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Supporting Media Freedom in Challenging Times

Independent Evaluation of OSCE's Programmatic Work on Media Freedom and Freedom of Expression



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This evaluation was led and conducted by Galina Gurova – Senior Evaluator at the OSCE's Office of Internal Oversight with the support of Adrian Ortuno Guendell – Junior Professional Officer. Overall guidance was provided by Nynke De Witte, Head of Evaluation/Deputy Director, OIO.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ATU Action against Terrorism Unit (OSCE)

CiA Centre in Ashgabat

CoE Council of Europe (CoE)

CPC Conflict Prevention Centre (OSCE)

EUD European Union Delegation

ExB Extra budgetary (project of the OSCE)

FoE Freedom of Expression

FoM Freedom of the Media

GE&HR Gender Equality and Human Rights

HCHR High Commission on Human Rights

HCNM High Commissioner on National Minorities (OSCE)

ICCPR International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights

KII Key Informant Interview

M&E Monitoring and Evaluation

MSI Media Sustainability Index

ODIHR Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights

OIO Office of Independent Oversight (OSCE)

OSCE Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe

PESU Programming and Evaluation Support Unit (OSCE)

PiA Presence in Albania

POiA Programme Office in Astana

POiB Programme Office in Bishkek

POiD Programme Office in Dushanbe

pS Participating States

RFoM Representative for Freedom of the Media (OSCE)

RSF Reporters without Borders

TNTD Transnational Threats Department (OSCE)

TOR Terms of Reference

UB Unified Budget of the OSCE

UNESCO United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

USAID United States Agency for International Development

Introduction

This is the first independent evaluation of the OSCE programmatic work on Freedom of the Media (FoM) and Freedom of Expression (FoE), covering the period 2016-2021. It was conducted by an internal evaluation team of the OSCE Office of Internal Oversight (OIO) between April 2022 and November 2022.

The evaluation was designed as an overall assessment of the media freedom programmatic work of the Representative on Freedom of the Media (RFoM) and OSCE's field operations (FOs) in South East Europe (SEE) and Central Asia (CA).

The evaluation took place at a challenging time for the OSCE, the entire international community, the media providers and the consumers of media information. The rise in political tensions around the war in Ukraine, the proliferation of disinformation, the lack of governance of online media, and the rise of fake news are among the challenges impacting the delivery of OSCE's work on freedom of the media.

This report presents the findings of the evaluation, its conclusions and recommendations. It is organized around five main chapters. **Chapter 1** provides the media freedom context within which the OSCE delivers its programmatic work and priorities in this regard. **Chapter 2** discusses the evaluation approach and methodology, and **Chapter 3** outlines the main evaluation findings for the RFoM's work or media freedom. **Chapter 4** focuses on the media freedom work of OSCE's field operations, while **Chapter 5** summarizes crosscutting findings such as OSCE's comparative advantage, gender and human rights considerations in the OSCE media freedom work. **Chapters 6 & 7** present the evaluation conclusions and recommendations. Identified good practices and considerations for the field operations are presented in **Chapter 8**. The report concludes with the management response and action plan in **Chapter 9**.



1. Context and Object of the Evaluation

1.1 Media Freedom and Freedom of Expression

Media freedom and freedom of expression are enshrined as basic human rights in most countries' constitutions.¹ Free and independent media is a cornerstone of democratic societies and the means through which citizens and their elected representatives communicate in their reciprocal efforts to inform and influence societal behaviours.

Freedom of the media is also essential for the protection of all other human rights. Instances of torture, discrimination, corruption or misuse of power usually come to light thanks to the work of investigative journalists. Making the facts known to the public is often the first, essential step to start redressing human rights violations and holding governments accountable.² Conversely, free media, unfettered by government control, promotes a free exchange of views, can have a positive impact on democracies, and can help reduce international tensions and prevent conflicts.³

Freedom of the media has become more difficult to attain in the digital age. The Internet, mobile communications and other fast-developing technologies have supplemented, but not supplanted, traditional media in protecting democracy, peace and stability. While new and transformative technologies can be liberating and democratizing, when abused, exploited and controlled for malign

purposes, they can also easily be used to control the narrative, influence free democratic societies, or threaten the safety of journalists.

New technologies have opened great opportunities for journalists, especially for investigative reporting. At the same time, they have posed additional risks to the safety of journalists, including an increase in online and offline attacks, harassment and killings of journalists with impunity, and an erosion of the independence, freedom and plurality of voices and opinions in state and corporate media.⁴

Other recent trends include the convergence of various media and communication platforms. While this has given citizens more possibilities to freely choose information sources that they trust, the proliferation of media platforms has made it more difficult to implement media standards and foster media quality, media transparency, credibility and independence.

1.2 OSCE's Commitments on Freedom of the Media and Safety of Journalists

The OSCE work in the areas of media freedom and freedom of expression is underpinned by the principle that "Freedom of expression is a fundamental human right," enshrined in Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights⁵ and in Article 19 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Right (ICCPR).⁶ OSCE's commitments to media freedom are stipulated in a number of organization's documents, such as the 1975 Helsinki Final Act, the 1990 Copenhagen Document and the Document of the Moscow



Meeting of the Conference on Human Dimension of the CSCE, 1991, MC.DOC/2/12.

With the 2018 Ministerial Council (MC) Decision on Safety of Journalists (MC.DEC/3/18), the OSCE reaffirmed its commitment to address challenges specifically related to the safety of journalists. The MC acknowledged that while journalism and technology are evolving and contributing to the public debate, the risks that undermine the safety of journalists are increasing – in particular those related to the safety of female journalists. It also emphasized the importance of protecting the safety of journalists for the implementation of the relevant Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, namely SDG 16 “Peace, Justice and Strong institutions”, and SDG 5 “Gender Equality”.

A number of joint declarations issued by the four international freedom of expression mandate holders of the UN, the OAS, the OSCE and the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights (ACHPR) further reiterated the need for the OSCE and its participating States to promote and support media freedom. Among these are the declarations on “Politicians and Public Officials and Freedom of Expression” (20 October 2021); “Freedom of Expression and Elections in the Digital Age” (20 October 2020); “Challenges to Freedom of Expression in the Next Decade” (10 July 2019); “Freedom of expression and ‘fake news’, disinformation and propaganda” (2017), and “Freedom of Expression and Countering Violent Extremism” (2016). The most recent joint declaration on “Freedom of Expression and

Gender Justice” was published on 3 May 2022.⁷ These declarations not only strengthen OSCE’s commitment to contribute to freedom of expression and media freedom, but also reiterate the important role that media can play in support of the OSCE comprehensive approach to security. **“There is no security without media freedom.”⁸**

It is important to note, however, that the OSCE is not the only organization striving to enhance the media freedom and freedom of expression environment in the OSCE Region. Other regional and international organizations such as the Council of Europe⁹ (CoE), the European Union Delegations (EUD), UNESCO¹⁰, OAS as well as the governments of many participating States (pS) are also developing policies and programmes aimed at addressing the growing challenges to media freedom¹¹. This renders international co-operation and co-ordination of efforts particularly important in the current environment.

“Independent journalism is in peril, faced with the erosion of business models, increasing crackdowns on press freedom, and ongoing threats against the safety of journalists. The global community must act swiftly to protect and promote press freedom and public access to free, independent, and pluralistic news media.”¹²

1.3 Representative on Freedom of the Media (RFoM)

Following a 1996 Summit of Heads of State in Lisbon, which recognized the important role of the media for lasting peace and security in the OSCE region, in November 1997, the OSCE Permanent Council established the Representative on Freedom of the Media (RFoM) as an autonomous OSCE institution (PC.DEC/193 from 5 November 1997)¹³. The RFoM's unique mandate as a watchdog for media freedom across the OSCE region delineated its role to provide early warnings on violations of freedom of expression and media freedom in the pS and to promote full compliance with the OSCE's principles and commitments related to freedom of the media and freedom of expression.¹⁴

The OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media (the Representative)¹⁵ is appointed for a three-year mandate (with a possibility for one extension) by the Ministerial Council. As a political appointee, every Representative has a personal and political mandate, directly attributed to the mandate holder. As such, the mandate holders shape the implementation of the mandate within its two-fold approach of monitoring serious problems to media freedom in the 57 OSCE pS on the one hand, and providing assistance to pS in upholding their relevant OSCE commitments on the other.

During the period covered by this evaluation (2016-2021), there have been three mandate holders, with different visions based on their

political assessment and the contemporary challenges to media freedom in the OSCE region.

There were two vacancy periods in 2017 and 2020 without a Representative, due to the absence of consensus among the 57 pS for the appointment of new mandate holders. These vacancies created challenges for the work of the RFoM Office as it is expected to support every appointed Representative with the fulfilment of his/her mandate, in addition to developing and implementing programmes and activities as per the 1997 PC.DEC/193, namely: 1) "To observe media developments in all OSCE participating States", and 2) "To advocate for and promote their full compliance with the Organization's principles and commitments on freedom of expression and free media."¹⁶ The early warning function of the Representative on Freedom of the Media falls outside the scope of this document, as the evaluation focused on the institution's programmatic work, directed towards assisting pS with the fulfilment of their OSCE commitments. The assistance that the RFoM provides to the pS results from the monitoring of media freedom problems and violations in the OSCE pS, as well as from recurring requests reflecting patterns pertinent to a large number of States, that the Representative receives from pS authorities through regular contacts or country visits.

1.4 Work on Media Freedom and Freedom of Expression by OSCE Field Operations and other Executive Structures

The OSCE field operations (FOs) (hereinafter interchangeably also referred to as OSCE “field missions” or “missions”) also play an important role in the implementation of the OSCE media freedom commitments through activities and programmes promoting media development, media and information literacy, media pluralism, and safety of journalists. As part of their mandates and programming priorities, the FOs assist host governments and media actors with the development of media legislation, media strategies, implementation of national public broadcasting reforms, capacity building for state-owned and independent media providers, and with ensuring the safety of journalists.

The RFoM and the field missions collaborate with each other and other OSCE executive structures on issues related to media freedom. For example, the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) is consulted on issues related to hate speech and hate crimes against journalists, as well as on democratization and media coverage of elections. The High Commissioner on National Minorities (HCNM) is consulted on projects related to media coverage, media literacy and information for ethnic and religious minorities and marginalized groups. Some sections of the OSCE Secretariat, such as the Transnational Threats Department (TNTD) and the Action against Terrorism Unit (ATU) are also consulted when the RFoM or the FOs

review legislations or policies and their potential impact on media freedom. The RFoM works closely with the Gender Issues Programme on issues related to the safety of female journalists.



2. Evaluation Objectives, Scope and Methodology

2.1 Evaluation purpose and objectives

The main purpose of this evaluation is to assess and generate evidence-based findings related to the coherence, effectiveness, comparative advantage and sustainability of OSCE's programmatic work on media freedom and freedom of expression and to provide recommendations to further improve the efficient and effective delivery of the OSCE media freedom projects and programmes. To this end, the evaluation has two objectives:

- **Accountability:** To provide an assessment of the coherence, effectiveness, comparative advantage and sustainability of the programmatic work of the RFoM and the work of the OSCE's field operations relating to media freedom and freedom of expression; and,
- **Learning:** To support organizational learning by highlighting good practices and lessons learned, and making recommendations where areas for improvement are identified.

The intended users of this evaluation include the Representative on Freedom of the Media, RFoM's Office staff, relevant OSCE Secretariat departments, OSCE field operations, as well as other interested

executive structures and delegations of participating States.

2.2 Evaluation scope and coverage

Institutionally, as per the approved Terms of Reference, the evaluation focuses on 1) the programmatic work that the RFoM has carried out under its second Unified Budget (UB) objective, as it relates to the "*promotion of OSCE media freedom commitments and assistance to the participating States in their understanding and compliance*", and 2) the programmes and activities related to media and media freedom of the OSCE field operations.

Temporally, the evaluation covers the OSCE programmatic work related to media freedom and media implemented between 2016 and 2021.¹⁷

Geographically, the scope of the evaluation includes the RFoM and the OSCE's field operations in South East Europe (SEE) and Central Asia (CA), with a stronger focus on three missions in SEE that were visited: the OSCE Presence in Albania (PiA), OSCE Mission to Serbia (MtSerbia) and OSCE Mission to Bosnia and Herzegovina (MtBiH).

The evaluation was conducted from April to December 2022 by an internal OIO evaluation team, consisting of a Senior Evaluator and a junior Professional Officer.

2.3 Evaluation approach and methodology

The evaluation is utilization-focused, using a combination of the following research and data analysis methods:

- **qualitative primary data collection:** semi-structured interviews with RFoM Office and field operation staff, and key stakeholders including representatives of government and civil society organizations, academia, media outlets and journalist associations, focus group discussions with journalists and, media outlet representatives, academia, representatives of government, civil society and international organizations, and field observations;
- **qualitative primary and secondary data review:** review of MC decisions, programmatic documents and reports, OSCE publications, decentralized evaluations of media freedom and media programmes commissioned by the OSCE Executive Structures, as well as recent evaluations of the media freedom and media-related programmes and strategies of other international organizations; and,
- **quantitative data:** RFoM's and FOs' budget reviews and data related to media freedom programmes and activities, international media freedom and media statistics, media freedom and media surveys conducted by third party organizations or commissioned by governments of participating States (e.g. Reporters Without Borders' Media Freedom Indexes, IREX research and statistics).

2.4 Data collection and analysis

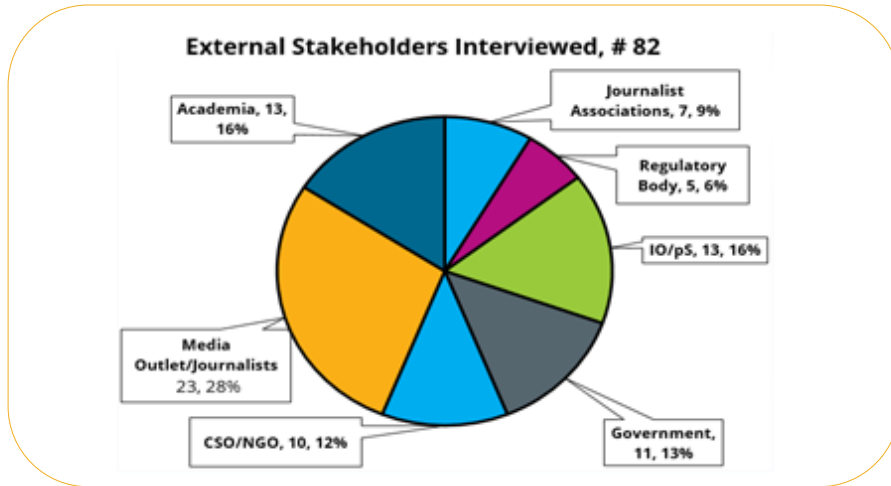
The evaluation used complementary data collection tools and triangulation of multiple lines of evidence to increase the objectivity of the evaluation findings. Findings were derived from at least three different types of sources (e.g. document and project reviews + semi-

structured interviews with OSCE staff + interviews with beneficiaries and external stakeholders).

Due to time, logistical and budget constraints, the evaluation team conducted field visits to three OSCE field operations in South East Europe: OSCE Presence in Albania (PiA), Mission to Serbia (MtSerbia), and Mission to Bosnia and Herzegovina (MtBiH). Despite situated in the same geographic region, the three missions presented a diverse sample in terms of mission mandates, size and composition of the media teams, programming resources (UB and ExB) allocated for media activities and projects, as well as the different historical, political, social and economic context of the host countries.

Table 1: Data Collection Methods

Data Collection Method	Description of activities
Review of OSCE Projects	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - RFoM ExB projects implemented between 2016 and 2022; - FOs' UB and ExB projects implemented between 2016 and 2022.
Literature Review	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - OSCE reports and publications on topics related to media freedom and safety of journalists; - Third party research and publications; - Evaluations of media freedom and media programmes or strategies of other regional or international organizations (e.g. UNESCO, Council of Europe, USAID);



- Decentralized evaluations of media freedom and media projects commissioned by OSCE's executive structures.

Key internal Informant Interviews – OSCE staff

#92 semi-structured interviews with RFoM Office staff, Heads and Deputy Heads of Mission, Missions' staff in 12 OSCE field operations.

Key External informant interviews

#82 Semi-structured interviews with external OSCE partners, media stakeholders, and beneficiaries of the OSCE programmes in SEE

Field Visits & Observations

Field visits to Albania, Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina; in-person meetings and interviews with OSCE mission staff, representatives of government, non-profit and civil society organizations.

Graph #1 presents the number and type of external actors interviewed (individually or in focus groups) during the evaluation team's (ET) field visits to Albania, Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina. *Graph 1: Number and percentage of external interviewees*

2.5 Evaluation criteria and evaluation questions

As per the approved Terms of Reference, the following questions guided the evaluation process:

Programming and project coherence and comparative advantage

- How coherent and/or complementary are the OSCE's media freedom priorities and media programmatic activities across the various executive structures?
- How are the OSCE's media freedom programmes and projects supporting the organization's comprehensive approach to security?
- To what extent are the RFoM's and FOs' media freedom programmes and initiatives co-ordinated with, or complementing those of other regional and international organizations?
- What is the OSCE's comparative advantage in implementing media freedom projects and initiatives?

Effectiveness of OSCE's media programmes and initiatives

- To what extent has the RFoM achieved its planned programmatic outcomes during the period under evaluation? How successful have been the FOs in implementing their media freedom priorities and in achieving planned project results?
- Have there been any unintended, positive or negative, outcomes of the OSCE's media freedom and safety of journalists work during the period under evaluation?
- What factors have facilitated or hindered the achievement of the RFoM's and FOs' programme objectives in a timely and/or economic manner?
- What management practices and/or innovative approaches have been used by the RFoM and the FOs to increase the efficient use of limited human and financial resources for the successful implementation of media freedom projects?

Gender equality & human rights mainstreaming

- To what extent have gender equality and human rights considerations been taken into account in the RFoM's and FOs' programme design, implementation, and reporting on results?

Sustainability of achieved results

- To what degree have the OSCE's media freedom programmes identified and promoted conditions necessary to sustain achieved results beyond the end of the programmatic activities?
- What lessons can be learned for the OSCE's future work on freedom of the media and freedom of expression?

2.6 Challenges and evaluation limitations

A number of challenges and limitations were encountered by the evaluation team and respective remedial actions were taken.

Table 2: Evaluation limitations and mitigation measures

Challenges not fully remedied	Mitigation strategies applied
Interlocutors not available due to summer vacations (SEE) or procedural requirements for arranging interviews in Central Asia.	For SEE, the evaluation team met with a sufficiently large sample of media stakeholders, partners and beneficiaries to confidently support the analysis and the evaluation findings. For Central Asia, the ET referenced only information received from RFoM's and missions' staff, supported with evidence from projects and official statements of participants in conferences organized by the OSCE.

Data availability and comparability:

Difficulties identifying media-specific budgets and spending when media freedom activities constitute part of a bigger project or programme portfolio.

The ET relied on project documentation provided by the field operations (mainly project proposals and self-evaluations), and on information received from mission staff. Budget information about FOs' media freedom activities was extracted to the extent possible from the OSCE corporate database (identifying the exact amount spent on media-related initiatives when these were part of larger programmes or project portfolios was not always possible).

Focus on RFoM's second UB objective and ExB projects only

As per the approved ToRs, the evaluation focused on the programmatic work of the RFoM, which falls mainly under its second UB objective and includes only ExB projects and initiatives. There have been no UB-funded FoM projects since 2016.

Political Sensitivities related to the current situation in the region, including the war in Ukraine.

Media freedom and freedom of expression are topics currently loaded with a lot of political sensitivity. Guided by the “do no harm” principle, the ET did not entertain discussions with partners and stakeholders on policies or politically sensitive topics and did not discuss these in the evaluation report. The evaluation is exclusively focused on the programmatic work of the RFoM and OSCE field operations.



3. Evaluation Findings: RFoM

The following chapter presents the evaluations findings in response to the main evaluation questions.

3.1 Programme Objectives, Budgets and Activities

Between 2016 and 2021, the work of the RFoM has been guided by two broad Unified Budget (UB) Objectives with related outcomes and outputs, as per the Table 3.

✓ **Finding 1:** The broadly formulated RFoM Objective 2 is seen by RFoM staff as both a strength and a challenge for the media freedom programmatic work in terms of longer-term planning and priority setting.

According to RFoM staff members, having broad objectives could be both a strength and weakness. On the one hand, the broadly formulated objectives allow sufficient flexibility for the Representative to adjust his or her work to the evolving media freedom situation, and to the changing needs of the participating States. On the other hand, they allow the RFoM to design projects and activities based on concrete requests from pS authorities. Programmatic activities under the second UB objective are mostly supporting individual participating States (e.g. review of specific legislations or media strategies), whereas the ExB projects are addressing the entire OSCE

region. The RFoM's ExB projects serve the overarching goal of building active citizenry through the media.

Table 3: RFoM: UB Programming Objectives and Outcomes

<p>OBJECTIVE 1: PROVIDE PARTICIPATING STATES WITH RAPID RESPONSE IN THE FORM OF INTERVENTIONS AND EARLY WARNING ON OCCURRENCES OR DEVELOPMENTS TO PREVENT AND LIMIT THREATS TO MEDIA FREEDOM, THE FREE FLOW OF INFORMATION, AND MEDIA PLURALISM IN THE OSCE AREA.</p>	<p>OBJECTIVE 2: PROMOTE OSCE MEDIA FREEDOM COMMITMENTS AND ASSIST PARTICIPATING STATES IN THEIR UNDERSTANDING AND COMPLIANCE, INCLUDING STRENGTHENING OF PLURALISM IN THE MEDIA.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Outcome 1.1: Participating States are constantly alert to developments which could endanger media freedom and media pluralism in a timely and effective manner. • Output 1.1.1: Media freedom violations are promptly addressed. • Outcome 1.2: Participating States are better informed about matters of compliance with the international standards and OSCE commitments on media freedom, including on the Internet. • Output 1.2.1: Legal and policy support is provided to participating States; international media freedom standards are constantly promoted. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Outcome 2.1: Participating States are provided with the necessary information, in the form of recommendations and guidelines, best practices and legal reviews supporting media freedom and pluralism on the internet and on other new technological platforms. • Output 2.1.1: International cross-cutting debate on the implications of regulation of media content on the Internet is enhanced. • Outcome 2.2: Governments, media, journalists and civil society develop their knowledge of journalism profession and media-related issues; improve their working relations and their understanding of each other's democratic functions. • Output 2.2.1: Development and strengthening of self-regulatory systems and professional codes of ethics are promoted.

Besides the regular annual regional media conferences that constitute 45% of the ExB budget for the five-year period, for the evaluators it was not always clear how the remaining projects and activities have been prioritized in the absence of a mid-term or longer strategic framework. The total amount budgeted for the 28 projects and activities implemented between 2016 and 2022 was EUR 3,058,266, however the total amount received from various donors was EUR 2,040,360, i.e. about 30% lower. The pledge deficit was partly

compensated by the lower expenditures due to COVID-related restrictions and respective adjustments to the planned activities (e.g., on-line meetings and reduced or no travel). Funds from a Repository Programme were also used when needed to offset funding deficits for some of the ExB projects.

✓ **Finding 2:** The RFoM annual UB budgets have seen only marginal increases in the non-staff costs since 2016, even though the media freedom challenges and needs of participating States have steadily increased.

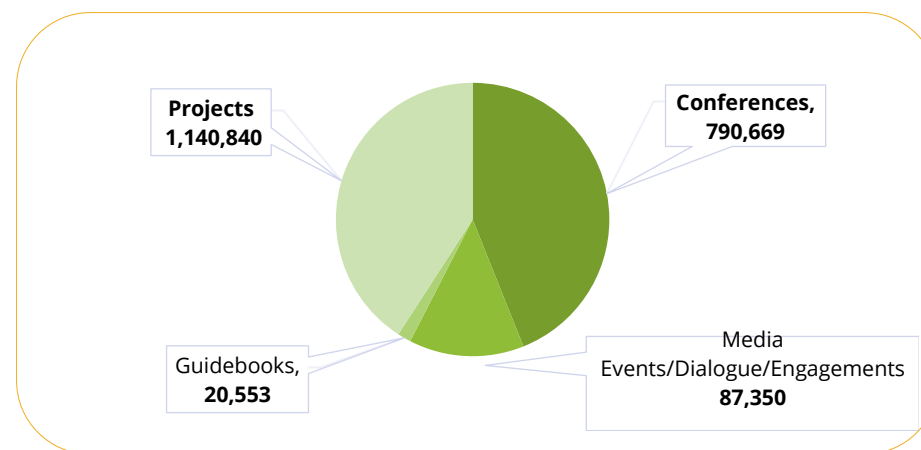
RFoM's Unified Budget (UB) was slightly increased in 2017 to EUR 1,608.800 from EUR 1,481.000 in 2016, and has seen only marginal increases afterwards despite the constant reiteration in every UB submission of growing media freedom challenges and needs of the pS to become compliant with the OSCE commitments on freedom of expression and free media, as well as the **“increased expectation towards international organizations and the RFoM, in particular, to provide opportunities for dialogue and help increase the understanding of this process on a regional and often global scale.”**¹⁸

During the period covered by this evaluation, the average annual RFoM budget has been around EUR 1.5 million, with EUR 270, 000 of it allocated to non-staff costs, with exceptional COVID-related circumstances in 2020, due to which the actual expenditure of non-staff related funds was reduced to EUR 63,400. Besides for monitoring of the media freedom situation in all 57 pS, which constitutes the

backbone of the RFoM's work, the Unified Budget of the RFoM has been mostly used for official country visits by the Representatives, for attendance of relevant stakeholder meetings and for provision of legal reviews as part of the RFoM's assistance to pS, and to a minor extent for networking and awareness raising activities.

There have been no UB-funded projects in the period 2016-2021, which also indicates that the programming activities largely depend on the availability of extra budgetary funds (ExB).

Graph 2: RFoM ExB funded Projects and Activities (2016-2022)



Between 2016 and 2021, the RFoM has implemented a total of 28 ExB-funded activities and projects, including 14 Media conferences, 4 media freedom events (high-level meetings, dialogues and engagements), 9 projects and one guidebook on safety of journalists. As per its Terms of Reference, this evaluation focused mainly on the ExB projects of the RFoM (Graph #2).

While the outcomes and outputs under UB Objective 2 have not been changed over the past five years, the annual RFoM Programme Outlines (POs), indicate some evolution in the programming priorities since 2016. For example, between 2016 and 2018, the RFoM's priorities included, as **equally important**, four thematic areas: "Review and adaptation of regulations and the regulatory role of the public authorities"; "Governments' interactions and engagement with citizens within a new digital media landscape"; "Emergence of hate speech, propaganda and disinformation on the internet"; and, "Compliance of participating States with the OSCE commitments in the new digital information era".¹⁹

Since 2019 to date, pursuant to the approval of the Ministerial Council Decision on Safety of Journalists (MC.DEC/3/18)²⁰, the RFoM identified "*Safety of journalists and combating impunity for killings attacks and threats*"²¹ as its **first priority**. The **second priority** was identified as "*Protection of media freedom in the new security context*", however in 2021, it was replaced with "*Legal safety of journalists/ strengthening the rule of law for safety of journalists*". The **third priority** of the RFoM as of 2021 was defined as "*Protection of freedom of expression and media freedom in the new digital context*", while tackling the issues of "*Disinformation without impending on media freedom through a holistic approach*" became its **fourth priority**.

Based on preliminary scoping discussions with RFoM staff, the evaluation focused on the 9 ExB projects implemented since 2016 under the second UB objective.

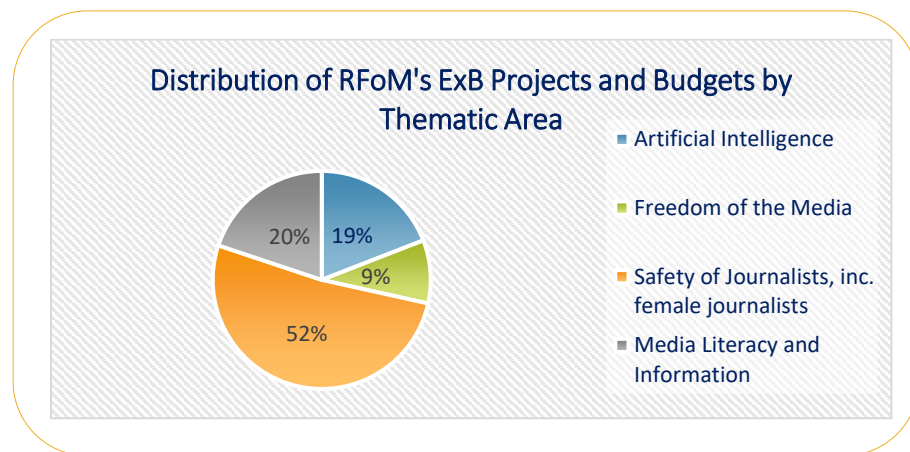
1. Access to Information (2016) (EUR 38,854)
2. Freedom of the Media in the Western Balkans (2017-2018) (EUR 39,857)
3. Cyprus Media Dialogue (2018) (EUR 78,812)
4. Self-Regulation Education in Mongolia (2019) (EUR 6,677)
5. Impact of AI on Freedom of Expression (2019-2022) (EUR 338,127)
6. Safety of Female Journalists Online (SOFJO Phase I) (2015-2020) (EUR 448,485)
7. Cyprus Media Dialogue (Exchange) (2020) (EUR 26,043)
8. Safety of Female Journalists Online (SOFJO Phase II) (2021-2022) (EUR 116,478)
9. Strengthening Freedom of the Media and Access to Pluralistic Information in Central Asia, South Caucasus, and South East Europe Regions (2021-2022) (EUR 126,218).

The self-evaluations of these projects indicate alignment with RFoM's Unified Budget Programme **Objective 2**. While the period covered by the evaluation was initially determined as 2016-2021, the review of the ExB projects included also those initiated in 2021 and planned for completion in 2022.²² For the purpose of the analysis, these projects are grouped under four thematic areas (Graph #3).

- 1) **Safety of Journalists**, including Safety of Female Journalists (51% of the total ExB project budget)
- 2) **Media Literacy and Information** (20% of the ExB project budget);
- 3) **Artificial Intelligence** (19% of the ExB programming budget), and

4) Freedom of the Media (9% of the ExB programming budget)

Graph 3: RFoM Programming Themes and Budget Allocations



RFoM staff members indicated that project topics are selected based on information obtained from monitoring the situation in the 57 pS, on priorities of the Representative (of the day), or on identified information gaps in the OSCE region. For instance, the activities under the second phase of the Safety of Female Journalists Online (SOFJO) project (2021-2022) and the practical examples provided in the “#SOFJO Resource Guide: ‘Walk the talk: What key actors can do for the safety of female journalists online’”²³ have been designed based on the findings of an extensive needs assessment study conducted as part of Phase one of the project. Other projects and media products have been developed in response to concrete requests from pS, such as translation of the Artificial Intelligence Handbook “*Spotlight on Artificial Intelligence: A Policy Manual*”²⁴ into Serbian following a special

request from the Serbian Ministry of Culture, and related discussions at an RFoM conference in Serbia.

While the above projects can be described as being “responsive” to identified needs and/or specific requests, there are also some examples of pro-active approaches and initiatives undertaken by the RFoM. One of these is the initiated translation of key OSCE media freedom publications and guidelines into the local languages of pS. The translated publications have been promoted during country visits of the Representative, as well as distributed to potential users during media freedom events, such as OSCE-organized conferences or workshops.

✓ **Finding 3:** While the scope and complexity of the RFoM work have significantly increased over the past five years, the available resources have remained unchanged.

Interviewed RFoM staff reiterated the strong commitments to support media freedom and freedom of expression in the OSCE pS through their programmatic activities. Some interviewees, however, indicated challenges with the “fixed” objectives and priorities, and the “ad-hoc” measures that sometimes need to be taken. They pointed to the need for more team discussions and brainstorming sessions to explore new approaches and more efficient ways to address the fast-evolving media freedom challenges. RFoM programming officers are cognizant of the increasing complexity and interrelatedness of media freedom and freedom of expression, and of the need for more comprehensive solutions and resource mobilization to address the growing needs of

pS amidst budget restrictions and increasing dependence on ExB donor funding.

Since 2016, the Office of the RFoM has reiterated in every UB Proposal that “the current human and financial resources are insufficient to cope with the increasing workload and the expectations of participating States” requesting two additional staff positions. Despite these requests, the number of the international contracted (7) and seconded (6) positions has remained the same for the past five years. In 2020, The Office received one additional “General Services” position for local staff. Interviewed RFoM staff indicated that their responsibilities and workload have considerably increased, to a point when delivering on all commitments may not be feasible or sustainable in the long term. Frequent staff turnover, interim periods with positions not being filled, and the steep learning curves for new employees have caused at times frustration among RFoM’s staff.

3.2 Programming Results and Effectiveness

EQ. To what extent has the RFoM Office achieved its planned project outcomes and outputs during the period under evaluation?

✓ **Finding 4: The RFoM Office has implemented all ExB projects as planned, even during the COVID pandemic with some adjustments to the delivery modalities.**

All RFoM ExB projects support its second UB objective, namely: **“Promote OSCE media freedom commitments and assist participating States in their understanding and compliance,**

including strengthening of pluralism in the media.” and commit to achieving expected outcomes and outputs (see textbox). The media freedom issues addressed by the RFoM’s programmatic work over the past five years have considerably expanded. Some of the newly emerging media freedom-related challenges, such as ensuring the safety of female journalists online, the impact of artificial intelligence on media freedom, and the need for enhanced media literacy, have become the focus of the most recent ExB projects.

Outcome 2.1: Participating States are provided with the necessary information, in the form of recommendations and guidelines, best practices and legal reviews supporting media freedom and pluralism on the Internet and on other new technological platforms.

Output 2.1.1: International crosscutting debate on the implications of regulation of media content on the Internet is enhanced.

Outcome 2.2: Governments, media, journalists and civil society develop their knowledge of journalism profession and media-related issues; improve their working relations and their understanding of each other's democratic functions.

Output 2.2.1: Development and strengthening of self-regulatory systems and professional codes of ethics are promoted

In the self-assessment reports, however, all projects implemented in the period 2016-2021, have reported mainly on successfully implemented activities rather than on actual outcomes achieved, or difference made.

✓ **Finding 5:** Reporting on actual outcomes and impact beyond implemented activities has been a challenge and is absent for most projects implemented between 2016 and 2021.

Some project self-evaluation and final reports, indicated the reasons for a lack of reporting on actual outcomes and impact, such as:

- **Lack of sufficient time elapsed from project completion to demonstrate impact;**
- **Absence of “project requirements to include an evaluation at the impact level”;**
- **A “challenge to find cost-efficient ways to measure verifiable impact attributed to RFoM’s work in all 57 OSCE participating States.”²⁵**

Another challenge, highlighted in the “SOFJO I” Self-Evaluation Report referenced the absence of a results-based planning model, indicating that the RFoM has been using implementation-based approaches and monitoring methods focusing on activities only. A “lesson-learned” in the same report, recognized the need for the RFoM Office “to include evaluation criteria and assessing indicators from the very early planning phase to enable stronger data collection and assessment of the project activities’ impact.”²⁶

The broadly formulated UB objective may have added to the performance reporting challenge. The evaluation also noted that the “outcomes” under objective #2, are formulated as “outputs”, and the “outputs” sound as “outcomes”.

In the absence of key performance indicators for the various RFoM project activities under the second UB objective, it was also not possible for this evaluation to roll up claimed outputs under each project to demonstrate achievement of the higher-level UB outcomes, nor to assess the overall effectiveness of RFoM’s programmatic work.

Some projects have not made a clear distinction between outputs and outcomes, both in their formulation under the project objectives, and in the reporting on results. For example, for the SOFJO I project (2015-2020), the project outcomes are formulated as objectives or activities (see excerpt below).

PROJECT OBJECTIVE	Result marker:
To improve awareness and develop strategies at state level, at editor’s level, as well as the individual level, to deal with online threats and harassment of female journalist.	Highly Satisfactory
PROJECT OUTCOME 1	
Through a multi-stakeholder approach, assist pS with knowledge and feasible action points in order to improve the online environment for all, specifically focusing on combating the climate of abuse and harassment targeting female journalists and media workers.	Highly Satisfactory
PROJECT OUTCOME 2	
Developing and publishing RFoM recommendations on sustainable solutions which can be implemented by a multitude of actors within the OSCE, to ensure the safety of female journalists and promote access to public conversations through a safe use of media offline and online.	Highly Satisfactory

The evaluation found, however, that in the projects designed after 2019, the RFoM has started applying results-based planning approaches, using progress markers, performance indicators and a theory of change in the project proposals. This is evident in the following projects: “Spotlight on the impact of artificial intelligence on freedom of expression (SAIFE)” (2019-2022); SOFJO Phase II (2021-2022); and, “Strengthening Freedom of the Media and Access to Pluralistic Information in Central Asia, South Caucasus, and South East Europe Regions” (2021-2022). Some of the self-evaluation reports for the Media Conferences also follow the results-based reporting guidelines. For the example the report on the “7th South East Europe Media Conference” has formulated outcomes, describing the expected changes that the conference would enable, e.g. *“Raised awareness of the current status of freedom of the media in the region”*. However, there is no further information available about the actual impact of the conference in the region beyond the raised awareness of the conference attendees.

The RFoM has not commissioned any decentralized evaluations of its projects since 2016.

In terms of communicating its achievements and promoting its products and new publications on media freedom and freedom of expression, it was noted that the RFoM does not have a Communication Strategy. While there are official social media accounts for the Representative, and staff members can feed in information on ongoing activities and projects, interviewed RFoM staff

reiterated the need for clear communication guidelines, especially for new employees.

✓ **Finding 6:** The RFoM regional media conferences in SEE were found to be particularly useful, allowing participants from several missions to share their experience and best practices, and collect creative ideas for future media freedom and media-related projects and initiatives in their respective countries.

Media programme officers in the SEE field underlined the importance of the RFoM-organized regional conferences for sharing missions’ experience and best practices in supporting the creation of media freedom strategies, legal frameworks and provisions for safety of journalists in the participating States. In the period 2016-2021, the RFoM, in close consultation and with the support of the respective field missions organized 4 media conferences in SEE on the following topics: “Journalism in Times of Crises” (Tirana, 2021); “The new Frontline: Working together to Foster Media Freedom” (Online, 2020); “Media Freedom and Holistic Approaches to Improve the Media Landscape (Struga, 2018); “Media development and Sustainability” (Sarajevo, 2019).

Interviewed journalists and media actors who had attended some of these conferences pointed to their importance as forums that bring together representatives from government, academia, civil society, industry, media outlets, judiciary, journalist associations and others in a safe space to discuss and seek solutions to issues affecting all of them, albeit in different ways.

Interviewed journalists denoted another added benefit of the conferences hosted by the RFoM, namely the opportunity provided for media actors to directly communicate and network with colleagues in the region. Another benefit of the conferences highlighted by participants was the awareness and critical knowledge they receive on evolving regional media freedom and freedom of expression challenges and potential strategies to address these. Some journalists shared a suggestion for these conferences to allocate more time for journalists to share their practical experience, and less time for academic research and presentations.

✓ **Finding 7:** In Central Asia, the media conferences were described as effective and well-attended forums, bringing together various media actors in a safe professional environment to discuss and share media development, capacity building and freedom of expression challenges and ideas.

In the period 2016-2022, the RFoM Office, in close consultation and supported by the OSCE field operations in CA, conducted 5 conferences on topics tailored to the media needs and challenges in the region, namely: “Promoting Public Value of the Media in Central Asia” (Tashkent, 2021); “Strengthening Media Diversity and Pluralism in CA” (Online, 2020); “Media Freedom and Pluralism in Times of Digital Transformation” (Bishkek, 2019); “The Future of Journalism” (Astana, 2018); “Open Journalism in CA” (Tashkent, 2017). These conferences and events are covering identified media challenges and important topics for the region, thus providing opportunities for media providers, CSOs and journalists to share practical experience,

establish contacts based on common interests, develop joint projects and discuss co-funding and resource mobilization opportunities.

3.3 Sustainability of RFoM’s Media Freedom Project Results

✓ **Finding 8:** All RFoM ExB projects have included sustainability considerations in the design phases, however, the actual sustainability of initiated good practices or achieved results could not be assessed by this evaluation due to a lack of sufficiently elapsed time or unavailability of outcome indicators.

Following the standard OSCE project proposal templates, all media freedom-related projects designed by the RFoM have a section on the sustainability of planned and expected results. In some cases, the planning for sustainability of results has been quite elaborate, at least theoretically. In other cases, projects have been designed as a second phase of an initiative, i.e. sustaining, building upon or scaling up results achieved in previous phases (e.g. SOFJO Phase I & II, “Cyprus Media Dialogue” – Phase One and Phase Two). Despite the fact that all projects have included conditions or considerations for ensuring the sustainability of results, most self-evaluation reports explain the lack of evidence for sustainability with the lack of sufficient elapsed time after the actual completion of the project. Only a few projects have indicated what conditions have been created to ensure sustainability of an initiative or of achieved results. Other reports claimed that sustainability would depend on the readiness or

willingness of beneficiaries to take ownership of the project achievements and to continue upscaling them.

The extent to which RFoM's projects have achieved sustainable results and outcomes, beyond implemented activities, could not be assessed by this evaluation, either because of the recent completion of some projects, the ongoing implementation of others, or the lack of outcome indicators. The actual sustainability of achieved results, or the longevity of good practices and initiatives instigated by RFoM's work, can, however, be assessed through decentralized evaluations of individual projects, especially of those with significant budget commitments.



4. Evaluation Findings: Field Operations

4.1 Media Priorities and Activities of OSCE Field Operations

✓ **Finding 9:** Besides some common features, the media landscape and media challenges experienced by OSCE participating States differ across South East Europe and Central Asia, and even among countries in the same region. Each OSCE field operation has been adapting its media programmatic work to the specific host countries' context and government priorities.

4.1.1 OSCE Media Priorities in South East Europe (SEE)

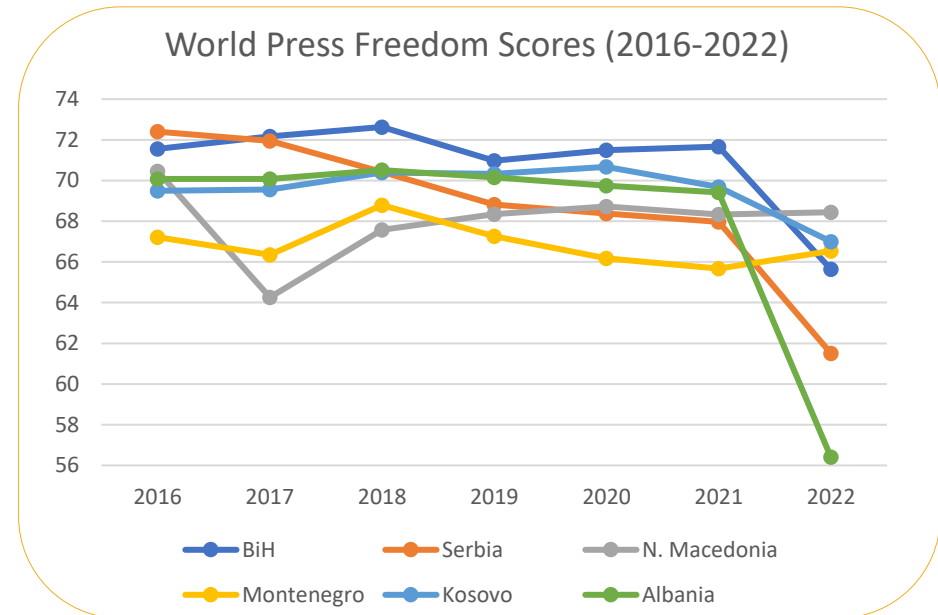
The evaluation reviewed the programmatic work of OSCE field missions and their contribution to FoM and FoE in the context of current media challenges and trends in SEE, namely:

- A “shrinking space”²⁷ for the media;
- Poorly implemented media laws and media strategies;
- Political and economic pressures on media;
- Criminal defamation and ongoing threats to journalists;
- Decline of ethical standards in journalism;
- Increased online harassment of women journalists;
- Low level of media literacy among the public.

The combined effects of these factors have exposed the freedom of

expression to increased vulnerability.²⁸ The following graph reflects the World Press Freedom Scores for the six countries in South East Europe with OSCE field operations.

Graph 4: Media Freedom Trends in SEE: based on JSF: [Index](#) | [RSF](#)



For the purpose of the analysis, the FoM projects implemented by the 6 OSCE field operations in the region (PiA, MtSerbia, MtBiH, MtSkopje, MtKosovo, MtSerbia, and MtMontenegro) in the period 2016-2022 were grouped under the following thematic areas:

- 1) **Capacity Building:** 18 projects, 29% of the total projects budget;
- 2) **Media Literacy** (including Digital): 19 projects; 24% of the total projects budget;

- 3) **Media Development:** 11 projects; 13% of the total projects budget;
- 4) **Policy Support** (including media reform, media legislation, legal frameworks): 8 projects; 14% of the total projects budget;
- 5) **Strengthening of Public Broadcasters:** 7 projects; 17% of the total projects budget;
- 6) **Elections/Gender-related Media:** 2 projects; 24% of the total projects budget.

In terms of budget allocations, the capacity building and media literacy projects are prevailing with budgets that are twice bigger than those of the other thematic areas (Graph 5).

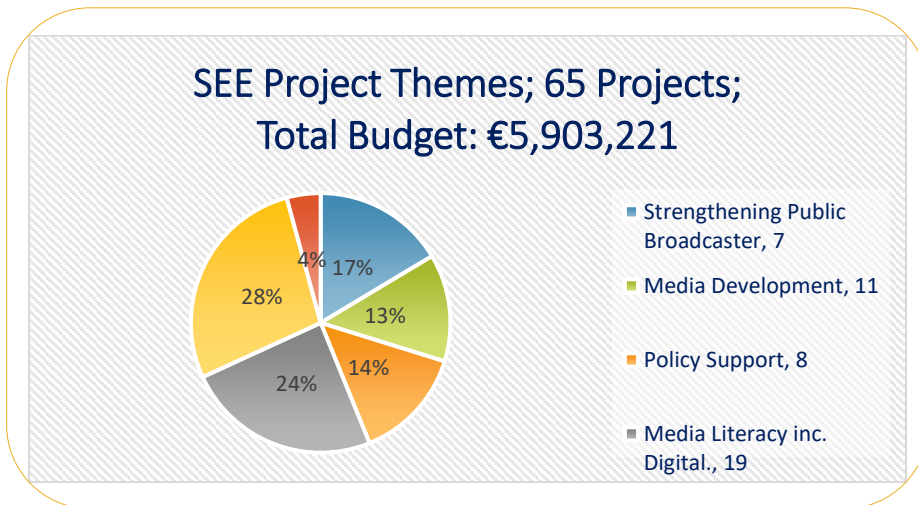
With regard to project design and focus, OSCE missions are consulting on an ongoing basis and working closely with local media stakeholders, including governments, public and private media providers and journalist associations to identify their specific needs. Missions are responding to these needs through various means such as but not limited to supporting national governments to upgrade their media legislation and media strategies, working with public/state broadcasters to develop professional standards, promoting media literacy, and monitoring the compliance of national and local legal frameworks for media freedom and freedom of expression with OSCE principles and commitments.

The most common media needs addressed by the OSCE field operations in the region include: expanding media and information literacy education; enhancing public awareness of the media in order

to safeguard the profession and create a safer environment for journalists; working within the local contexts to strengthen existing and emerging capacities of media professionals, including technical skills; and building coalitions among experienced journalists to facilitate the exchange of best practices and improve networking.

For example, the OSCE **Presence in Albania (PiA)** has developed a rolling three-year Media Plan (2019-2022) for the Media Development Unit (MDU) that addresses the most pressing needs in the country. While recognizing that the Albanian media landscape has “significantly changed during recent years”, the Plan reflects the outstanding media challenges, including that Albania has dropped 7 places on the media freedom scale of the Press Freedom Index in 2019 (from 75th to 82nd place), with an additional drop of 2 places in the 2020 rankings.²⁹ A general assessment of the media scene in Albania concluded that the worsening of the situation was a consequence of: “the lack of proper legislation; violations of the labour law; blackmailing; the small size of the media market, and its limited possibilities of the public broadcaster”.³⁰

Graph 5: Programming Priorities and Budget Allocations



Taking stock of this situation, the Presence’s rolling 3-year Media Development Plan is addressing the most pressing media issues in the country, targeting three areas: 1) **Media Freedom** (including monitoring and reporting cases of threatened journalists, supporting and advising on relevant legislation; promoting media professionalism and ethics; and, introducing new learning opportunities and courses into journalism curricula; 2) **Public Service Media** (working with the Albanian public broadcaster (RTSH); promoting quality journalism; and, 3) **Media Community** (focus on reinforcing initiatives targeting self-regulation in online media).

In **Bosnia and Herzegovina**, interviewed academia representatives elaborated on the “shrinking space for media freedom” and underlined the essential role played by the OSCE in countering the negative trends affecting the media situation in the country. The soft-

diplomacy work of the OSCE Mission in Bosnia and Herzegovina (MtBiH), its inclusive approach to all media stakeholders, involving government, judiciary, police, civil society representatives and journalists was highlighted as particularly important for improving the media landscape in the country.

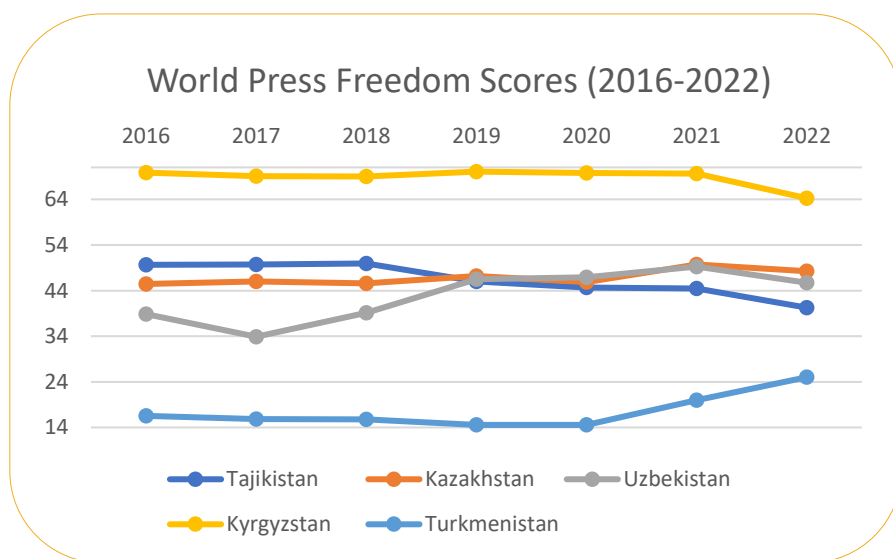
In **Serbia**, all independent media are in need of emergency technical assistance and heavily rely on grants just to carry out their daily operations. Interviewed media stakeholders in Belgrade and Novi Sad indicated that the sustainability of the media outlets is an area where international assistance is vital. With the media advertising system being under strict control of political and economic powers, foreign support and co-financing of media projects and initiatives to ensure the sustainability of the media outlets is of paramount importance.

In this context, the main objective of the Media Department³¹ of MtSerbia is “To support the development of a media system by providing citizens with quality public interest content and a platform for democratic debate.”³² Under this objective, the Mission has supported the implementation of Serbia’s Media Strategy, Action Plan and relevant legislation frameworks, and has contributed to strengthening the capacities of state authorities and media associations. Interviewed government representatives, media practitioners and journalists praised the work of the OSCE and the Mission to Serbia as highly relevant to the needs of the media sector in the country.

In all three field operations, the evaluation team witnessed the important role played by the Heads of Mission, their ongoing engagement with government officials and active support for the missions' media related activities.

4.1.2 OSCE Media Priorities in Central Asia

Graph 6: Media Freedom Trends in CA: based on JSF: [Index](#) | [RSF](#)



While some countries in Central Asia have made progress in developing and maintaining media pluralism after gaining independence, others have been slower in implementing media laws and regulations. According to the Media Sustainability Index³³ and IREX publications, recent trends and media freedom and freedom of expression challenges in the region are to a great extent due to factors such as:

- **Shrinking space for civil society;**
- **Weak co-ordination and partnerships (or lack of such) among various media, civil society and government representatives;**
- **Use of restrictive laws and politically motivated legal prosecutions to suppress freedom of expression and silence dissent;**
- **Thriving self-censorship;**
- **Shutdowns of critical media outlets and frequent internet disconnects;**
- **Spread of disinformation and propaganda.**

Currently, these challenges are further exacerbated by regional security problems, such as the war in Ukraine, the Taliban takeover, border tensions with Afghanistan, etc.

The evaluation team interviewed online OSCE staff in the five OSCE field operations in Central Asia, namely in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan.

Despite overall commonalities, the media landscape differs across these Central Asian countries. After gaining their independence from the former Soviet Union, these States have reached different levels of economic and social development, influenced to a great extent by the political priorities of their respective governments. The state of the media and media development is also specific for each country, which determines the focus and type of OSCE media activities there. In addition, the mission mandates, projects and activities in this region

are subject to annual approvals by the respective country's Ministry of Foreign Affairs. This renders the media work of OSCE missions mostly responsive to the priorities of the host governments.

A 2016 Research Survey on the *"Impact of the global financial crisis on the independent mass media in the Republic of Tajikistan"* commissioned by the Programme Office in Dushanbe (POiD) summarized some of the reasons for the "unprecedented decline of activities within the media community in Tajikistan". These include:

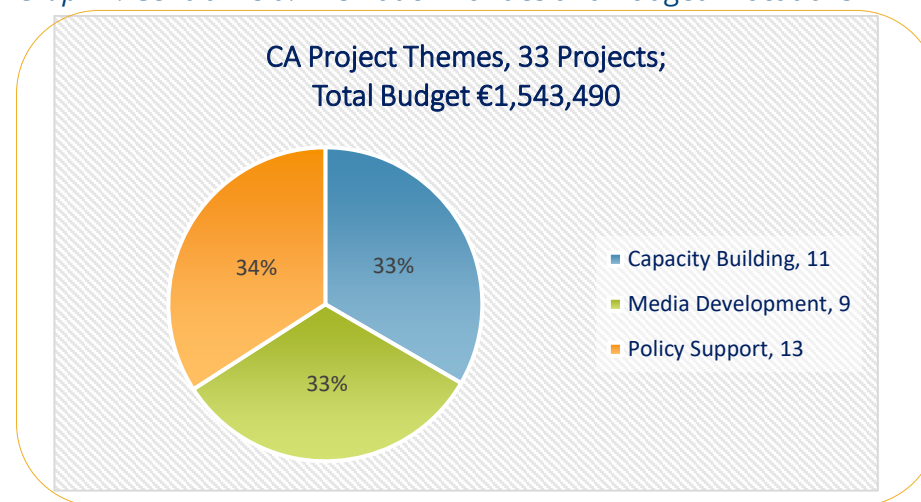
- Pressure on independent mass media and journalists by public officials;
- Lack of equal conditions and fair competition between state and private media;
- Lack of efficient systems for dissemination of periodicals;
- Decreasing incomes for traditional media in favour of Internet and social networks;

Besides challenges, the media landscape in these countries also presented opportunities for the OSCE and its field operations to collaborate with, and support Central Asian governments and civil society organizations with media capacity building, combatting disinformation, and mainstreaming gender in media projects and initiatives. The media projects of the OSCE field operations in Central Asia, implemented between 2016 and 2022, can roughly be grouped under three main thematic areas as per Graph 7.³⁴

- 1) **Media Policy Support** (including media reform, media legislation, legal frameworks): 13 projects; 34% of the media budget allocations;
- 2) **Media Development/Support:** 9 projects; 33% of the media budget allocations; and
- 3) **Capacity Building:** 11 projects; 33% of the media budget allocations.

The OSCE UB and ExB funded media activities in the region include: working with local journalists, media outlets, government and civil society experts; supporting efforts to reform media legislation; conducting training courses for journalists on a variety of topics, such as economic and environmental security, human rights, ethics in covering terrorism in the media, investigative journalism and the use of new technological tools.

Graph 7: Central Asia: Thematic Priorities and Budget Allocations



For instance, the **Project Coordinator in Uzbekistan (PCUz)** has implemented a number of UB-funded media-specific projects to support the development of national mass media legislation, such as the 2021 project “Support to Mass Media in Uzbekistan” and “Development of the Internet Radio as part of the Internet Media Portal on Countering Terrorism” – a project implemented over three years (2018/2019/2020). Through projects such as “Engaging the Media to Improve Journalistic Fact-Checking (2020), and “Preventing violent extremism and radicalization that lead to terrorism (VERLTY)”, the PCUz has been contributing to training and professional development of journalists and bloggers in Uzbekistan.

Assisting the Republic of Tajikistan in “*strengthening democratic institutions and freedom of the media*” is part of the mandate of the **OSCE Programme Office in Dushanbe (POiD)**. Within this mandate, the Office has developed concrete media freedom programme objectives and outcomes for each year since 2018. These are focused on: improving the media policies and legal frameworks in the country in line with OSCE’s commitments in the field of freedom of expression and freedom of the media (2018 & 2019); enhancing the capacity of the government and civil society to introduce improved media legislation and high-quality university journalism curricula (2020 & 2021); supporting the host country in implementing media freedom and access to information parts in the draft Human Rights Protection Strategy (2022).

The **OSCE Centre in Ashgabat** (CiAshgabat) is assisting the modernization of Turkmenistan’s media legislation and the reform of

journalist education. Activities have included training for journalism students and instructors on modern reporting techniques and work standards in traditional print, broadcast and online media.

In Kyrgyzstan, the media-related projects of the **OSCE Programme Office in Bishkek** fall under the thematic category of “Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms”. A 2021 project entitled “Assistance in Promotion of Inter-Confessional Dialogue and Tolerance”, in addition to promoting an inter-confessional dialogue, includes activities aimed at strengthening the partnership among national media outlets and building the capacity of regional multi-media centres. Jointly with other international and non-governmental organizations, the Office also conducts on an annual basis National Partnership Media Conferences, to discuss challenges faced by journalists in Kyrgyzstan. Further initiatives are focused on preventing disinformation and hate speech.

Media freedom activities of the **OSCE Programme Office in Astana** (POiA) are implemented under the first OSCE Dimension, i.e. the politico-military dimension of security. The Office has been working with local NGOs, journalist networks and media outlets, organizing training courses for journalists on a variety of topics such as economic and environmental security, human rights, ethics of covering terrorism in the media, and safety of journalists when covering peaceful assemblies. Efforts have been made to create dialogue platforms and encourage wide public discussions on Kazakhstan’s media legislation.



4.2 Results of FOs' Media Work

This section focuses on the media programming results of the three OSCE missions visited by the evaluation team (PiA, MtSerbia and MtBiH). Evidence for the achievement of these results was derived from project documents and interviews with mission staff, but also corroborated by implementing partners and beneficiaries. Brief information is also provided about media-related accomplishments of the other three missions in SEE based on project documents and on-line interviews with mission staff.

EQ.: How successful have OSCE field operations been in implementing their media freedom priorities and in achieving planned project results?

The size and number the media programmes, projects and initiatives implemented by OSCE field operations vary across the two regions and across countries within each region, mainly due to the different capacity of the missions and the needs of their host countries. Interviewed staff in most missions indicated that the increasing media challenges and needs of journalists and media providers in the participating States often exceed the missions' capacity to effectively address all pressing issues. In addition to increasing their flexibility and adaptability to the changing medial landscape, some missions have developed mid-term strategic plans prioritizing the media issues to be addressed based on available resources.

✓ **Finding 10:** The media development and freedom of expression projects and activities of OSCE's missions in SEE and CA have been implemented as planned, with some activities being amended or postponed due to the COVID pandemic.

4.2.1 Spotlight on SEE

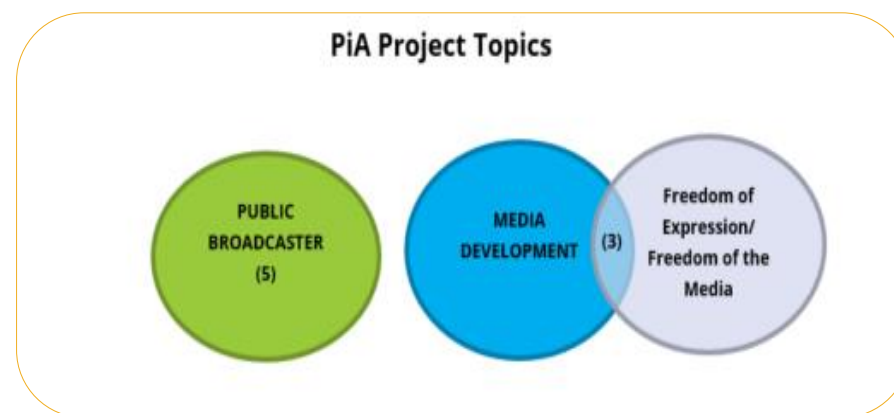
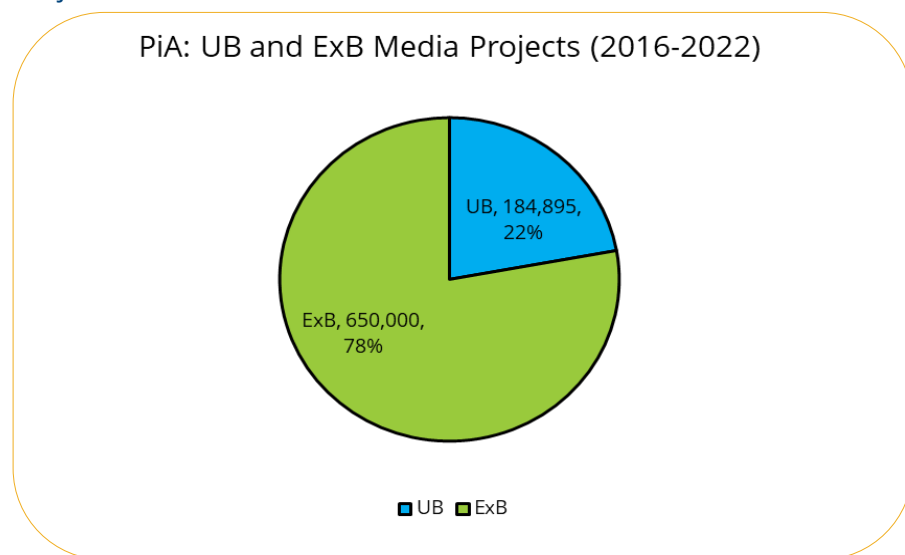
Interviewed local media stakeholders, government and CSO representatives, media providers, regulators and journalists in Albania, Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina reiterated the important role of the OSCE FoM and FoE work and its contribution to positive changes in the media landscape of these countries. The provision of legal advice, the promotion of media legislation, and the capacity building support to local public and private media providers were cited as particularly important OSCE contributions. The evaluation team noted that missions are implementing their media-related projects in an environment characterized by constantly emerging and growing media freedom and freedom of expression challenges, making OSCE's efforts even more important and valued.

OSCE Presence in Albania

During the period 2016-2022, the OSCE Presence in Albania (PiA) implemented seven UB-funded media freedom projects for a total of EUR 184,805, and one major ExB project (2019-2021) focused on Strengthening the Public Broadcaster and School of Journalism in Albania (EUR 650,00). These projects covered three main thematic areas: 1) Support for the public broadcaster of Albania; 2) Media Development; and 3) Freedom of Expressions/Freedom of the Media

All projects have been completed as planned. Project partners and beneficiaries praised the PiA for its contributions to enhancing the capacity and the modernization of the Public Broadcaster, as well as for supporting the work of media regulators, local civil society organizations and private media providers. In line with the whole-of-mission approach, the small media team of the Presence has closely collaborated with the Legal Team and ODIHR. One of the successful products of this cross-departmental collaboration has been the issuance of a Manual of Guidelines for reporting on elections, developed specifically for the private media providers.

Graph 8: Presence in Albania: UB and ExB Allocations for Media Projects



The PiA Head of Mission described the small media team as a **“magnifier of activities”** for its competence and persistence with the implementation of a large number of media freedom initiatives. The “Youth Trail Programme” is among the outstanding initiatives and a flagship project of the Media Team, bringing together young journalists from the region to discuss purpose-driven topics on youth and media development, and to network. One of the results was the establishment of the Tirana Media Platform for young journalists.

The PiA’s support for investigative journalism has yielded great results and has increased not only the visibility of the Presence but has also encouraged young investigative journalists to continue with doing challenging but highly important work. The initiative for launching a competition for best investigative articles started 2019. Since then, the Presence has been awarding every year up to three investigative journalists for their articles. Interviewed award recipients underscored the importance of having received an OSCE

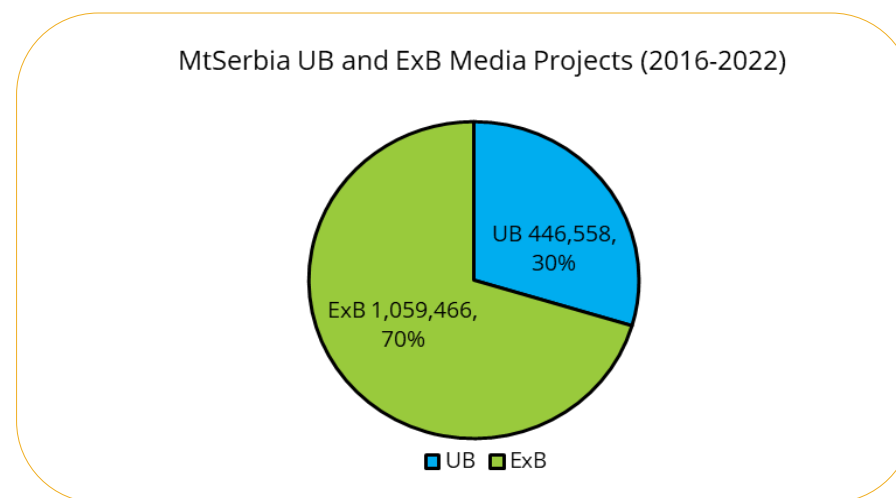
recognition, which has triggered increased public attention and visibility of the cases revealed by their work.

The active collaboration of PiA with the Journalism Department of the Tirana University and support for updating the journalism curriculum were highlighted as an important contribution to the new cohort of young journalist, being better prepared for the challenging media environment. The international study visits for Albanian journalism students to universities in Marseille and Brussels were found to be particularly effective in promoting the journalist career in an increasingly challenging professional environment.

OSCE Mission to Serbia

One of the main UB objectives of the Media Department of MtSerbia is “To support the development of a media system providing citizens with quality public interest content and a platform for democratic debate”. Under this objective, the Mission is pursuing four outcomes: 1) Implementation of a Media Strategy and Action Plan; 2) Improved environment for exercising media freedom and freedom of expression; and 3) Support for public debate in a digital environment and 4) Contribution to professional journalism and improved media literacy.

Graph 9: MtSerbia: Media Budget Allocations 2016-2022.



Focussing on these outcomes, over the period 2016-2022, the Media Department has implemented 22 UB-funded media projects and five major ExB projects for over 1 Million Euro. These projects and related initiatives have contributed to improvements in Serbia’s media legislation, to strengthening the media integrity and ensuring the safety of journalists, as well as to enabling a diverse and accountable journalism in a digital environment. All interviewed interlocutors emphasized the importance of the Mission’s contribution to Serbia’s 2020-2025 Media Strategy.

A 2021 Decentralized Evaluation of the ExB project “Support to Transparent and Inclusive Development of New Media Strategy 2018-2021” assessed the OSCE contribution to the design and implementation of Serbia’s “*first comprehensive*” Media Strategy and

Action Plan.³⁵ MtSerbia had engaged media experts to analyze topics raised for the first time in Serbia, such as the potential use of artificial intelligence, adjustment of media content for persons with disabilities, provision of media in the languages of national minorities, etc. The Media Department of the Mission was commended for its convening power and ability to bring together all stakeholders in the process of designing and approving the Media Strategy.

The Mission's contribution to a healthy and productive dialogue within the Permanent Working Group for Journalist Safety and the development of a Code of Conduct and Action Plan for the Working Groups, were also brought to the attention of the evaluation team. Based on this Action Plan, a SOS Help Line was established for journalists, and the OSCE funded a pool of attorneys to support journalists in need.

Direct feedback from media stakeholders in Serbia attested to some major accomplishments by the Mission, such as but not limited to:

- **Raising the topic of journalist safety in the public discourse, and triggering institutional changes to address safety issues;**
- **Working with the Prosecutor's Office and the Police, and initiating the appointment of state prosecutors and police officers as contact points in case of attacks on journalists;**
- **Triggered institutional changes related to address the safety of journalists; and**

- **Created a space for open dialogue, thanks to which CSOs and media stakeholders can be heard and seen as resourceful actors in the media sector.**

MtSerbia's Media Department has also implemented multiple media literacy initiatives, including the provision of programmatic and technical support to the Novi Sad University and the Novi Sad School of Journalism through updates to their media programmes.

OSCE Mission to Bosnia and Herzegovina

A field visit to Sarajevo, provided an opportunity for the evaluation team to witness first-hand the media freedom achievements of the OSCE Mission to Bosnia and Herzegovina. The Mission did not have a designated Media Program Officer for a considerable period of time, and most media projects had been carried out by the Human Rights Section. A National Programme Officer was appointed only in 2020. Nevertheless, over the review period, the Mission had implemented one UB media project in 2018 and multiple ExB funded projects and initiatives.

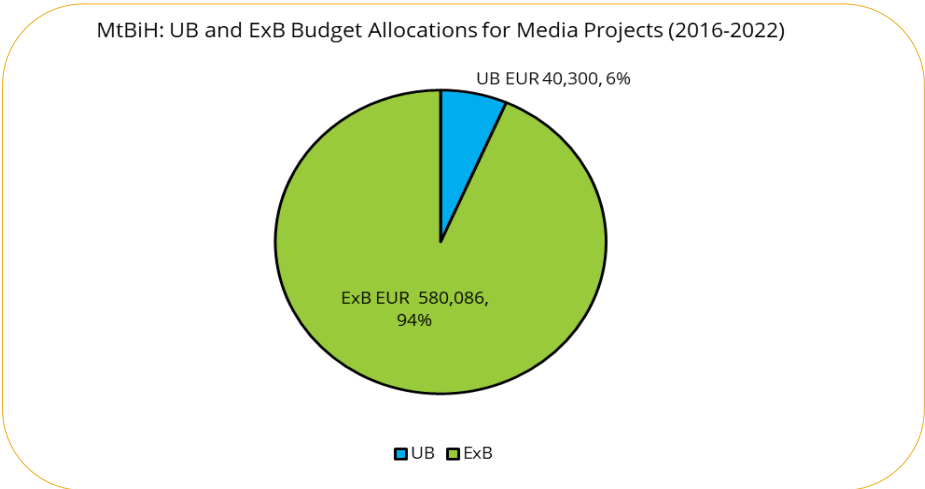
In 2020, the Mission initiated a major 3-year project aimed at improving the safety of journalists in Bosnia and Herzegovina. During the same year, MtBiH supported the release of an impactful documentary on defamation lawsuits against journalists, prepared together with the Balkan Investigative Reporting Network. Building on its long-term relations and strategic partnerships with media outlets and the civil society sector, MtBiH also provided capacity building support and specialized trainings, including a conference for media

professionals to responsibly report on terrorism, foreign terrorist fighters (FTFs) and violent extremism. These initiatives contributed to strengthening the cooperation between national and regional public institutions and the media.

MtBiH also funded an important Needs Assessment study of the media sector to assess the sector-wide media needs, risks and challenges in the country. The study highlighted a core problem in the country related to the lack of robust and comprehensive data on the nature and extent of the issues faced by the media.

To strengthen the role of religious leaders in local communities with regard to Preventing Terrorism and Countering Violent Extremism that Lead to Terrorism (P/C VERLT), the Mission contributed to improving the media literacy and skills of more than 110 imams, supported the delivery of media literacy training-the-trainer (ToT) sessions for 14 madrasa teachers, and oversaw the rollout of media literacy training for more than 70 madrasa students.

Graph 10: MtBiH: UB and ExB Media Budget allocations (2016-2022)

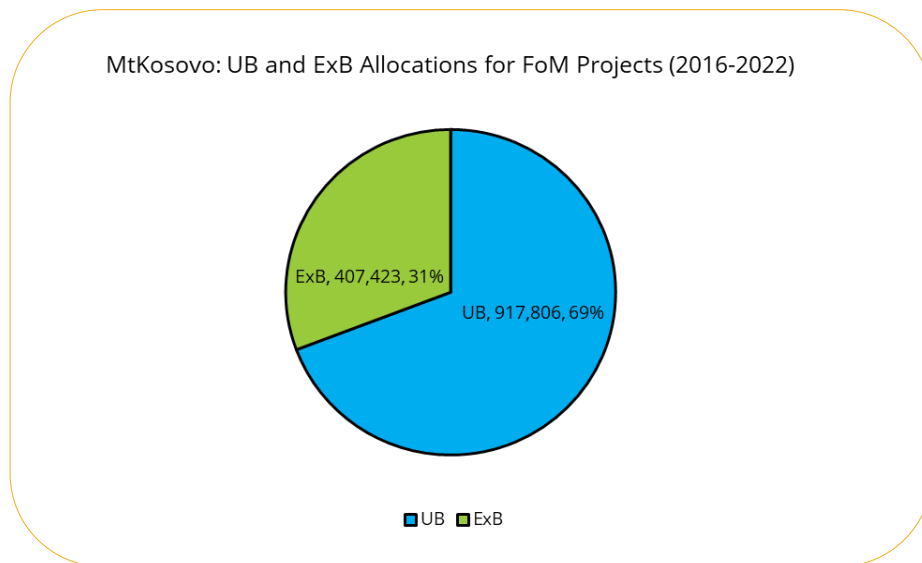


The publication of the updated “*Guidelines on the Co-operation between Media and the Police*” and the production of two documentaries on the effects of the pandemic on the media, and on the safety of journalists were among the other outstanding achievements of the MtBiH media programme.

OSCE Mission in Kosovo

Freedom of the media, media and information literacy, and safety of journalists are the main programmatic priorities for the Media Team of the OSCE Mission in Kosovo (MtKosovo) and its field offices. Since 2016, the Mission has committed almost EUR 1 million from its UB budget to media programmes aimed at strengthening the professional capacities of non-majority media, fostering media literacy and facilitating coalition building among journalists.

Graph 11: MtKosovo: UB and ExB Budget Allocations for Media Projects



All project self-evaluations have clearly identified objectives, expected/achieved results, related performance indicators, including outcome indicators, as well as an overall performance marker (e.g., satisfactory, highly satisfactory, etc.).

OSCE Mission to Skopje

During the period 2016-2022, the MtSkopje Communications and Media Relations team had focused its efforts on projects that foster ethical reporting and support media work related to the protection of citizens' rights to freedom of expression. The Mission has assisted the local Council on Media Ethics with the development of "Ethical

Reporting Guidelines" and a document addressing the challenges related to online media and hate speech.

A 2020 evaluation of the ExB project "Support Freedom of the Media and the Safety of Journalists 2018-2020" (EUR 96,764) assessed the project as "highly relevant" and "coherent" both with the OSCE strategic guidelines and with the needs of the country. The project's objective to address the challenges faced by female journalists corresponded to a real and relevant concern. The evaluation highlighted the effectiveness of the project based on the achieved results, among which the trainings and visits related to the safety of journalist were deemed the most important. The high efficiency of the project was attributed to the competencies of the media team and the "added value" of the OSCE Mission to Skopje as an implementer: *"A modestly funded project, it benefitted from the core resources and assets of the OSCE – political clout, existing partnerships, institutional and administrative backup."*³⁶

OSCE Mission to Montenegro

Unlike the other OSCE missions in SEE, the OSCE Mission to Montenegro has implemented only UB-funded media projects. The 17 UB projects, totaling EUR 1,296,462, vary in size (with values ranging from EUR 15,480 to EUR 166,915). Through these projects, the Mission has provided support to Montenegro's public broadcasting service, to the Agency for Electronic Media and the Agency for Protection of Personal Data and Free Access to Information. The Mission's main contributions are related to strengthening the media legal framework of the country, to creating a safer environment for journalists, and to

increasing the media and information literacy. The Mission has also done commendable work facilitating the exchange of best practices and the networking between journalists and professional media associations in the SEE region.

4.2.3 Spotlight on Central Asia

Over the five years covered by this evaluation, the OSCE missions in Central Asia have implemented mainly UB-funded media projects. As mentioned earlier in the report, all projects of these missions required a prior approval by the host country's ministry of foreign affairs. Therefore, each mission had tailored its media programmatic priorities to the needs and expectations of the host governments. While this evaluation could not directly observe or assess the outcomes of OSCE's FoM projects in Central Asia, information on achieved results was collected through interviews with mission staff and a review of the mission reports and project self-evaluations.

OSCE Programme Office in Dushanbe

Media freedom and media development are part of the mandate of the OSCE Programme Office in Dushanbe (POiD) under the Human Dimension. The Office has been committing every year an average of EUR 120,000 from its UB programme budget for media projects, to a total of EUR 711,685 over five years. In 2020, 2021 and 2022, the POiD successfully implemented projects focused on "Building Media Capacity and Raising Journalistic Standards".

One of the recent accomplishments of the Office relates to the support provided to Parliament of Tajikistan for finalizing an inclusive and publicly consulted draft Information Code. This includes a recommendation for the establishment of a monitoring mechanism and a roadmap for the implementation of strategic FoM documents, in line with international commitments, namely: State Information Policy Concept and Implementation Programme; Television and Radio Broadcasting Strategy. A follow-up roundtable, facilitated by the Office, brought together representatives of Parliament, government, media and civil society to discuss the implementation of these strategic documents.

In 2021, jointly with the Tajik Media Council (TMC), the Office organized a conference commemorating the World Press Freedom Day, bringing together various national and international media stakeholders, resulting in increased participants' awareness of issues related to media freedom in Tajikistan and media adherence to journalistic ethical standards.

OSCE Programme Office in Bishkek

In **Kyrgyzstan**, the OSCE Programme Office in Bishkek (POiB) has supported the establishment of media partnerships between state and non-state media representatives by promoting the principles of media freedom and freedom of expression. The Office is implementing capacity building initiatives for media outlets and regional multimedia centres on the uses of modern public relations techniques, digital broadcasting, information security, and gender-sensitive reporting, especially during elections. Some media freedom

initiatives of the Office have been jointly implemented with other initiatives or projects under the Human Dimension, such as elections or promotion of inter-confessional dialogue and tolerance. One of the objectives of a multi-year UB-funded project “Promoting inter-confessional dialogue and tolerance” is “to strengthen the partnership among national media outlets and the capacity of regional multi-media centres.” One of the results of the project was the development of specific recommendations at a 2019 Media Partnership Conference and their approval by a Government Working Group under the Ministry of Culture, Information and Tourism (MCIT). Also, following discussions with various media stakeholders at platforms and events supported by the POiB, the MCIT developed a “National Information Policy Concept” - a strategic document outlining key concepts and challenges on media development in Kyrgyzstan.

Through its ExB project “Support to strengthening inclusiveness of electoral processes in parliamentary and local council elections” (2019-2022), the POiB has set a number of media freedom objectives with SMART performance indicators related to: enhancing journalist skills to provide professional reporting on women’s civic participation, capacity building for gender-sensitive reporting (in partnership with UN Women), introducing media monitoring and opportunities to address complaints on any violation of freedom of the media principles.

OSCE Programme Office in Astana

The OSCE Programme Office in Astana implements its media projects under the Politico-Military Dimension (PMD). The Office has limited

staff and no designated media programme officer. Yet, a few initiatives have been implemented in collaboration with media outlets, local NGOs, a Legal Media Centre and the Court on issues related to hate speech, ethics in covering terrorism in the media, investigative journalism, digitalization and the use of new technological tools. In 2021, the Office worked with government and civil society organizations, academia, the private sector, and the international community to develop innovative approaches for promoting security in Kazakhstan and the Central Asia region. The Office has conducted activities to enhance the safety of journalists covering peaceful events, by supporting the manufacturing of vests and arm bands, which these journalists need to wear.

OSCE Centre in Ashgabat

In **Turkmenistan**, the OSCE has been the only international organization providing systematic and sustained support for media development. Taking into account the fact that all media instruments in the country are state-owned, online news are slowly emerging, and there is no public statistics and information on the status of the media landscape, the Media Office of the OSCE Centre in Ashgabat (CiAsh) has focused its efforts on contributing to the modernization of the media registration process in the country. The Centre has also worked on media capacity building, promoting international standards and contributing to improved media education. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the CiAsh designed and delivered a training module on freedom of expression by remote modality to journalists, and in 2020, experts commissioned by the CiAsh designed a second module -for

“Training of Trainers” (ToT) for journalists and lawyers. As a result, nine local trainers were prepared to further disseminate training to journalists, lawyers and other media stakeholders in the country. The OSCE is also supporting the digitalization of the media, which has become an important issue in Turkmenistan over the past two years, as well as the incorporation of gender issues and capacity building for gender equality, safety of female journalists and media literacy.

EQ. Have there been any unintended, positive or negative, outcomes of OSCE’s media freedom projects?

Besides being recognized for their contribution to media freedom and safety of journalists, the OSCE projects in SEE have been also appreciated for their ancillary benefits. Media projects and related capacity building initiatives have been beneficial for countries pursuing EU membership and achievement of EU standards. As one of the requirements of the EU accession policy, media freedom has become particularly important for some countries in South East Europe. As a result, the OSCE FoM and FoE work in these countries has not only been aligned with their specific needs, but has also been contributing to the efforts of their governments to receive approval for EU membership. For example, many of the UB-funded projects of the OSCE Presence in Albania, especially those supporting the public broadcaster RTSH, were appreciated for their positive impact on the public media provider, as well as for their contribution to the country’s visibility and credibility on its path to an EU membership.

✓ **Finding 11:** There have been some multiplier effects from OSCE’s work on media freedom associated with the creation of new and strengthening of existing partnerships with local, regional and international organizations.

The convening power of OSCE’s field operations and their ability to bring together representatives of governments, civil society, academia, journalist associations and media regulators to jointly discuss media challenges and develop common solutions, have been highly estimated and recognized by international partners. This has been demonstrated by the Working Groups on media issues created by the OSCE missions in Serbia and in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

The transition to online media conferences during COVID-19, while initially seen as an impediment, has also brought some unintended benefits for participants. The virtual format has allowed a much higher attendance, creating opportunities for journalists and media providers to participate, who would have otherwise not been able to take part due to travel or budget restrictions. The OSCE conferences and media events in Central Asia were specifically mentioned, as some of them were attended for the first time by participants from Turkmenistan, for whom travel to other countries has been challenging.

✓ **Finding 12:** There is an untapped potential for building regional networks and initiating regional programmatic work through resource mobilization across missions, as well as unexplored

opportunities to attract donor funding to address regional media freedom and freedom of expression issues.

Through its regional media conferences, the RFoM has instigated an increased interest for regional co-operation not only among journalists and media professionals, but also among media programme officers from OSCE missions. Some missions from neighbouring countries in the Western Balkans have already initiated regional meetings for their media officers to discuss common challenges in the region and practical approaches and strategies to deal with them. For example, the Mission to Bosnia and Herzegovina leveraged some of the good practices and approaches used by the Mission to Serbia with convening and managing media working groups with representatives of government, CSOs and journalist associations.

Similar co-operation among media officers in Central Asia could help not only with exchange of good practices and lessons learned, but also with exploring opportunities for donor funding for regional initiatives.

EQ. What factors have facilitated or hindered the achievement of OSCE's media freedom and freedom of expression objectives in a timely and economic manner?

- ✓ **Finding 13:** Changes in some countries' political priorities and administrative restructurings in government organizations have been among the factors affecting the timely and successful delivery of FoM projects by OSCE missions.

Political changes and reforms in the state apparatus and senior management ranks of ministries were highlighted as factors affecting the timely implementation of the media projects of the OSCE Mission to Montenegro and the (former) Project Coordinator in Ukraine.

In Serbia, the ExB project "Support to Media Reforms" was initiated based on an agreement between the OSCE and the Government of Serbia, which entrusted the OSCE Mission with the role of a key facilitator in the negotiations and the drafting of Serbia's media reforms. The Media Department of MtSerbia participated in two working groups and actively worked with the Serbian Ministry of Culture and Information to ensure a transparent and inclusive process, taking into consideration the voices of the public and private media actors. Despite the hard work and sustained support provided by the Mission for the development of the 2020-2025 Media Strategy, it was not approved in a timely manner due to changes in the Serbian government which have occurred as a result of the June 2020 elections. The implementation of the Media Strategy was further hampered due to COVID-19 and the 2020 and 2022 elections.

The OSCE field operations in Central Asia are often facing challenges with a longer-term planning of their media initiatives due to the annual approvals of their mandates and programming priorities by the MFAs. Changes to the missions' mandates based on changing host government priorities have triggered the need for internal restructurings in some field operations and shifting the media programme from one dimension to another. For example, the media programme of the OSCE Programme Office in Bishkek was moved

from the first (politico-military) to the third (human) dimension with a much smaller budget allocation.

Last but not least, field operations' media commitments and programmatic work depend on budget availability. In the absence of stable and predictable funding, it has been a challenge for some missions to plan and implement longer-term projects, especially UB-based. Delayed budget approvals create additional challenges for engaging implementing partners.

Nevertheless, all interviewed Heads of Missions and mission staff indicated strong support for the OSCE's media freedom commitments, and shared their optimism and determination to find creative ways to implement programmes and initiatives supporting media freedom and freedom of expression in the participating States.

EQ. What management practices and innovative approaches have been used by the OSCE field operations to increase the efficient use of limited human and financial resources for the successful implementation of media freedom projects?

✓ **Finding 14:** Field missions are becoming more efficient by using innovative approaches to overcome challenges related to their limited human and financial resources, or to the shrinking operational space caused by the lack of buy-in from host country authorities.

The OSCE Mission to Bosnia and Herzegovina, for example, has implemented a number of practical approaches to increase the

efficient use of its limited financial resources and to ensure the timely implementation of UB projects. The Media Team has successfully signed Implementing Partnership Agreements (IPAs), engaging local civil society organizations (CSOs) to implement projects of common interest. One of the main advantages of using IPAs, according to mission staff, relates to the more flexible timelines (compared to those for UB-funded projects), allowing the Mission to search for and find the right implementing partner without major time pressure. Another highlighted benefit of the IPAs was that by taking some of the responsibility for achieved results, implementing partners feel more determined to do a good job and add their name under a successful project. Implementing partners indicated that they appreciate this type of arrangements, since besides financial assistance, being hired by the OSCE, gives them increased visibility and credibility in the country for the work they do.

The important role of the Heads of Mission (HoMs) in the promotion of media freedom was also highlighted as a contributing factor for increased effectiveness of the media work in the host countries. Externally, HoMs can increase the visibility of the missions' work across government organizations, while internally, they can improve the efficiency and effectiveness of media programmes and initiatives by encouraging a whole-of-mission approach and collaboration among the three dimensions. For instance, the Head of Media Department in the OSCE Mission to Serbia regularly attended the meetings of the Working Group for the Media Strategy along with Serbian government representatives. In addition, the Head of the

Mission to Serbia participated in milestone sessions, alongside the Prime Minister. Similarly, the active engagement of the Head of Mission of OSCE's Presence in Albania through regular meetings with government representatives and media stakeholders on issues related to media freedom and safety of journalists, has increased the visibility and credibility of the work done by the small but highly professional and dedicated PiA Media Team.

In Central Asia, OSCE missions are also applying various strategies to compensate for the diminishing resources for media work. For example, the Programme Office in Bishkek (POiB) has used cost-sharing approaches with other mission programmes for some of its media initiatives. The Office has also drafted a concept proposal to support eco-journalists in Kyrgyzstan, as part of OSCE's support to the environmental priorities of the government of Kyrgyzstan.

4.3 Coherence

EQ. How coherent and/or complementary are OSCE's media freedom priorities and programmatic activities across the three dimensions and the various executive structures?

✓ **Finding 15:** Through a whole-of-mission approach and cross-dimensional co-operation, OSCE missions have considerably increased the efficiency and effectiveness of their FoM work.

Interviewed mission staff in all OSCE field operations provided examples of good co-operation among the three security dimensions

related to the planning and implementation of complex media freedom projects.

The media teams of OSCE field operations vary considerably in size, composition and reporting structures. In most SEE missions, for example, there are separate media units/teams under the Human Dimension, while in Central Asia, media freedom activities and projects are often delivered under the Politico-Military dimension, or are co-located with other mission functions (e.g. Communications).

The evaluation found evidence of strong programming coherence and a whole-of mission approach to the design and implementation of media projects and initiatives in all OSCE missions in South East Europe.

An example of efficient internal coherence and leveraging of synergies across mission functions is the co-location of the media and the communications programmes in the OSCE Mission to Skopje (MtSkopje). The media activities have gained considerable support from the communications team with the design and delivery of on-line digital courses for journalists. The MtSkopje has also demonstrated good co-ordination and internal coherence between the politico-military and human dimensions on projects related to the protection of journalists reporting on corruption, as well as on improving the relations between the police and media representatives. Interviewed staff reiterated that all mission projects are complementary and there are no "stand-alone" activities.

In the OSCE Mission to Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Media Unit has initially been part of the Press Department before moving to the

Human Rights Department. The latter has been extremely supportive of all media freedom and freedom of expression activities, seen as fundamental freedoms, along with other human rights and freedoms on which the HR Department is focused (e.g. Freedom of Assembly and Association, and Freedom of Religion and Beliefs). The small media team³⁷ has worked closely with the communications and human rights teams for the production of three highly impactful documentaries on freedom of the media and freedom of expression in Bosnia and Herzegovina ("*Rise in defamation cases against media restricted freedom*", "*Pandemic exposes media's vulnerability*", and "*Journalism is not a crime: Bosnian Journalists speak out.*")³⁸

The Media Department of the Mission to Serbia has been working closely with the Rule of Law & Human Rights, and the Security Co-operation Departments to ensure a holistic approach to media development and freedom of expression in the country. Examples include the work of the Media Department on projects involving both the police and the Prosecutor, aimed at enhancing their response to threats and attacks against journalists. The Mission has succeeded in bringing for the first time the Prosecutor and the police to work together with media representatives.

In Central Asia, only the OSCE Programme Office in Dushanbe has a dedicated Media Unit situated under the Human Dimension Programme, consisting of a Media Officer, a Senior Programme Assistant and a Project Assistant. The rest of the field operations in the region do not have a dedicated media officer, and the media portfolio is usually assigned to a Press and Public Information Officer

or a Programme Officer under the Human Dimension or in the Office of the Head of Mission. In the OSCE Programme Office in Astana, the media portfolio is under the politico-military dimension.

All missions indicated good collaboration with the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) on projects and activities aimed at fighting and preventing hate crime and hate speech. Collaboration with ODIHR also occurred during elections in some participating States, related to the monitoring of the media situation during elections. Another example is the collaboration between the Media Unit in the OSCE Presence in Albania (PiA) and ODIHR for the development of a Manual of Guidelines for Election Reporting, specifically focused on private media.

✓ **Finding 16:** Mission staff have indicated a need for periodic media freedom related training for both new and longer-standing media programme officers, and for regular updates on FoM and FoE challenges in the OSCE region and opportunities for leveraging whole-of-OSCE synergies in addressing those challenges.

A common challenge, shared by mission staff in both SEE and CA field operations, relates to the high turn-over of staff in the missions and in the RFoM Office, reiterating the need for closer cooperation and ways to retain institutional memory and knowledge.

Interviewed staff at OSCE field operations would welcome periodic training sessions for programme officers designing and implementing FoM and FoE programmes and initiatives. Missions would also be interested in opportunities for leveraging synergies with the RFoM

Office and to better apply a Whole-of-OSCE approach to pressing media problems in the participating States.

The evaluation noted that RFoM approaches media freedom and freedom of expression mainly from a human rights and policy perspective, while field operations are focusing on media development and capacity building for local media actors. Staff in the field indicated that there is an underutilized potential to leverage synergies between the two approaches and utilize available expertise and resources towards more effective ways to address FoM and FoE challenges in the OSCE region.

✓ **Finding 17:** Regional collaboration among media programme officers from field operations in the Western Balkans were reported to be an effective way for discussing common media challenges and trends in the region, and for exchanging good practices and ideas for future programmatic work and activities.

Over the past three years (2019-2022), the media teams/departments of OSCE missions in SEE have informally met every year to discuss best practices in dealing with common themes and media challenging in the region, and to share information and planning updates related to their respective media projects and programming priorities. Participants in those meetings described them as a good practice they would like to see implemented on a regular basis, at least yearly.

An example of the benefits of sharing good practices among missions has been the experience of the Mission to Serbia with the creation of

a Working Group for Safety of Journalists in Serbia, which was replicated by the OSCE Mission to Bosnia and Herzegovina (MtBiH). MtBiH benefitted from, and applied the knowledge shared by MtSerbia in the implementation of a similar project and created a similar Working Group for Safety of Journalists in the Canton of Sarajevo.

In addition to the regional RFoM conference some field operations have organized conferences on specific topics of interest to the local media actors. For examples, in September 2018, the OSCE Mission to Bosnia and Herzegovina organized a conference on “Media and Terrorism”, which was attended by more than 100 journalists and media professionals from the country and the region. The discussions were focused on the latest trends in the Western Balkans, and on the challenges and standards in reporting on violent extremism and terrorism. The conference served as a platform for the exchange of experience and best practices in preventing intolerance and societal divisions when reporting on terrorism. The particular importance of this conference was seen in its contribution to the professional development of journalists and media professionals working towards the promotion of stability in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Following this Conference, the MtBiH supported the development of guidelines for reporting on terrorism.³⁹

EQ. To what extent are OSCE's media freedom programmes and initiatives co-ordinated with, or complementing those of other regional and international organizations?

✓ **Finding 18:** Field operations are maintaining close contacts and exchange of information with international and regional organizations on media freedom and freedom of expression in the OSCE region. However, the evaluation did not find evidence of joint programming or examples of co-operation going beyond a few signed Memorandums of Understanding with IOs or joint participation in working groups.

Interviewed mission staff in SEE shared their positive experience in exchanging information with regional and international organizations on issues related to freedom of expression and media freedom both at the country level and regionally. The Council of Europe, the EU Delegation, the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), UNESCO, embassies of participating States, as well as some EU media-specialized organizations, such as the European Union Rule of Law Mission in Kosovo (EULEX) are among their main partners.

When engaging with other regional or international organizations, OSCE missions indicated that they aim at leveraging synergies and complementarities, and at avoiding duplication of effort and resources. Maintaining regular working contacts with international partners and donors was highlighted by OSCE interlocutors as particularly important for conveying a stronger and co-ordinated message to local authorities. A united international voice helps when changes to a country's legislation are needed. The evaluation found a few MoUs signed with donor organizations, but no evidence of joint programming of joint project implementation.

The evaluation team received positive feedback from representatives of some international organizations about their effective collaboration with the RFoM Office and OSCE missions, as well as about the important role that OSCE field operations play in participating States.

4.4 Sustainability of FOs' Project Results

EQ. To what degree have OSCE missions identified and fostered conditions necessary to sustain the results of their media freedom programmes?

✓ **Finding 18:** All OSCE media-related projects, initiated over the past five years, have included a sustainability clause and considerations in their project proposals. However, the actual sustainability or durability of achieved results could not always be ascertained in the self-evaluations or final reports.

This evaluation could not ascertain the extent to which sustainability of media-related project results across OSCE missions has been achieved, besides the few projects for which missions had commissioned decentralized evaluations (e.g. MtSkopje, MtSerbia and MtKosovo).

The evaluation field visits to the three missions in SEE allowed, however, for direct observations and in-person discussions with

project implementers and beneficiaries about factors contributing to the sustainability of media project results.

One of the main identified factors for sustainability of results was the willingness of governments to implement media reforms and media legislations. In some SEE countries, the development of good media laws alone was found to be insufficient, if these laws were not applied or strictly followed by the respective government institutions

Interviewed mission staff in Central Asia and South East Europe indicated that the sustainability of media project results is often contingent upon funding for continuous engagement with project partners, implementers and beneficiaries. In the absence of predictable long-term or stable funding, OSCE field operations have been exploring different ways to ensure sustainability and continuation of achieved results in their media portfolios. A successful strategy used by many field operations is to build upon the achievements of previous projects or project phases, integrating these as a stepping stone for the next projects. Most missions indicated that they avoid implementing one-off projects.

Media freedom and safety of journalists' issues are often closely interrelated, which makes their solution more complex and requiring a comprehensive approach and a longer-term vision. Media programme officers in several missions indicated that applying OSCE's comprehensive approach to security along with a whole-of-mission engagement in the design of media programmes and initiatives, has facilitated the inclusion of factors contributing to the

sustainability of achieved results. For example, MtSkopje described its media work as being both proactive and reactive. Media initiatives and interventions have been often selected in ways that complement the mission's work on human rights, thus increasing the opportunities for a broader impact but also a longer duration of results.

Another identified factor contributing to the sustainability of result is development of mid-term programmatic strategies that align UB media priorities and ExB projects with mission mandates and available budgets. For example, the Democratization Department of the OSCE Presence in Albania, has developed a "Multi-Year Outlook of Portfolios" (2019-2022), a strategy outlining the three-year priorities of the Democratization Department, including a longer-term vision with main areas of focus, including the specific priorities for the Media Development Unit (MDU) under each strategic area. For example, the strategy identifies three interlinked and mutually reinforcing areas of work for the MDU: Media Freedom; Public Service Media; and Media Community. Based on this "Multi-year Outlook" the PiA is planning and budgeting for new media projects with a view to sustain and build on already achieved results across the three areas. This approach has also helped the MDU to plan for projects that are complementing the work of other mission departments. For instance, one the main ExB media projects of the Mission - "Media in Focus", initiated in January 2019 with funding from the European Union, has been complementing and leveraging the core programming priorities of PiA's Democratization Department over a period of three years (2019- 2021).

A number of projects implemented by the media teams of the OSCE missions to Serbia and to Bosnia and Herzegovina, included the missions' engagement in the design and implementation of media laws guaranteeing media freedom and freedom of expression in the respective States. The development and implementation of such laws requires continuous and sustained mission involvement in a long, multi-year process, the success of which often depends on the priorities of the government of the day and its readiness to accept new media laws or strategies. The latter often determines the ultimate success, delayed results, or sometimes even failures of projects related to new media legislation. Even when a good Media Strategy is being developed, there is no guarantee that the government of the day would approve it. The sustainable effect in such cases is reduced to the relationship and trust built by the OSCE missions with local media stakeholders.

In Central Asia, OSCE field operations rely heavily on the engagement and ownership displayed by government authorities, Parliaments, political parties, civil society organizations, as well as by the general public as factors contributing the sustainability of project results. Of particular importance is the engagement of various CSOs as project implementing partners for media-related projects. These organizations are expected to acquire adequate capacity and build effective relations with the state authorities and to sustain the efforts and the results achieved with the support of OSCE missions.



5. Crosscutting findings

5.1 OSCE's Comparative Advantage

EQ. What is the OSCE comparative advantage in implementing media freedom projects and initiatives?

- ✓ **Finding 20:** The RFoM and OSCE field operations have been praised by regional and international partners, media stakeholders, government representatives, civil society organization and journalist associations for their standing presence, long-term relationships, trust, and responsiveness to media freedom challenges and needs in the participating States.

The OSCE is highly respected as an **intergovernmental** and **political organization** in both South East Europe and Central Asia. Interviewees from international and partner organizations indicated that the RFoM and OSCE missions are usually the first to react publicly in the social media when there is an assault on a journalist or a case of non-compliance of a pS with media freedom commitments. Other organizations, such as the EU, the UN Human Rights Office (OHCHR) or the US embassy often re-tweet or re-issue on their media sites OSCE's messages.

An OSCE comparative advantage highlighted by interviewees in SEE, relates to the fact that as a **security organization**, it plays a unique role for the security and safety of journalists by bringing together human rights and security aspects in a way that no other international

or regional organizations does. In this respect, the OSCE adds value and complements the work of the European Union Delegation (EUD) which is focused on legislative processes and the judiciary, and of the Council of Europe, which supports pS in bringing their legislation in compliance with European Union (EU) norms, especially for accession purposes.

The **long-standing presence of OSCE field operations** and the **competency** of OSCE media officers were highlighted as providing the OSCE with a unique comparative advantage, both among national and international partners. OSCE missions were praised for their **convening power and initiatives**, bringing together representatives of the international community and local media providers, both public and private.

The evaluation found that the RFoM and the OSCE field missions stand out with their mandates, credibility and way of work with governments, civil society organizations, state and private media providers, and journalist associations. According to interviewed journalists in Albania, Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina, no other organization works with them the way the OSCE does. Interviewees reiterated on multiple occasions the unique and important role of the OSCE media officers as contact points for journalists' safety.

For example, the OSCE mandate in Serbia enables the Mission and its Media Department to quickly react in crisis situations related to FoM and FoE in addition to implementing multiple projects in support of media freedom and safety of journalists. The evaluation team had an

opportunity to hear directly from external interlocutors about the unique role and contributions of the entire media team to the media sector in Serbia. The Mission and the Media Department were praised for their capacity, expertise, long-term presence, institutional memory and knowledge of the media sector and the media actors in the country. MtSerbia has been able to act as a resource hub for all media actors, with unlimited access to national and international experts, with organizational skills and abilities to initiate dialogues as an honest broker on issues related to freedom of the media. Mission staff were described as **“reliable, responsive and competent to provide expert advice and support when needed”**.

Representatives of international organizations in Serbia described the OSCE as **“an organization with a power to translate demands from the media into a responsibility for governments to turn into law.”**

“OSCE’s Mission to Serbia is the bridge between government and civil society.”

Interviewed International partner

In other SEE countries, OSCE missions are seen as **“focal points”** and **“conveners of multiple stakeholders”**, able to bring together **“in the same room”** representatives of the government, public and private media providers, media and journalist associations, the prosecutor’s office, and the police.

In Bosnia and Herzegovina, for example, the role of the OSCE was described as **“unique”** due to the historical legacy of OSCE’s Mission.

Both public and private media providers perceive MtBiH as **“one of their key and most reliable partners”**. This OSCE Mission has another comparative advantage related to its eight field offices, which provide the Mission with a wider reach in the country, with opportunities for direct contacts at the local level, and a better, first-hand knowledge of the specific media challenges in the different cantonal structures.

Representatives of media outlets in Bosnia and Herzegovina were appreciative of the OSCE Missions’ support and collaboration and described the Mission staff as open, accessible and approachable. Interviewed media actors stated that a direct contact with MtBiH is always possible and someone is always available to help, particularly when journalists are facing challenges or threats.

“The OSCE helps coordinate the response of the international community to attacks and threats against journalists. The OSCE has done a good job of separating media rights and political interests, and is upholding the principle of protecting the rights of journalists no matter of their background or the media outlet they are working for.” *(Interview quote: journalists in Bosnia and Herzegovina)*

In Albania, the personal and long-standing professional relationships of PiA’s Media Unit with representatives of media outlets and journalist associations was seen as an important contributing factor for the effective work of the Presence with all media partners.

Interviewed media stakeholders and journalists underscored the mutual trust built over the years with the PiA and its Media Team. The solid knowledge of the media situation in the country and the ability of the PiA to deliver projects on the ground, tailored to the specific needs of the media actors, are giving the OSCE a comparative advantage to other international organizations that usually implement consulting projects remotely from their Headquarters.

In Moldova, the OSCE was highlighted as the only international organization with media projects specifically focusing on Transnistria and monitoring the situation from both sides.

- ✓ **Finding 21:** OSCE missions' relative lack of bureaucratic formalities was highlighted as a factor allowing missions to have greater flexibility in providing programmatic support to local media stakeholders, which other international organizations may not always have.

The efficient project management system of the OSCE missions in SEE was highlighted on a number of occasions as a contributing factor to the effectiveness of OSCE's work, as well as its comparative advantage in the implementation of media-related projects and initiatives, in relation to other international organizations, doing this remotely from their Headquarters.

Interviewed media stakeholders in Bosnia and Herzegovina elaborated on another comparative advantage of the OSCE and provided concrete project examples, pointing out that most of the

MtBiH's media initiatives are not stand-alone projects similar to those of other international organizations, but are part of a "***continuous, long-term commitment of the OSCE to influence a change from all angles***".

For example, the MtBiH has been supporting for years the University of Sarajevo with the establishment of a specialized Master's Programme course in Media Law and the curriculum design. This project has been part of a broader initiative aimed at establishing a regional hub for media law in Sarajevo. Further, as part of this broader initiative, the MtBiH is also supporting an accreditation learning programme with university credits, students' participation in the Moot Court and media law competition.

- ✓ **Finding 22:** The OSCE's field operations in SEE are perceived by local media actors as a "safe-heaven" for journalists seeking advice and protection for their freedom of expression rights, while mission staff have been praised for being "always available, responsive and reliable when media stakeholders need advice or support".

Another comparative advantage of the OSCE highlighted by interviewees relates to the fact that the OSCE missions are constantly monitoring the media situation in the participating States which enables them to quickly react and provide relevant support to media actors when most needed.

The Mission to Montenegro, for example, has demonstrated the ability to quickly adapt its media programming to the evolving media challenges and frequent changes in the country's political

environment, not least because of its well-established relations and effective communications with the NGO sector.

Another major advantage of the OSCE is related to the additional field offices that some missions have in the countries in SEE. For example, the field outlets of the OSCE Missions to Serbia, Kosovo, and Bosnia and Herzegovina have enabled these missions to closely follow and quickly respond to media challenges in different regions of the countries, as well as to directly engage with local governments, establish stronger relationships, and build trust among the local authorities and civil society organizations.

The comparative advantage of OSCE's field operations in Central Asia has been attributed mostly to the long-standing relationships of the missions with the host countries' governments and the established trust and respect. For example, the Centre in Ashgabat has been supporting for years the modernization and digitalization of the media registration in Turkmenistan. In addition, the fact that the Centre's mandate is open-ended, has contributed to the stability and consistency of its work in addressing the specific media needs of the country.

In Tajikistan, the Programme Office in Dushanbe is seen as a provider of an active dialogue platform between civil society and government, and between donors and international organizations. One of the added values of OSCE's work in Tajikistan has been attributed to the ability of the Office to organize study visits for local journalists and media stakeholders abroad, helping them to acquire international

experience and to witness first-hand the good practices of foreign media providers.

✓ **Finding 23:** While the OSCE's decentralized structure makes the organization adaptable and flexible, it may sometimes affect the image of the missions being perceived by local CSOs as their competitors for donor funding.

A challenge brought to the attention of the evaluation team by representatives of some local CSOs and NGOs in SEE relates to the fact that OSCE missions are sometimes seen as their competitors for obtaining donor funding. According to these organizations, their chances to receive funding from foreign governments or international organizations are decreasing when OSCE missions are also applying for funding from the same sources.

Other CSOs, however, have highlighted the positive role that OSCE missions can play by promoting the importance of the work they do to foreign donors, thus increasing their credibility and chances to get funding. A concrete example was the help provided by the OSCE's MtBiH to the Press Council for Print and Online Media in Bosnia and Herzegovina – the only self-regulatory agency in the country. Being aware of the uniqueness and importance of the Press Council's work for the media community, the OSCE Mission to Bosnia and Herzegovina made a strong business case for the need of this work in the country, and solicited international organizations and foreign embassies willing to make a pledge. As a result, the Press Council received a grant thanks to which an important project was

successfully completed. Interviewed representatives of the Press Council indicated that despite having all the expertise, they would not have been able to receive funding without OSCE's support.

5.2 Gender and Human Rights Considerations

EQ. To what extent have gender equality and human rights considerations been taken into account in RFoM's and FOs' programme design, implementation, and reporting on results?

✓ **Finding 24:** The RFoM Office and the field operations have mainstreamed gender considerations in most of their projects. Gender-equality and gender-related topics, especially those concerning the safety of female journalists, have been the focus of OSCE's recent media-related projects and initiatives.

In 2019, the OSCE introduced the “**gender marker**” as a statistical tool to classify the ExB projects based on the extent to which they mainstream or target gender equality. Some field offices, such as the Mission to Serbia are using a GM for both the ExB and UB projects. The OSCE gender marker uses a three-tier rating system with scores from 1 to 3.⁴⁰ Most of the reviewed OSCE media projects, in addition to indicating their gender marker, have also made a reference to the Sustainable Development Goals. The review of the project reports revealed that gender has been mainstreamed in most projects, and a “gender sensitive” language has been used throughout the reports.

Among RFoM's projects, the Safety of Female Journalists Online project is the only one with a Gender Marker 3, and a reference to Sustainable Development Goal 5 (SDG 5) related to Gender Equality. This flagship RFoM project is aimed at improving the safety of female journalists across the OSCE region through a free and safe use of media, including digital technologies. Its goal is “to bridge the implementation gap between good intentions and concrete actions” by enhancing participating States' knowledge of the consequences of online harassment and attacks on women journalists. A good example of co-operation and functioning of the whole-of-OSCE-approach is the fact that most OSCE field operations in Central Asia have contributed to this project, echoing the concerns related to safety of female journalists in the respective participating States.

In terms of gender equality related to the media landscape in the participating States in SEE, a study commissioned by the OSCE Mission to Serbia, found that the majority of journalists in Serbia are female (similar to Albania), however, management positions such as editors and senior staff are predominantly occupied by male journalists. This study has informed the mission's activities as they relate to the support of female reporting journalists, who are increasingly exposed to harassment, discrimination and defamation lawsuits. In its programmatic priorities, while focusing on media development, information and digital literacy for journalists and citizens, the Mission to Serbia also places special emphasis on the promotion of tolerance, non-discrimination and confronting gender stereotypes in media reporting and in the public discourse.

All other OSCE missions in SEE have mainstreamed gender in their media programmatic activities, with an increasing focus on gender and hate speech, gender discrimination, gender stereotyping and reporting on domestic violence in the media.

Gender mainstreaming is becoming an important element of OSCE's projects in Central Asia, with countries in the region becoming increasingly interested in gender-related aspects of online media and committed to address challenges experienced by female journalists. Interviewees from OSCE missions in CA indicated that there is a prevailing female majority among journalists in Central Asia. Nevertheless, or rather because of this fact, media-related projects in the region are getting more attuned to gender mainstreaming and considerate of the challenges experienced by female journalists.

✓ **Finding 25:** Human rights considerations and analysis of the impact of media developments and freedom of expression on marginalized groups of the population have become an important aspect of the OSCE media freedom projects.

The RFoM has been approaching all its media freedom projects and initiatives from a human rights perspective. Most ExB projects of the RFoM Office elaborate on freedom of expression as a basic human right. For example, in the project "Impact of Artificial Intelligence on Freedom of Expression (2019-2022)" (Gender Marker 2), special emphasis is placed on the impact of Artificial Intelligence (AI) on female journalists and on marginalized societal groups. The project highlights the potential risk for a detrimental impact of AI on human

rights if used for commercial, political or state purpose, as well as its impact on marginalized groups of society who would be at a higher risk due to the technologies' potential for scaling of discrimination.

In Bosnia and Herzegovina, the media portfolio is under the Human Rights Section of the Mission, which encompasses work on three fundamental types of freedoms: 1) freedom of the media, 2) freedom of religion and belief, and 3) freedom of assembly and association. This co-location has enabled a close collaboration and alignment of the media projects of the Mission with its work on other human rights and gender-related issues. In addition, MtBiH has built a long-standing relationship with the Ministry for Human Rights and Refugees. Representatives of the Ministry highlighted the importance of their collaboration with the OSCE and the work done by the Mission on human rights aspects of the media and efforts to register and track cases of discrimination against journalists in the country.

Most OSCE missions in SEE also work with ethnic minorities and marginalized groups of society in an effort to increase their media literacy and mitigate the potential impact of hate speech, disinformation or discrimination when it comes to freedom of expression. The OSCE Presence in Albania, for example, has translated important freedom of expression documents and studies in several languages to make them accessible to the Macedonian and Greek minorities in the country. Similarly, in Bosnia and Herzegovina, the OSCE Mission has started translating its publications in Bosnian, Croatian and Serbian.

The Mission to Serbia has been working closely with other OSCE field operations in the region, exchanging information and best practices related to the integration of national minorities, to strengthening of non-discrimination policies and addressing hate crimes. The Mission has also supported Serbian-Albanian youth initiatives through exchanges between journalism students.



6. Conclusions

Without any claim to exhaustiveness, and based on the approved Terms of Reference (ToR), this evaluation covered the OSCE programmatic work on FoM and FoE. One of its focuses was on the ExB projects delivered by the RFoM under the second Unified Budget objective, namely: “To promote OSCE media freedom commitments and assist participating States in their understanding and compliance, including strengthening of pluralism in the media.” Its other focus was on the media work of the OSCE’s field operations, zooming in on their media capacity building programmatic work and initiatives.

Based on the analysis of evidence derived through desk research, online and in-person interviews with OSCE staff, media partners and stakeholders, as well as three field visits to missions in SEE, this chapter brings together some broader reflections on OSCE’s contributions to FoM and FoE.

OSCE’s Comparative Advantage

CONCLUSION 1: The RFoM and OSCE field operations possess a unique comparative advantage for advancing media freedom and freedom of expression in the participating States based on their comprehensive approach to security, as well as their ability and expertise to design, plan and deliver programmes and projects tailored to the pressing media freedom problems identified through ongoing monitoring of the media situation in the OSCE region.

The OSCE considers media freedom and freedom of expression as fundamental freedoms and human rights, and contributing factors for the security and economic prosperity in the region. The OSCE political clout, comprehensive approach to security, and ability to mobilize different executive structures (RFoM, FOs, ODIHR, HCNM), involving the three security dimensions (politico-military, economic and environmental, and human security) in the design and delivery of media-related projects and initiatives, are among OSCE’s distinguishing characteristics. The link between media freedom and other types of freedoms and security is gaining increasing attention in the complex political environment making OSCE’s contributions to FOM and FoE unique. These are also some of the factors giving the RFoM and the OSCE field operations a major comparative advantage among other international and regional organizations.

Effectiveness of OSCE’s work on media freedom

CONCLUSION 2: The evaluation found that the RFoM’s and FOs’ media freedom programmatic work has been implemented as planned, and activities and outputs are appreciated by governments, media providers, civil society organizations and journalist associations in the participating States. It has been hard, however, to measure the effectiveness and impact of OSCE’s media freedom work in the absence of clearly defined outcome indicators, as well as in a changing media and political landscape in the participating States. While the broadly formulated RFoM UB objectives and expected outcomes are allowing for greater flexibility in the design and implementation of media freedom-related

projects and initiatives, the evaluation found a growing imbalance between expected results under each objective, the increasing media freedom challenges and needs of participating States, and the actual human and financial resources of RFoM to effectively address these challenges. It was also noted that the RFoM's expected outcomes and outputs under its second UB objective have not changed since 2016 despite the changing nature of the media freedom-related challenges. The lack of clearly defined outcomes and key performance indicators for most ExB projects made it difficult to assess their actual effectiveness or impact.

Desk research and review of RFoM's ExB project reports and self-evaluations indicated that the RFoM is covering a wide range of FoM and FoE topics, addressing the evolving challenges and needs in the OSCE region, such as safety of journalists, safety of female journalists online, impact of artificial intelligence, media information literacy, etc. The evaluation could not determine the actual impact of RFoM's projects and interventions in the absence of key performance indicators, monitoring data or a strategic framework with priorities and targets against which the thematic coverage and outcome performance could be assessed. The RFoM has also not conducted any decentralized evaluations of its major projects over the past five years that could shed some light on actual outcomes and impact.

The evaluation noted that many missions, with their different mandates than that of the RFoM, have developed three-year media strategies, aligned with the missions' priorities, with identified media trends and potential needs of the host countries, and most

importantly, commensurate with their human and financial resources and capacity to deliver. In some cases, these mid-term strategies have been used to leverage expertise and resources across mission departments and security dimensions, including cost-sharing for certain joint initiatives (e.g. politico-military and human dimension departments in PiA and MtSerbia jointly involved in the media-related trainings of the police and prosecutors). A few missions have also commissioned decentralized evaluations of their media freedom projects (e.g., MtSkopje, MtSerbia and MtKosovo), which have gleaned evidence about their effectiveness and impact.

Coherence of OSCE's media freedom work

CONCLUSION 3: Even though the RFoM and the field operations are addressing media freedom challenges from different perspectives (e.g. human rights and policy focused for the RFoM vs capacity building for FOs), there is an unexplored potential for greater complementarity between the two approaches, and for leveraging synergies in a whole-of-OSCE context.

The internal coherence within the RFoM Office and FOs' whole-of-mission approaches to media freedom and freedom of expression were identified as important prerequisites for the efficient and effective delivery of the OSCE's programmatic work. The RFoM's management has made some good strides towards strengthening the internal office co-ordination of tasks and processes by assigning clear roles, country and thematic responsibilities to each staff member. However, the lack of clear external communication guidelines or a

communication strategy was identified as an area in need for further improvement by RFoM staff.

While liaison and monitoring responsibilities have been assigned to RFoM staff for each OSCE field operation, and there are frequent communications between the RFoM and FOs' media officers, especially during the preparation of regional media conferences, there have been no attempts to explore complementarities or leverage synergies and expertise towards joint projects and initiatives.

The evaluation found evidence of good coordination and attempts to avoid duplication of efforts between OSCE field operations in SEE and other international organizations working on FoM and FoE in the countries or the region.

CONCLUSION 4: There are untapped opportunities for field operations to address media freedom challenges from a regional perspective, by mobilizing the expertise, human and financial resources of several missions for a greater impact.

The evaluation found that countries in SEE, and particularly in the Western Balkans are experiencing similar FoM and FoE challenges and needs. In Central Asia, the influence of neighbouring countries was also reported to be strong in terms of following some good practices in raising media freedom and freedom of expression awareness, and fostering changes to the media practices and legislations in the countries.

This renders the exploration of opportunities for joint regional initiatives worthwhile, as well as for the development of joint strategies for attracting the attention and potential funding from donors interested in supporting projects with greater impact.

Sustainability

CONCLUSION 5: The RFoM and field operations have planned for sustainability in all projects, however the actual durability of achieved results remains to be seen with time.

The RFoM and field operations have used different approaches towards ensuring the sustainability of their projects and interventions, such as but not limited to: building upon and scaling up of project results through a second/follow-up phase or continuation of an initiative, involvement of CSOs through implementing partner agreements (IPAs) and transferring ownership and responsibility for results, training of trainers sessions, developing multi-year university journalism curricula, etc.

Besides factors contributing to sustainability, the evaluation identified factors diminishing the longevity of achieved results. Some of these factors are internal to the OSCE, e.g. human and financial resource constraints; high staff turnover and loss of institutional memory or expertise. Among the external factors hindering the sustainability and duration of project results, are the frequent changes in the senior government cadres in some countries, changes in the priorities of the government of the day, or lack of political will to be persistent with

the implementation of media strategies and media legislation in a politically volatile or sensitive context.

Despite these objective challenges, the evaluation found ample evidence of the patience, persistence, diplomacy and tact, and most of all – of the high professionalism, knowledge and expertise with which RFoM and FOS' staff are supporting pS with the implementation of the OSCE FoM and FoE commitments.

To the extent possible, this evaluation has acknowledged the commendable work done by the RFoM and OSCE field operations, and has documented some of their most important contributions to FoM and FoE. The evaluation, could not, however, assess the impact and sustainability of the OSCE media freedom-related projects in the specific context of each country. This can however be done through decentralized evaluations of the larger, more complex and multi-year media programmes. The 2022 OSCE Evaluation Policy provides guidance for the commissioning of decentralized evaluation and the potential benefits for the implementing executive structures.

CONCLUSION 6: The RFoM Office and OSCE field operations have streamlined gender and human rights considerations both in the design and implementation of their media projects and initiatives.

The fact that a gender marker has been assigned to each project, even when it is marked as level "1", is indicative that gender mainstreaming has been considered early in the project design phase. Gender-related aspects have also been considered in the implementation

phases of most projects. Similarly, approaching media from a human rights perspective has helped both the RFoM Office and field operations to design media programmes and initiatives that directly or indirectly address the media literacy needs and challenges experienced by ethnic minorities, religious communities, people with disabilities, or marginalized groups of media consumers.



7. Recommendations

Based on the evaluation findings and conclusions, the following **recommendations are made for the RFoM.**

1. Develop a mid- or longer-term strategic framework outlining a multi-year strategic planning based on identified priorities, with clear targets and performance indicators.

This strategic framework should link UB objectives with PO priorities, and align these with available budgets and human resources, i.e. be used for resource mobilization as well. Also, the RFoM needs to develop clear performance indicators in order to monitor and report on achieved results.

2. Develop and implement a Communications Strategy to improve internal and external information sharing.

- Clear **internal communication guidelines** will ensure a more effective information sharing and collaboration within the Office.
- An **external communication strategy**, will support the consistent messaging and pro-active raising of the profile of the Office and its cutting-edge programmatic work, also contributing to knowledge management and sharing across the organization, with pS delegations and relevant external partners.

3. Identify synergies and plan activities that leverage expertise and resources with field operations towards a coherent whole-of-OSCE approach to FoM and FoE in the OSCE region.

- The RFoM and FOs approach media freedom from different perspectives; nevertheless, there are unexplored complementarities that can be leveraged to increase the visibility and credibility of OSCE's media freedom work, and to help mobilise FOs' expertise at a time of diminishing financial resources. Potential activities can become part of RFoM's strategic framework, while the promotion of such could be included in the RFoM communication strategy.

4. Commission decentralized evaluations for the larger and multi-year ExB projects (e.g., SOFJO and Artificial Intelligence) in line with the new OSCE Evaluation Policy.⁴¹



8. Good practices and Considerations for FOs

Resource mobilization

OSCE field operations, with the support of the OSCE Secretariat, are advised to explore opportunities for resource mobilization on a regional basis.

At a time of decreasing financial resources and increasing complexity of the media landscape, field operations are advised to increase the coordination of their programming activities on a regional basis in order to identify opportunities for joint media programmes that leverage the expertise and available resources across several missions. Working closely with the RFoM office and the Secretariat will help missions to focus on priority areas for participating States and to consolidate efforts for obtaining donor funding to address these areas.

Knowledge management

OSCE field operations are advised to periodically share with the RFoM Office and among themselves good practices and success stories related to the management and implementation of specific FoM and FoE projects and initiatives.

This will contribute to better knowledge management across the OSCE, to leveraging of synergies and whole-of organization

approaches to media challenges in the OSCE region, as well as to preventing the loss of institutional memory under a high staff turnover.

The evaluation identified a number of good practices for enhancing the efficiency and effectiveness of media-related projects and initiatives. These practices can be replicated by more missions or used as an inspiration for innovative approaches tailored to the specificity of a country or region.

- 1. Applying a whole-of-mission approach to media-related problems:*** Media freedom and freedom of expression are becoming more complex and interrelated with other human rights, economic and security issues. OSCE field operations should apply the OSCE comprehensive approach to security, leveraging relevant expertise from the three dimension in the design and implementation of media projects and activities. A whole-of-mission approach has resulted in **joint projects and cost-sharing** in some missions.
- 2. Development of mid-term strategic plans:*** Some missions have developed rolling three-year strategic (“outlook”) plans for their media-related activities, which have helped them achieve higher planning efficiency, including a better preparedness for timely applications for donor funding.
- 3. Using OSCE’s convening power to strengthen international co-operation on media freedom and freedom of expression.*** The OSCE is well-positioned to strengthen the co-operation

and co-ordination among international organizations working on issues related to media freedom, freedom of expression and media literacy in OSCE participating States. Representatives of international organizations have underscored the OSCE convening power and its ability to establish well-functioning working groups bringing together state and civil society actors. Co-ordination of OSCE projects with the media-related work of other international or regional organizations helps not only to avoid duplication of effort, but also to find niche opportunities for the OSCE to have a greater impact and for scaling up on achieved results.

- 4. Use of Implementing Partnership Agreements (IPAs):** Some OSCE missions have successfully used IPAs for the implementation of major media projects. Such IPAs have proven to be particularly helpful when a mission does not have sufficient internal capacity and specific expertise to implement a larger ExB-funded project. Evidence from successfully implemented projects indicates that by giving the implementing organizations a sense of product ownership, IPAs increase their visibility, as well as their sense of responsibility and willingness to deliver a high-quality product, which ultimately increases the chances for sustainability of results. While helpful and effective, the use of IPAs needs to be discussed and approved beforehand by the donors.



9. Management Response and Action Plan

The first comprehensive evaluation of the OSCE's programmatic work on freedom of the media provides important findings and guidance for the further strengthening of media freedom in the OSCE region as an essential pillar to democracy and comprehensive security.

Despite operating in an increasingly challenging environment, with ever more complex tasks and unchanged human and financial resources, the RFoM has undertaken continued efforts also beyond the time scope of the evaluation to improve the effectiveness and sustainability of its programmatic work, while preserving the flexibility required to react to a fast-changing environment.

In line with the evolving OSCE standards the RFoM has and will continue to constantly improve design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of its ExB projects. Participation of all project related staff in relevant training programs or making effective use of PESU project assessments will be continued.

In times of limited resources the RFoM will, where possible, continue and further enhance close coordination with OSCE field presences and other regional and international actors in implementing the Mandate and achieving the set objectives.

Area/Issue	Recommendation	Client	Accept (Yes/No/Partially)	Implementation Plan (if not accepted, add managements comments)	Implementation Date (estimate)
Strategic Planning	1) Develop a mid- or longer-term strategic framework outlining a multi-year strategic planning based on identified priorities, with clear targets and performance indicators.	RFoM	Partially	<p>The media freedom environment in the OSCE region is fast evolving and requiring a high degree of flexibility and adaptability in the work of the RFoM. In addition, taking into account that the RFoM mandate is a personal mandate, changes of mandate holders and vacancy periods constituted additional challenges to long term-planning.</p> <p>On the occasion of the 25th anniversary of the RFoM mandate, the Representative, building on the work of an Advisory Group of Eminent Experts on Freedom of the Media (AGEEFOM) has published the report “Can there be Security without media freedom”, which was both taking stock of current challenges and provided a broad range of thematic recommendations, which will provide a basis for the future work of the institution.</p> <p>The RFoM aims to continue this process, with a broader network of academia and civil society representatives to regularly consult and collaborate with in a structured dialogue on safeguarding media freedom, and its important role for peace and security. Details and a work plan for this further process, which are currently being elaborated, will be available by the end of the year and will provide the basis for the elaboration of a longer-term strategic framework with</p>	By end of 2024

				<p>priorities and targets to be developed in the next mandate period.</p> <p>Taking into account the fast-changing media freedom environment in the OSCE region, any strategic planning will however need to preserve the flexibility and adaptability required in the work of the RFOM.</p>	
Knowledge management/ Information Sharing	2) <i>Develop and implement a Communications Strategy to improve internal and external information sharing.</i>	RFoM	Yes	The Communication Strategy of the RFoM (from 2021) is currently under revision and will be updated to further improve public communication of the programmatic work of the institution.	By Dec. 2023
Coherence/ Whole-of-OSCE Approach	3) <i>Identify synergies and plan activities that leverage expertise and resources with field operations towards a coherent whole-of-OSCE approach to FoM and FoE in the OSCE region.</i>	RFoM	Yes	The RFOM will continue to closely coordinate its work with the OSCE field operations. E.g. the SEEMC 2023 was developed in close cooperation with OSCE field operations in the region and provided a platform for the presentation of the overall work of the OSCE in the field of FoM and FoE. Taking into account limitations in human and financial capacities, the RFOM will identify further opportunities for cooperation with a view to leveraging expertise and resources on both sides (e.g. cooperation on specific thematic work, invitation of field operation staff to RFOM events etc.) on a regular basis in the ongoing work of the institution.	By Dec. 2023
Monitoring and Evaluation	4) <i>Commission decentralized evaluations for the larger and multi-year ExB projects</i>	RFoM	Yes	In line with the new OSCE Evaluation policy decentralized evaluations for all projects above € 400.000 are already under preparation.	By end of 2023

Annex 1: List of Evaluation Findings

Finding 1: The broadly formulated RFoM Objective No 2 is seen by RFoM staff as both a strength and a challenge for the media freedom programmatic work in terms of longer-term planning and priority setting.

Finding 2: The RFoM annual UB budgets have seen only marginal increases in the non-staff costs since 2016, even though the media freedom challenges and needs of participating States have steadily increased.

Finding 3: While the scope and complexity of RFoM's media freedom work have significantly increased over the past five years, the available resources have remained unchanged.

Finding 4: The RFoM Office has implemented all ExB projects as planned, even during the COVID pandemic with some adjustments to the delivery modalities.

Finding 5: Reporting on actual outcomes and impact beyond implemented activities has been a challenge and is absent for most projects implemented between 2016 and 2021.

Finding 6: The RFoM regional media conferences in SEE were found to be particularly useful, allowing participants from several missions to share their experience and best practices, and collect creative ideas for future media freedom and media-related projects and initiatives in their respective countries.

Finding 7: In Central Asia, the media conferences were described as effective and well-attended forums, bringing together various media actors in a safe professional environment to discuss and share media development, capacity building and freedom of expression challenges and ideas.

Finding 8: All RFoM ExB projects have included sustainability considerations in the design phases, however, the actual sustainability of initiated good practices or achieved results could not be assessed by this evaluation due to a lack of sufficiently elapsed time or unavailability of outcome indicators.

Finding 9: Besides some common features, the media landscape and media challenges experienced by OSCE participating States differ across South East Europe and Central Asia, and even among countries in the same region. Each OSCE field operation has been adapting its media programmatic work to the specific host country' context and government priorities.

Finding 10: The media development and freedom of expression projects and activities of the OSCE missions in SEE and CA have been implemented as planned, with some activities being amended or postponed due to the COVID pandemic.

Finding 11: There have been some multiplier effects from the OSCE's work on media freedom associated with the creation of new and strengthening of existing partnerships with local, regional and international organizations.

Finding 12: There is an untapped potential for building regional networks and initiating regional programmatic work through resource mobilization across missions, as well as unexplored opportunities to attract donor funding to address regional media freedom and freedom of expression issues.

Finding 13: Changes in some countries' political priorities and administrative restructurings in government organizations have been among the factors affecting the timely and successful delivery of FoM projects by OSCE missions.

Finding 14: Field missions are becoming more efficient by using innovative approaches to overcome challenges related to their limited human and financial resources, or to the shrinking operational space caused by the lack of buy-in from host country authorities.

Finding 15: Through a whole-of-mission approach and cross-dimensional cooperation, OSCE missions have considerably increased the efficiency and effectiveness of their FoM work.

Finding 16: Mission staff have indicated a need for periodic media freedom related training for both new and longer-standing media programme officers, and for regular updates on FoM and FoE challenges in the OSCE region and opportunities for leveraging whole-of-OSCE synergies in addressing those challenges.

Finding 17: Regional collaboration among media programme officers from field operations in the Western Balkans were reported to be an effective way for discussing common media challenges and trends in the region, and for exchanging good practices and ideas for future programmatic work and activities.

Finding 18: Field operations are maintaining close contacts and exchange of information with international and regional organizations on media freedom and freedom of expression in the OSCE region. However, the evaluation did not find evidence of joint programming or examples of co-operation going beyond a few signed Memorandums of Understanding with IOs or joint participation in working groups.

Finding 19: All OSCE media-related projects, initiated over the past five years, have included a sustainability clause and considerations in their project proposals. However, the actual sustainability or durability of achieved results could not always be ascertained in the self-evaluations or final reports.

Finding 20: The RFoM and OSCE missions have been praised by regional and international partners, media stakeholders, government representatives, civil society organization and journalist associations for their standing presence, long-term relationships, trust, and responsiveness to media freedom challenges and needs in the participating States.

Finding 21: OSCE missions' relative lack of bureaucratic formalities was highlighted as a factor allowing missions to have greater flexibility in providing programmatic support to local media stakeholders, which other international organizations may not always have.

Finding 22: OSCE field operations in SEE are perceived by local media actors as a "safe-heaven" for journalists seeking advice and protection for their freedom of expression rights, while mission staff have been praised for being "always available, responsive and reliable when media stakeholders need advice or support".

Finding 23: While the OSCE's decentralized structure makes the organization adaptable and flexible, it may sometimes affect the image of the missions being perceived by local CSOs as their competitors for donor funding.

Finding 24: The RFoM Office and the field operations have mainstreamed gender considerations in most of their projects. Gender-equality and gender-related topics, especially those concerning the safety of female journalists, have been the focus of the OSCE's recent media-related projects and initiatives.

Finding 25: Human rights considerations and analysis of the impact of media developments and freedom of expression on marginalized groups of the population have become an important aspect of the OSCE's media related projects.

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- ³⁵ Quotes form the 2021 ,Evaluation of the ExB project "Support to Transparent and Inclusive Development of New Media Strategy"
- ³⁶ OSCE Mission to Skopje (2020) Evaluation of the project "Support Freedom of the Media and the Safety of Journalists."
- ³⁷ At the time of the ET visit to Bosnia and Herzegovina, the MtBiH Media Unit had only one National Media Programme Officer in expectation of the appointment of one international staff member.
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- ³⁹ <https://www.osce.org/mission-to-bosnia-and-herzegovina/392342>
- ⁴⁰ Score 1: Gender is mainstreamed to a small extent (e.g. participation); Score 2: Gender is mainstreamed to a significant extent or at all stages of the project: Score 3: Gender equality is the main objective of the project. A score of "0" (or no score indicated) is used only for projects with no reference to gender equality.
- ⁴¹ OSCE (2022), OSCE Evaluation Policy, Section 6, p. 12. <https://www.osce.org/oio/535323>



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