

FROM DEMOCRACY DEFENDERS TO FOREIGN AGENTS?

Needs assessment of Central European
and South-East European civil society organisations

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ABOUT

This publication was compiled as a part of the project “*Countering disinformation in the V4 and the Balkan region: Mapping needs, building capacity, and generating civic activism*” supported by the US Department of State and implemented in eight countries - Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Macedonia, Montenegro, Poland, Serbia and Slovakia.

One of the project’s aims is to increase communication and outreach capacities of civil society organisations that focus on countering disinformation, supporting media literacy and increasing public awareness of crucial topics leading to a more active civil society.

To do so, the eight partner organisations conducted interviews with at least three other civil society organisations to identify their key obstacles and needs in this respect. The questions focused on identification of weak points and areas for improvement, on awareness of existing tools, on best and worst practices stemming from the organisations’ experience and the recognition of external factors that might be contributing to any successes and failures.

The answers collected by our partners enabled us to fully grasp what is needed at the level of civil society actors in terms of more effective communication and outreach. Apart from this report, the findings served as a basis for the development of a curriculum and agenda for training tailored specifically to the civil society organisations’ (CSOs) needs, which will take place in September 2018 in Skopje and Bratislava.

RECOMMENDATIONS

FOR DONORS AND OTHER STAKEHOLDERS

1. Provide communication training - the higher the communication capacities of the organisation, the wider the reach of their activities and impact.
2. Dedicate resources for graphic designing and social media tools - sponsored content, annual fees for graphic tools, license purchase of software for graphic development and video-creation.
3. Before providing resources for professional software, carry out training for relevant staff members in developing visual messaging / videos.
4. Provide long-term or annual grants focusing on the same issue. This enables organisations to develop capacity and expertise in a particular field, which they can pursue and build upon for several years.
5. Provide guidance to CSOs or their representatives on crisis management in case of cyber-attacks, concerted media/information warfare attacks or massive coordinated activity by trolls or other hostile actors.

FOR CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANISATIONS

1. Dedicate attention and energy to develop a communication strategy. Defining goals and milestones, as well as the means to reach them, will make it easier to communicate with the audience, also in the case of staff changes.
2. Develop a protocol for transfer of know-how and go-to documents for the next generation of your colleagues summarising your experience and lessons learned.
3. Identify and use free easy-to-use online content production tools, (canva.com, infogr.am, etc.).
4. Follow social media trends and updates by subscribing to digital marketing companies' newsletters - these often constitute a free and accessible source of tips, which can quickly maximize the reach of your outputs.
5. Establish cooperation with a PR/marketing agency or IT companies that are often capable of providing pro-bono tailored training.
6. Think big and try to connect and join forces with other actors from various social spheres - many institutions and actors might have similar goals.
7. Network - a lot of international initiatives whether on digital communication or debunking have been established in previous years - join their ranks and become involved in an international community.
8. Develop protection measures and crisis-management scenarios for cyber-attacks, concerted media/information warfare attacks or massive coordinated activity by trolls or other hostile actors.
9. Create your own blog on an already-established platform or online portal, which already has a large and constant number of visitors (e.g. Medium), where you can promote your outputs and attract many readers.

CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANISATIONS: NEEDS AND CHALLENGES

Research related to civil society organisations is often inspirational and motivating on one hand and frustrating on the other hand. While there are plenty of organisations with relevant purpose, aims and dedication, the difficulties they must face and deal with largely restrict the possible and feasible activities and accomplishments. The walls are created both by external and internal factors, with the former usually heavily affecting the latter. The following organisations joined forces to identify the most pressing needs and challenges of the CSOs in the region:

LEADER AND EDITOR



GLOBSEC, Slovakia

PARTNERS AND AUTHORS



ALFA Centar, Montenegro



Asociace pro mezinárodní otázky (Association for International Affairs),
Czech Republic

AMO.CZ



Centar za politološka istraživanja Filozofskog fakulteta,
Bosnia and Herzegovina



Euro-Atlantic Council of Macedonia, Macedonia



Fondacija Centar za međunarodne I bezbednosne poslove
(International and Security Affairs Centre – ISAC Foundation), Serbia



Fundacja Centrum Analiz Propagandy i Dezinformacji
(Centre for Propaganda and Disinformation Analysis), Poland



Political Capital, Hungary

EXTERNAL FACTORS

Disinformation narratives and conspiracy theories spread by political representatives increase the credibility of disinformation outlets and combined with the increasing attempts to control the public broadcasters, they pose a serious threat to the very survival of liberal democracy and one of its essential elements - civil society organisations.

None of the analysed countries have a dedicated and whole of government approach to counter disinformation. Most of the campaigns and activities of the NGO sector are directed at the general public to raise awareness about disinformation and disrupt their spread, but they lack constructive communication strategies to reach a wider audience. Furthermore, prejudice against NGOs and an overwhelming flow of disinformation about them being constantly spread on many fronts reduces the impact and outreach of the CSOs' activities.

CENTRAL EUROPE

The field and hostility towards NGOs differs between the Czech Republic and Slovakia on one side and Hungary and Poland on the other side.

In the Czech Republic and Slovakia, there is a generally open and positive climate for the civil society organisations. The issues of disinformation, media literacy and education are currently highly debated and relevant in current public discussion in the country. Some CSOs even actively communicate and cooperate with selected representatives of the government and public administration to widen and strengthen the impact.

Despite the presence of several civil society organisations active in the field of disinformation and media literacy in Poland, a scope and possibilities of their activities are rather constrained by a strict implementation of the legal code. In Hungary, the current political

environment is quite hostile to civil society organisations. The main "opponents" of the CSOs are generally the pro-governmental entities spreading government narratives. Many organisations are being constantly harassed by smear campaigns, being stigmatised as foreign agents and portrayed as the enemies of the nation. Therefore, it is very challenging to handle these attacks properly in the online communication space.

However, similar tendencies are possible to observe across the region. George Soros has been labelled as a major negative force by populist politicians and pro-Kremlin actors alike in the Visegrad countries. Hungary's anti-Soros NGO law, a law imposing strict restrictions on NGOs dealing with migration and that receive foreign funding had set a precedence in the region and became an inspiration for many who would want to impose similar measures in their own countries.

Equally concerning is the high level of support for conspiracy theories and particular disinformation narratives in this region. The data from the GLOBSEC Trends 2018¹ report clearly shows that conspiracy theories are widespread among Central Europeans - on average, 40% of Central Europeans believe that secret groups seek to establish a totalitarian world order and 39% agree with the anti-Semitic conspiracy statement that Jews have too much power and secretly control many governments and institutions around the world. Since George Soros as a Jewish billionaire philanthropist supports via his foundations activities of CSOs and policy changes within the whole region, the animosities and mistrust are being applied towards the recipients to such funding. In addition, it is alarming that more and more high level political representatives use and adopt disinformation narratives; undermine the credibility of investigative journalism and the work of CSOs.

¹ Milo, Klingová, Hajdu (2018) GLOBSEC Trends 2018, GLOBSEC Policy Institute, <https://www.globsec.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/GLOBSEC-Trends-2018.pdf>

EXTERNAL FACTORS

SOUTHEASTERN EUROPE

The campaigns and initiatives directed at countering disinformation and propaganda practices are limited both in their reach and effectiveness because of several factors.

The attitude towards CSOs in the region is generally hostile. Their activities are often hindered through editorial policies of the mainstream media, which often show aversion towards CSOs, either considering them as irrelevant or neglecting them on purpose.

In some countries (Serbia for example), mainstream media are government-controlled and disseminate particular pro-governmental narratives (including disinformation), supported and further disseminated by an “army” of trolls.

The representatives of CSOs and their activities are thus often perceived as mercenaries of foreign actors spreading propaganda. The media landscape, especially its online segment, is full of hate speech, which often targets CSOs particularly. The ignorance and/or hostility of mainstream media contributes to the lack of concern about the CSOs’ content among the population in general, including the youth, which makes it difficult to attract attention and convey the message to a desired audience. A lack of public interest was identified as one of the key factors limiting the impact in Montenegro. In addition, hate speech based on ethnic divisions was identified as a serious problem in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

This is connected to low media literacy, which makes the population particularly vulnerable to manipulation, myths and propaganda. These are being spread by both pro-Kremlin outlets and, in many cases, by the mainstream media, which can be under undue political influence. In addition, independent media or the few CSOs do not have the capacity to produce their own content or debunk the distorting one automatically taken by the mainstream media

following on from the Sputnik news agency and other pro-Kremlin agencies.

In Macedonia, the external environment is less hostile, nevertheless, campaigns and initiatives directed at countering disinformation and propaganda practices are limited both in their reach and effectiveness. The lack of multisectoral cooperation is identifiable in all countries concerned.

INTERNAL OBSTACLES

Naturally, the majority of the difficulties faced by the CSOs come down to insufficient funding. The lack of financial resources implies lack of personnel in general. As a result, many CSOs rely on interns and volunteers who, although often skilful and dedicated, fluctuate. This makes them unable to develop long-term functional processes and rules, especially when it comes to communication.

Moreover, while the spheres of marketing, communication and graphical design are quite resourceful, the CSOs struggle to hire qualified and experienced graphic designers, communicators or marketers capable of substantial improvements of organisations' outreach due to uncompetitive payment levels. The same principle applies for outsourcing. The fees for these services generally surpass the organisations' budget, thus are usually affordable in specific circumstances only.

One could argue that the internet age simply provides free unlimited resources to learn any possible skills one needs to improve the standard of their work. However, the lack of human resources also implies a lack of time. Many CSO employees must have several hats and functions to cover for financial, human resources or communication departments. As a result, very limited time is left for self-development.

Nevertheless, as there is a visible dedication to achieve desired goals, there is also a strong awareness of the need for effective communication with the target audience. The possibilities to do so have largely improved with online communication and freely available and easy-to-use creative tools. In general, the CSOs are aware of these and expressed real determination in using them. However, an expert helping hand is always welcomed to improve the skilfulness, efficiency, and effectivity.

In more concrete terms, the organisations mainly identified the following barriers in communication:

- ▶ **Overall communication strategy:** Lack of overall communication and PR strategy, especially among more research-based think tank organisations.
- ▶ **Social media:** Tailoring the language to reach a target audience; low awareness of “trends”; insufficient promotion of events; inability to measure effectiveness of the messages.
- ▶ **Reaching beyond the “bubble”:** struggling to reach a wider audience except for the usual suspects, i.e. critically-thinking parts of the society
- ▶ **Public-friendliness:** Struggling to “sell” the analytical content to the desired expert audience as well as communicate in a public-friendly manner.
- ▶ **Disinformation-related skills:** Difficulties with countering trolls online and communicating the counter-narratives.
- ▶ **Visual communication:** How to make visually appealing materials without dedicating too much time?

COUNTRY REPORTS

CZECH REPUBLIC

Asociace pro mezinárodní otázky

<http://www.amo.cz/en/>

Stuzak – studenti zakum

<https://stuzak.cz/>

Demagog.cz

<https://demagog.cz/>

Zvolsi.info

<http://zvolsi.info/>

BACKGROUND SITUATION AND EXTERNAL FACTORS

There is a generally open and positive climate for the civil society organisations which dedicate their work to the areas of media and information literacy, critical thinking, fact-checking, disinformation and propaganda. These issues are currently highly debated and relevant in the current public discussions in the country.

The most pressing problems of NGOs come from the lack of institutionalisation and professionalisation of the organisations (fluctuation of volunteers, lack of financial resources and a lack of rules and procedures).

STRONG AND WEAK POINTS

Organisations have rather well-developed content and strong messaging, but they struggle with the form. During their communication, the CSOs primarily struggle with the effect of social bubbles, which limits them in reaching out to a wider audience that might be more sceptical of their work.

Organisations focusing on the activities with strong face-to-face interaction have a problem with defining and reaching their audience online. Their lack of visibility among the target audience could be solved by leading a public campaign in support of the initiative.

RELEVANT EXAMPLES OF SUCCESS

- ▶ Demagog.cz successfully reached beyond the “bubble” on social media thanks to cooperation with media on the occasion of elections - had an opportunity to present its analyses on air, in addition to privileged access to the online media and TV stations. More visibility was also gained thanks to a reference by the Czech president Milos Zeman during a presidential debate.
- ▶ For Zvolsi.info, it was the most shared post on Facebook related to 1 April - the only day, when people really use critical thinking on social media.

AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT - NEEDS

The CSOs' audience collects most information about their work from social media, therefore, they are interested in improving their online and digital skills as well as work with social media. Moreover, due to the problem of reaching beyond the social media “bubble”, the CSOs would welcome help with communications strategies and practical skills to attract wider audiences.

COUNTRY REPORTS

HUNGARY

Political Capital

<http://www.politicalcapital.hu/>

Atlatzo.hu

<https://atlatzo.hu/>

Mérték Media Monitor

<http://mertek.eu/en/>

Transparency International, Hungary

<https://transparency.hu/en/>

BACKGROUND SITUATION AND EXTERNAL FACTORS

The current political environment is quite hostile to civil society organisations. The main “opponents” of the CSOs are generally political representatives and the pro-governmental entities spreading government narratives. Many organisations are being constantly harassed by smear campaigns, being stigmatised as the foreign agents and portrayed as the enemies of the nation. Therefore, it is very challenging to handle these attacks properly not only in the online communication space, but also in terms of legal and administrative obstructions.

STRONG AND WEAK POINTS

Organisations are generally capable of using Facebook and building a strong base of followers on social media. Despite claiming to know their audience very well, one organisation finds it hard regardless to target their messages properly. Others felt they were able to communicate and engage with their social media audience effectively but will welcome any improvements.

Lack of a communications strategy was identified as one of the key weak points among the CSOs interviewed.

Despite strong writing skills, expertise and high quality outputs, the CSOs struggle with the delivery of complex messages to the audience.

It is particularly hard to communicate them in an easy-to-understand and engaging manner.

RELEVANT EXAMPLES OF SUCCESS

- ▶ Átlátszó.hu created a successful crowdfunding campaign thanks to a group of professionals (a dramaturg who wrote the script, professional actors, director, video team).
- ▶ Transparency International created a successful campaign thanks to the involvement of a well-known public persona, a Hungarian actor, through engaging him in a video. Cooperation secured more than 200k views on YouTube, which is a great improvement considering a usual average of 15k views. Moreover, the cooperation also created interest from mainstream media which generated further public interest.

AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT - NEEDS

A lack of a communications strategy due to the missing capacities to create, plan and execute it was identified as one of the key needs.

Secondly, visual content is being outsourced in almost all cases as none of the organisations have an in-house graphic designers or video editors. Simple visual training would thus be useful for everyone involved, including the introduction of online tools. The same applies for the needs in data visualisation - infographics.

Thirdly, each CSO would find it useful to improve in defining and reaching the right audience. Related to that, the formulation of messages in an easy-to-understand manner is a must in the improvement of engagement with the audience and widening a current audience. Effective communication vis-a-vis trolls would be appreciated likewise.

COUNTRY REPORTS

POLAND

Fundacja Centrum Analiz Propagandy i Dezinformacji (Center for Propaganda and Disinformation Analysis Foundation, CAPD)
<https://capd.pl>

Stowarzyszenie Demagog, projekt Akademia Fact-Checkingu (Demagog Association, project Academy of Fact-Checking)
<http://demagog.org.pl/>

Fundacja Reporterów
<http://fundacjareporterow.org/>

Grupa Defence24
<http://www.defence24.pl/>

Fundacja ePaństwo
<https://epf.org.pl/>

BACKGROUND SITUATION AND EXTERNAL FACTORS

While the environment for the CSOs working in the field of media literacy is generally positive, activities aimed at countering disinformation and fact-checking might face obstacles due to a strong polarisation of Polish society and the Polish political scene. Strict implementation of legislation - Article 212 of the Criminal Code on defamation and the Article 23 of the Civil Code on the infringement of personal rights - forces researchers to resort to debunking false information anonymously for fear of being sued for libel.

The most pressing problem for NGOs in Poland is the lack of funding for media and information monitoring activities. One of the reasons might be that since 2016 – following the implementation of a new media law - the heads of public TV and radio broadcasters have been appointed by the government.

STRONG AND WEAK POINTS

CSOs have very little to no data regarding general information consumption and the youth behaviour on social media. Consequently, it is

difficult to effectively reach out to the youth, as well as to other specific audiences. Moreover, when compared to large media enterprises or outlets, the lack of human resources and expert capacities in CSOs limit the ability to react quickly, verify information and create various forms of reader-friendly outputs. Therefore, the CSOs struggle to deliver complex messages in a way that would be attractive and understandable to both their specific audience and the wider public.

The lack of communication strategy and in-house professionals responsible for communication on social media has been identified as the top weakness by the interviewed CSOs.

RELEVANT EXAMPLES OF SUCCESS

- ▶ Constant and engaging interaction with audience on social media that builds and maintains relationship.
- ▶ Proactive approach in the form of a newsletter disseminated by the Demagog Association to the local CSOs and the general public.

AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT - NEEDS

All CSOs have a good basic knowledge of and are interested in new trends in digital communication. Therefore, skills which need improvement include advanced skills on social media, the ability to create visual content (including infographics and presentations) and creating and processing videos. CSOs have a limited budget for such services and thus they rarely such work. Therefore, a hands-on training on visual content creation would be useful.

In addition, the lack of communication strategy, resulting from missing staff capacities to create, plan and execute, has been identified as one of the key points that need improvement. CSOs expressed their will to develop a communication strategy which would enable them to effectively communicate with their audience.

COUNTRY REPORTS

SLOVAKIA

GLOBSEC

<https://www.globsec.org/>

Demagog.sk

<http://www.demagog.sk/>

Euro-Atlantic Center

<http://www.eac.sk/en/>

Transparency International Slovakia

<http://transparency.sk/sk/>

BACKGROUND SITUATION AND EXTERNAL FACTORS

As the CSO landscape is quite widely developed in the country, the organisations often struggle with increased competition when it comes to attracting both possible donors and audience. Moreover, the political situation strongly influences the popularity of communication activities and the public's interest in their activities. For example, during the government crisis in early 2018, the interest in activities and outputs which touched, commented on or were related to the political situation, was visibly higher than usual. Representatives of CSOs are also often targets of hate speech and are labelled as foreign agents controlled by George Soros. Such attitudes were voiced by the representatives of the far-right extremist political party as well as hinted at by the former prime minister Robert Fico.

STRONG AND WEAK POINTS

A high disproportion between dedicated energy on one side and final results and outreach on the other is sensible among the organisations. Communication strategies and guidelines are often lacking in teams due to a high fluctuation of employees or volunteer-based work. As a result, a lot of online content is produced on a basis of trial and error. One of the strongest points is the ability to produce professional and high quality content. The downside is a subsequent lack of interest and

ability to “tell the story” - framing complicated topics in a simple manner. This applies both to reaching out to the wider public and journalists.

RELEVANT EXAMPLES OF SUCCESS

- ▶ Demagog.sk identified posts using humour and directly related to current political situations as the most popular, together with events which were organised with other partners, which enabled them to dedicate more resources to sponsored content.
- ▶ Transparency International Slovakia's successes are mostly related to stories or corruption scandals it unveiled and that triggered emotions among the public. Their transparency rankings of municipalities and/or state-government companies and open data portals are very successful.
- ▶ GLOBSEC conducted an innovative online campaign using top Slovak video bloggers with over 1.2 million views on YouTube and over 4 million reached on social media.

AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT - NEEDS

Widening the audience (beyond critical thinkers and people actively interested in politics) is a challenge for all the CSOs interviewed. As the organisations generally avoid sensationalism in communication, they regard it as more difficult to reach the wider public when competing with other online content that does not adhere to strong principles of neutrality and political correctness. Therefore, effective storytelling and public-friendly communication is a skill identified as needed among all.

Moreover, due to a high fluctuation or volunteering of staff, CSOs often lack guidelines that would ensure the transfer of know how should key personnel suddenly change. Guidelines would be welcome both in the area of PR and overall communication strategy.



COUNTRY REPORTS

Visualisation of outputs (creation of images, gifs, videos) is recognised as key in attracting public attention when promoting a cause, an output or an event, yet the staff often lack the time and skills to get creative. They often find it time-consuming and difficult to develop visual content able to convey the desired message, while also facing difficulties with finding appropriate images to use without paying the fees of image banks.

COUNTRY REPORTS

BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA

Centar za politološka istraživanja Filozofskog fakulteta (CPIFF)

<http://cpi.ff.sve-mo.ba>

Centar za istraživačko novinarstvo (CIN)

www.cin.ba

Centar za sigurnosne studije

www.css.ba

Demokratska inicijativa mladih

<https://www.facebook.com/dimsirokibrijeg/>

Savjet omladinskih organizacija Banja Luka

(Council of Youth Organisations Banja Luka)

<http://www.soobl.org/>

Restart Srpska

<http://www.restartsrpska.org/>

Omladinska novinska asocijacija u BiH

<http://karike.ba>

Mediacentar Sarajevo

www.media.ba

Centar za razvoj medija i analize

<http://www.account.ba/stranica/kontakt>

UPSMedia

<https://www.upsmedia.ba/>

BACKGROUND SITUATION AND EXTERNAL FACTORS

The situation is generally hostile towards CSOs. Their activities are often hindered through editorial policies of the mainstream media, which often demonstrates aversion towards CSOs, either because they consider them irrelevant or block them on purpose. Ignorance of mainstream media contributes to the lack of concern about the CSOs' content among the population in general, including the youth. As a result, there is a lack of awareness of propaganda in media. Individuals and organisations dealing with this issue are forced to work alone and are, for now, not well connected. Lack of knowledge is prevalent among young people who lack mechanisms to

identify propaganda and disinformation in the media and on social networks.

Due to the negative reputation of NGOs in society, they are often perceived in pejorative terms as non-serious and incapable of an important contribution to society. The media system, especially its online segment, is full of hate speech, which often targets CSOs in particular.

STRONG AND WEAK POINTS

The balance between the CSOs' aims and the interests of the target audience was identified as the biggest problem. The CSOs generally publish high quality content with added value for society but struggle to "sell it", especially to a young audience. Several organisations constitute their writing skills as a strong point, some are capable of creative visual content, but reaching a desired audience remains the main struggle.

RELEVANT EXAMPLES OF SUCCESS

- ▶ Good connections and cooperation with the media, especially with online media.
- ▶ Proactive approach to the audience so they would constantly follow or read their content.
- ▶ Centar za istraživačko novinarstvo mentioned an example of their story about money laundry in one bank which no one in the B & H media space wanted to publish.
- ▶ Publish success stories, achievements of individuals who fulfil their missions despite a non-enabling environment. Positive stories are published through Community radio stations - audio, video, photo, web articles.

COUNTRY REPORTS

AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT - NEEDS

Due to a lack of interest from the youth in the issues covered by the CSOs, they find it almost impossible to reach a relevant amount of young people with their content, i.e. analyses and critical texts. As the only plausible channel for youth is social media, CSOs realise the need to adjust the content but struggle with the format. A skill to reduce text to key topics while remaining to the point is one of the biggest challenges.

Related to that, improving PR skills and optimisation of communication techniques is crucial to achieve CSOs' goals. This includes digital marketing skills, which would also improve the organisations' capacity to target desired audiences.

A large area for improvement was identified in video making and editing, as well as general graphic design skills and data collection techniques. In some cases, organisations struggle to effectively counter anonymous comments and hate speech.

COUNTRY REPORTS

MACEDONIA

Euro-Atlantic Council of Macedonia

<https://www.atamacedonia.org.mk/en>

Diversity Media

<http://diversitymedia.mk/>

Council of Media Ethics

<http://semm.mk/en/>

Radio Free Europe

<https://www.slobodnaevropa.mk/>

Center for Research and Policy Making (CRPM)

<http://www.crpm.org.mk/>

BACKGROUND SITUATION AND EXTERNAL FACTORS

The campaigns and initiatives directed at countering disinformation and propaganda practices are limited both in their reach and effectiveness. They are directed at the general public in order to make them recognise and disrupt the spread of disinformation, but they lack constructive information strategies in order to reach the wider audience. Also, there are no cooperation efforts or joint strategies among the media, state institutions, NGO sector, and other relevant stakeholders. Additionally, they are not supported by public debates and discussions, as well as larger media literacy campaigns.

The lack of 'strategic communications' specialists and content-selective policies, a deficiency in knowledge of how to effectively use the new media in order to make their campaigns more visible among the youth and a shortage of finances are among the issues that hinder the efficiency of the current approaches.

STRONG AND WEAK POINTS

The key obstacles related to launching/organizing campaigns/activities in countering disinformation identified during the interviews are associated with the insufficient

understanding of the rationale behind the measures needed to be undertaken by the CSOs and media when it comes to countering disinformation, lack of awareness and knowledge and limited capacities. Additionally, the lack of credible information sources and the overwhelming flow of information, contributes to a reduction of the impact of such activities and efforts.

The main difficulties are primary related to promotion through media (lack of media coverage and interest from journalists) and a wider outreach particularly when organising public events. The CSOs also expressed difficulties in successfully conveying the message to a desired audience, and, thirdly, a hardship in framing their messages in a clear and straightforward manner so that their content, when re-published (or re-shared) by third parties on social networks is not distorted.

RELEVANT EXAMPLES OF SUCCESS

- ▶ Diversity Media organised a Debate on D-Fest (innovative festival), the quality and innovative journalistic products such as reportages or documentaries while using the topics that are of interest to the public were considered a success.
- ▶ CRPM mentioned School of Public Policy "Mother Teresa" organised in cooperation with the Council of Europe.
- ▶ For EACM, a NATO student simulation, a traditional event attracting students and young professionals interested in NATO, security and international politics, is a successful example. The event gets across through promotion, teamwork, clear and effective messages transferred via a social media and online campaign.



COUNTRY REPORTS

AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT - NEEDS

The interviews revealed that the priority needs of the Macedonian CSOs mostly pertain to skills associated with data visualization, social media and online campaigns and creating visual content.

General advancements in the communication strategy were also identified as needed by several organisations, whereas they communicate both online and face-to-face through events and other networking or informative formats.

While struggling to attract media attention, the CSOs seek to improve the strategy to attract media attention and journalists' interest in reporting on the issues, outputs and events. Transmitting of a message becomes particularly difficult on a local level with very limited local media capacities.

COUNTRY REPORTS

MONTENEGRO

ALFA Centar

<https://www.alfacentar.org/>

ADP “ZID”

<http://www.zid.org.me/>

NVO “Novi Horizont”

<http://www.ngo-horizonti.org>

Agencija za lokalnu demokratiju

www.aldnk.me

BACKGROUND SITUATION AND EXTERNAL FACTORS

The lack of transparency in online news, lack of media literacy especially among youth and general inability to identify disinformation hinder the CSOs efforts in pursuing activities in tackling disinformation. As regards other activities, a general lack of public interest in and thus support for the CSOs' activities makes it more difficult to attract attention and convey the message to a desired audience.

STRONG AND WEAK POINTS

Long-term and well-established cooperation with the media, communication on social media and the use of creative tools were generally mentioned as strong points of the CSOs. Thanks to the latter, especially visual content as gifs, the organisations are able to reach out to a younger generation.

One of the main problems identified was an inability to convey a message to the media which argue that the lack of sensationalism or relevance in the content produced demotivates them to use the press releases or other materials provided.

Despite being able to produce visual content in the form of images or gifs - relevant to the youth, the disinterest of the target group makes it very difficult to convey the desired messages.

RELEVANT EXAMPLES OF SUCCESS

- ▶ Well-organised events thanks to effective communication through different channels.

AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT - NEEDS

The interviewed CSOs believe that using YouTube would definitely improve their capacity to reach out to young people. Therefore, tips and tricks on using the platform together with a simple guide on video creation and editing would be appreciated by the CSOs concerned.

Being aware of constant changes in communication trends, attracting and communicating with a young audience is a constant struggle. Therefore, the improvements and new ideas in creating attractive visual content through different online tools are always welcome.

While young people account for an important target group, the CSOs would like to improve their ability to convey a message to other relevant groups as well. Generally, they would like to be more engaging, creative and up-to-date.

COUNTRY REPORTS

SERBIA

The International and Security Affairs Centre (ISAC)

<https://www.isac-fund.org/en/>

Krik

<https://www.krik.rs/en/>

Novi Sad School of Journalism

<http://www.novinarska-skola.org.rs/sr/>

European Western Balkans

<https://europeanwesternbalkans.com/>

BACKGROUND SITUATION AND EXTERNAL FACTORS

The campaigns and initiatives directed at countering disinformation and propaganda are limited both in their reach and effectiveness because of several factors. There is a public distrust towards the NGO sector dating back to Milosevic's era and particular topics related, for example, to NATO, Russia or European integration are tabooed. Representatives of CSOs and their activities are perceived as mercenaries of foreign actors spreading propaganda. The low media literacy among the Serbs makes the population vulnerable to manipulation, myths and propaganda spread by both pro-Kremlin outlets as well as mainstream media, many of which are government-controlled. These are supported and further disseminated by the army of trolls. Tabooed topics, prejudice against NGOs and an overwhelming flow of disinformation constantly spread on many fronts reduces the impact of the CSO's activities.

STRONG AND WEAK POINTS

The impact of CSOs is relatively small. While the organisations have qualified employees, they are very few in numbers and fight an unfair battle against actors spreading disinformation. While the organisations are generally capable of using social media, particularly Facebook, and building a strong followers base there,

they are not able to reach the wider public. The CSOs particularly struggle to reach the segment of the public vulnerable to disinformation. The audience generally consists of an educated, critically thinking segment of society.

RELEVANT EXAMPLES OF SUCCESS

- ▶ Raskrinkavanje portal, established by Krik, labels information and stories spread online based on their trustworthiness, or their proximity to being completely false.
- ▶ Novi Sad School of Journalism for journalists developed website Fake News Tragac (Fake news trail) to educate students of journalism, journalists and people in the media sector, raise awareness about the impact and threats of disinformation and build up a community of individuals who would counter it.
- ▶ European Western Balkans is a regional online portal providing credible information on European and Euro-Atlantic integration of candidate countries from the Western Balkan. A portal connected with the CSO Center for Contemporary Policies offering information in English as well as in Serbian became the main credible source of information on the EU integration process and related topics in the region.

AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT - NEEDS

The interviews revealed that the priority needs of the Serbian CSOs mostly pertain to skills associated with storytelling, data visualisation, social media and creating visual content. CSOs struggle to "sell" their content. Therefore, they seek to improve the overall communication strategy to attract the wider public not only their traditional audience and breach stigmatised perceptions about NGOs themselves and tabooed topics. An opportunity for improvement is also seen in increasing their personal capacities and training more journalists.

OVERVIEW OF ORGANISATIONS INVOLVED IN MAPPING ANALYSIS

ORGANISATION	WEBSITE	KEY MEANS OF COMMUNICATION
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BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA

Centar za politološka istraživanja Filozofskog fakulteta (CPIFF)	http://cpi.ff.sve-mo.ba	Web, Facebook
Centar za istraživačko novinarstvo (CIN)	www.cin.ba	Web, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram
Centar za sigurnosne studije	www.css.ba	Web, Facebook, Twitter
Demokratska inicijativa mladih	https://www.facebook.com/dimsirokibrijeg/	Facebook
Savjet omladinskih organizacija Banja Luka (Council of Youth Organisations Banja Luka)	http://www.soobl.org/	Web, Facebook
Restart Srpska	http://www.restartsrpska.org/	Facebook, Twitter, Instagram
Omladinska novinska asocijacija u BiH	http://karike.ba	Web, Facebook, Instagram
Mediacentar Sarajevo	www.media.ba	Web, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, LinkedIn

CZECH REPUBLIC

Asociace pro mezinárodní otázky	http://www.amo.cz/en/	Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Instagram, web
Stuzak – studenti zakum	https://stuzak.cz/	Events and workshops, web, social media
Demagog.cz	https://demagog.cz/	Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, web, Demagog TV
Zvolsti.info	http://zvolsti.info/	Offline workshops, Facebook, web

ORGANISATION	WEBSITE	KEY MEANS OF COMMUNICATION
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HUNGARY

Political Capital	http://www.politicalcapital.hu/	Traditional media, web, Facebook, Twitter
Atlatzo.hu	https://atlatzo.hu/	Web, Facebook
Mérték Media Monitor	http://mertek.eu/en/	Facebook, Twitter
Transparency International, Hungary	https://transparency.hu/en/	Facebook

MACEDONIA

Euro-Atlantic Council of Macedonia	https://www.atamacedonia.org.mk/en	Web, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram
Diversity Media	http://diversitymedia.mk/	Web, Facebook
Council of Media Ethics	http://semm.mk/en/	Web, Facebook, Twitter
Radio Free Europe	https://www.slobodnaevropa.mk/	Web, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube
Center for Research and Policy Making (CRPM)	http://www.crpm.org.mk/	Web, Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, media appearances

MONTENEGRO

ALFA Centar	https://www.alfacentar.org/	Web, Facebook, Twitter
ADP "ZID"	http://www.zid.org.me/	Web, Facebook
NVO "Novi Horizont"	http://www.ngo-horizonti.org	Web, Facebook
Agencija za lokalnu demokratiju	www.aldnk.me	Web, Facebook

ORGANISATION	WEBSITE	KEY MEANS OF COMMUNICATION
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POLAND

Fundacja Centrum Analiz Propagandy i Dezinformacji (CAPD)	https://capd.pl	Web, Facebook Twitter
Stowarzyszenie Demagog, projekt Akademia Fact-Checkingu	http://demagog.org.pl/ http://akademia.demagog.org.pl/	Web, Facebook, Twitter
Fundacja Reporterów (Reporters Foundation)	http://fundacjareporterow.org/	Web, Facebook, Twitter
Grupa Defence24	http://www.defence24.pl/ http://www.cyberdefence24.pl/	Web, Facebook, Twitter
http://www.cyberdefence24.pl/	https://epf.org.pl/pl/	Web, Facebook, Twitter
Freelancer: Maciej Ostasz	NA	NA

SERBIA

The International and Security Affairs Centre (ISAC)	https://www.isac-fund.org/en/	Web, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram
Krik	https://www.krik.rs/en/	Web, Facebook, Twitter
Novi Sad School of Journalism	http://www.novinarska-skola.org.rs/sr/	Web, Twitter
European Western Balkans	https://europeanwesternbalkans.com/	Web, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube

SLOVAKIA

GLOBSEC	https://www.globsec.org/	Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, web
Demagog.sk	http://www.demagog.sk/	Facebook, Instagram, web
Transparency International Slovakia	http://transparency.sk/sk/	Facebook, web, newsletter
Euro-Atlantic Council	http://www.eac.sk/en/	Facebook, web



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