
- **Learning.** The evaluation must also provide relevant insights on the ways in which the Project has contributed to make policy makers, media actors and the CSOs from Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo*, Montenegro and Serbia address Foreign Information Manipulation and Interference (FIMI) in a coordinated manner and thereby contributing to more democratic resilience to FIMI and to lessen chances of inter-communal conflict in the Western Balkans.

The **European Partnership for Democracy (EPD)** is a non-profit organisation supporting democracy worldwide. It is a unique partnership comprising European democracy support organisations present in Africa, Asia, Europe, the Middle East and Latin America. EPD works inside and outside Europe as democracy is a universal aspiration and the contemporary challenges and opportunities for democracy are global in scope. More information about EPD is available at www.epd.eu.

2. Background information about the project

Following the aftermath of COVID-19 and the 2022 Russian invasion of Ukraine, disinformation, already considered endemic throughout the Western Balkans, experienced a

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sharp increase. While originating from various systemic issues within these countries, specific key common factors have been identified such as polarisation, scepticism towards EU integration, lack of pluralism, and state-owned media.

While foreign actors feature prominently, a significant share of disinformation in the Western Balkans is produced and disseminated by domestic and regional actors to undermine or delegitimize their political opponents. This fuels greater polarisation, hinders cross-communal cooperation, and undermines people's confidence in democratic processes.

The Project focused precisely, on tackling FIMI in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo*, Montenegro and Serbia. The Project seeks to mitigate disinformation influence in the region by:

- Actively involving citizens in raising awareness campaigns, media education, assemblies deliberation, consensus-making and decision-making.
- Analysing disinformation patterns, the media ecosystem in which mass media operate, as well as the respect of ethical professional standards by media to inform advocacy and dialogue sessions and subsequently implement activities tailored to disinformation tactics and strategies.
- Contributing to the improvement of regulation both at national and regional level, without hampering freedom of expression.
- Fostering capacity-building in fact-checking skills, increasing accountability and reliability of potential print media, broadcast media and internet media.

The Project's **rationale** states that if 1) citizens' involvement in proposing legitimate solutions to FIMI is fostered (**Output 1**); if 2) the evidence base on information ecosystems and patterns in the Western Balkans is widened (**Output 2**); if 3) Dialogue among policy makers, key stakeholders and citizens on a balanced approach to combating disinformation while protecting fundamental civil rights is built (**Output 3**); if 4) Constructive engagement of public and private stakeholders in finding regional mitigation measures to disinformation in the Western Balkans is promoted (**Output 4**); if 5) the capacity of media actors in the four target countries to operationally counteract disinformation is strengthened (**Output 5**); if 6) Media and ethical standards in reporting ethnic and political sensitive content are upheld (**Output 6**); and if 7) Awareness on disinformation among citizens and stakeholders, leveraging creative campaigns and tools, online and offline formats, is increased (**Output 7**) then policy makers (including political parties), media actors as well as the civil society organisations in the four target countries can address FIMI in a coordinated manner, while protecting freedom of expression and media pluralism and based on a citizen-driven approach (**Overall outcome**); and thereby contribute to more democratic resilience to FIMI and to lessen chances of inter-communal conflict caused by FIMI in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo*, Montenegro and Serbia (**Impact**).

Media outlets, CSOs, and national policy makers (including political parties) from the four target areas have been identified as the **primary targeted groups** by the intervention. Given the key roles they have in the way disinformation works and it is spread, they jointly play a

crucial role in counteracting disinformation in the Western Balkans Region. **The final beneficiaries** are general citizens from different age groups, to whom the Project intended to provide trusting and verified information, and empowered them in having a say and taking a stand in a phenomenon where they are normally only regarded as manipulable users, participating instead to consensus-building and decision-making processes.

The Project was implemented by a consortium of nine organisations: European Partnership for Democracy (**project lead**), Agence française de développement médias (CFI), ARTICLE 19, Atlantic Council of Montenegro (ACM), Centre for Civic Initiatives (CCI), Center for Research, Transparency and Accountability (CRTA), Club de Madrid, New Social Initiative (NSI).

3. Evaluation modalities

During the Inception phase, the Evaluator shall make use of the Outcome Harvesting method **to collect and document a first series of outcomes** through scoping interviews (perhaps also focus groups). The first collected outcomes, their significance and the Project's contribution should be presented in a **participatory workshop** gathering the project consortium in order to **collectively define the areas (i.e. thematics) of changes which will be under scrutiny during the evaluation**. The same participatory workshop will enable the **collective formulation of the evaluation questions and the evaluation methodological design**.

Likewise, the Inception phase shall include a **preliminary phase** to assess the Project's own analysis of the political economy of the media sector in the Western Balkans, as well as of the political trends and dynamics identified through the social media monitoring. This step of the evaluation process should provide the Evaluator with a general background against which to assess the relevance of the Project's activities and the consortium's capacity to adapt to a changing political environment.

The inception report shall therefore consist in an **evaluability assessment**, transcribing evaluation questions and the evaluation methodological design as co-created by the Project consortium, informing the regional and national contexts of implementation of the Project's interventions, and paving the way for the next steps of the evaluation process.

The evaluation will result in a Final evaluation report aimed at providing consortium members and the donor with a clear understanding of both the **expected and unexpected results and impact** of their work in all its dimensions (political, social, economic, etc.). Secondly, it shall gather lessons learnt, challenges faced, and best practices and use such insight to generate recommendations that can help the consortium members as well as the EU to assess the **sustainability and the replicability** of similar initiatives in the future.

When producing the analysis and formulating the recommendations, it is recommended to the Evaluator not to conceive the Project as one single intervention, but **as a set of several interventions interacting together** to make policy makers, media actors and the CSOs in Western Balkans region tackle FIMI in a coordinated manner. What is more, the relevance, effectiveness, impact and sustainability (cf. the evaluations questions under these criteria) of the different interventions implemented under the Project should be analysed **taking into account the heterogeneity of the contexts where they were implemented.**

The full evaluation process is to be completed by early April 2025.

4. Evaluation questions

In its proposal, the Evaluator is invited to submit a series of preliminary evaluation questions covering the aspects described in the previous section.

Once the contract is awarded, these questions and the methodological approaches suitable to answer those questions will be open to discussion so that the consortium members can suggest new angles or fields of inquiry according to their first-hand experience acquired during implementation. To ensure this co-creation process, a participatory workshop, gathering all consortium members, will be organised by the Evaluator to finalise the formulation of the evaluation questions and the evaluation methodological design, which will be then formulated in the inception report.

Some overarching questions are proposed below, however the bidders are welcome to refine them and suggest others.

Relevance

Did the Project's problem statement hold true? In their attempts to make policy makers, media actors and the CSOs in Western Balkans region tackle FIMI in a coordinated manner, to what extent have the interventions of the Project responded to FIMI's related needs, priorities and difficulties, coming from :

- those targeted actors (policy makers, media outlets and CSOs) ?
- and the citizens/general population ?

Have the different interventions implemented under the Project been sensitive and relevant to the political economy and policy contexts in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Montenegro and Serbia ? In other words : to what extent the different interventions under the Project have been successfully tailored to 1) their national/local contexts of implementation 2) critical events susceptible to undermining their achievements 3) the overall political framework and specificities of democratic institutions ?

Efficiency

To what extent financial and human resources have been sufficiently anticipated and efficiently managed by the consortium members to deliver the expected results of the Project? Has the Project created conditions for effective networking among target groups? Are there any instances in which joint work and alignment has resulted in the pooling of resources?

Coherence

How coherent was the overall approach? To what extent have the members of the Project consortium created synergies in between the interventions implemented under the Project ?

How coherent was the Project with the EU diplomatic stance and project portfolio in the region? And with that of other donors?

Effectiveness

To what extent were implementation strategies effective in delivering expected results?

Impact

In their attempts to make policy makers, media actors and the CSOs in Western Balkans region tackle FIMI in a coordinated manner, have the interventions of the Project contributed to set off changes in the opinions, attitudes and practices among those actors and their organisations ? What are these changes ?

To what extent and how have the interventions implemented under the Project contributed to these changes ? Have the interventions contributed to the changes in the same manner from one context of implementation to another ?

To what extent those changes could have 1) benefited the general population and improved democratic resilience to FIMI in the region and 2) lessened chances of inter-communal conflict in the Western Balkans ?

Sustainability

To what extent the interventions of the Project, and the changes they have contributed to, could be replicated and sustained in the future ?

In which contexts of implementation could the interventions of the Project and their associated changes be replicated? Under what conditions could they become sustainable ?

EU added value

What has been the added value of the intervention being funded specifically by the EU compared to other donors? How has the intervention contributed to the EU agenda in the region?

5. Evaluation methods

The Project's results chain was defined in a Logical Framework Matrix during the design phase. This will be the basis for the "accountability" dimension of the Evaluation. To this end, the Project team has been tracking progress for the realisation of each of the seven outputs and the overall outcome, as formulated in the Logical framework. The Evaluator shall consider the descriptions of progress as one of the key sources of evidence.

Beyond the indicators expressed in the Logframe, the Evaluator shall identify and substantiate a number of outcomes following the Outcome Harvesting method. In other words, concrete behavioural and organisational outcomes, describing the changes of opinions, attitudes and practises as observed from the targeted actors and beneficiaries are to be identified, and the contribution of the Project's intervention to these changes are to be documented.

The conclusions of the inception report should assess the relevance and the feasibility of using other approaches such as :

- a Contribution Analysis, on one selected significant outcome (or category of outcomes), 1) to analyse the contributions of other actors who did not take part in the Project, but who nonetheless contributed directly or indirectly to this outcome 2) and therefore better isolate the contributions of the Project to the realisation of this outcome / and describe the synergies developed with actors beyond the Project
- a qualitative and/or quantitative Social Network Analysis, to analyse the results of the policy dialogues's efforts in connecting media actors, CSOs and policy makers.
- a Narrative Assessment to produce a critical examination of the advocacy efforts and achievements directed towards the representatives of the political parties targeted by the different interventions of the Project.
- a Political Economy Analysis to ensure a sound understanding of the key political factors affecting the Project activities.

Data collection methods could combine desk reviews, surveys, field visits, interviews and focus groups (including with the project teams).

The final design of the evaluation process, including its methods, will be the result of the co-creation process referred above.

6. Deliverables and timeline

- An *inception report* (in English), including a first sample of harvested outcomes, the theories of change describing the functioning of the different interventions under the Project (and how they interact together) and the design of the evaluation methodology as co-created within the Project consortium.

- The raw data of all harvested outcomes, the description of their significance and the documentation of the Project's contributions to their realisation. A sample of at least 25% of these outcomes should be substantiated to ensure their reliability.
- *A full evaluation report* (in English) answering the evaluation questions phrased in the inception report and formulating recommendations on the Project, also including:
 - An executive summary (not exceeding 5 pages; in English);
 - Raw data and primary sources of information collected during the evaluation.

Other innovative forms of communicating evaluation findings are encouraged

Deliverable	Indicative deadline
Inception report	31/01/2025
Draft report	31/03/2025
Presentation of the draft final report at consortium level	07/04/2025
Consolidated Final Report	15/04/2025
Presentation of the final report to the donor and any other interested parties identified along the evaluation.	Second half of April

7. Documents to be consulted (preliminary list)

The following documents will provide the Evaluator with background information and insight into Project implementation and achievement of the objectives:

- Project proposal (Description of the Action attached to the contract);
- Results chain (Logical Framework attached to the contract);
- Interim reports submitted to the EU;
- Internal monthly update to the EU;
- Research and policy documents produced over the course of the Project, including, reports and activity deliverables.

8. Budget

The maximum total budget available under this contract is EUR 37 000 including VAT and/or any other taxes. Any travel costs (and related costs) need to be covered within that budget.

The budget will be split in three instalments, to be transferred to the Evaluator after the completion of the afore-mentioned assignments.

9. Eligibility criteria

The Evaluator must fulfil the following criteria:

- Proven track record of conducting project evaluations in the field of fight against disinformation, media support, democratic governance and citizens' engagement;
- Prior experience of working in the Western Balkans is required;
- Excellent knowledge of English and Bosnian-Croatian-Montenegrin-Serbian (BCMS) is required;
- The application is complete and submitted in due time in accordance with Article 10 of the present TOR.

Applicants are invited to submit the application documents detailed below, which as a whole constitute the application package. Incomplete applications will not be considered.

10. Application procedure

a. Deadline

Interested bidders are requested to submit a **technical and financial offer** which will be assessed by an Evaluation Committee against the criteria listed in *Annex 1*. Please find Annex 1 below at the end of the TOR.

The application package is to be sent at the latest by **18 November 2024, 12:00 CET** to corentinpecot@epd.eu; Subject line: *"CDWB - Evaluation"*

Requests for clarification may be submitted to the email address above until 11 November 2024, 23:59 CET. Answers will be published on EPD's website by 14 November 2024, 23:59 CET.

b. Technical offer

The technical offer is composed of the:

- Updated CVs of the Evaluator(s);
- [Annex 2](#) - Application form filled in.

c. Financial offer

The financial offer shall be: A separate document in the form of a quotation broken down into a detailed budget, that includes the total amount of the offer, all taxes included.

d. Selection modalities

An Evaluation Steering Committee will be established to evaluate the bids and coordinate the evaluation process on behalf of the consortium. The committee, led by the EPD Head of Programmes, will be the first line of contact with the evaluation team lead.

The technical offer will be weighted with 80%; the financial offer will be weighted with 20%. Only candidates scoring at least 75/100 with regard to the criteria set in Annex 1 for their technical offer will have their financial offer considered. Bidders may be invited for an interview during the technical evaluation if deemed necessary by the Evaluation Steering Committee.

EPD reserves the right to enter into a negotiation with the candidates on the financial offer proposed by them, before finalising the selection process. The selection process will be finalised after candidates shortlisted in the second step of the process have been interviewed by the Evaluation Committee and agreement on the offer has been found.

11. Data treatment

EPD collects and treats your private data in compliance with the EU General Data Protection Regulation 2016/679 i.e. hereby requests personal data only for recruitment purposes, pursuing a legitimate interest in a reasonable way, and will delete them after it is judged no longer necessary to archive. Shortlisted applications will be provided to the Funding Agency to ensure compliance with EU procurement rules in external action projects. By bidding to this tender, you authorise EPD to treat your personal data accordingly.

ANNEX 1

TECHNICAL EVALUATION GRID

<u>Criteria</u>	<u>Score</u>
Experience in evaluations and with relevant evaluation methods	[30]
Experience in the Western Balkans (Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo¹, Montenegro and Serbia)	[20]
Relevant language skills (English and Bosnian-Croatian-Montenegrin-Serbian)	[20]
Quality of the methodology's rationale and strategy	[30]
<u>Overall total score</u>	<u>100</u>

¹ This designation is without prejudice to positions on status, and is in line with UNSCR 1244/1999 and the ICJ Opinion on the Kosovo declaration of independence.