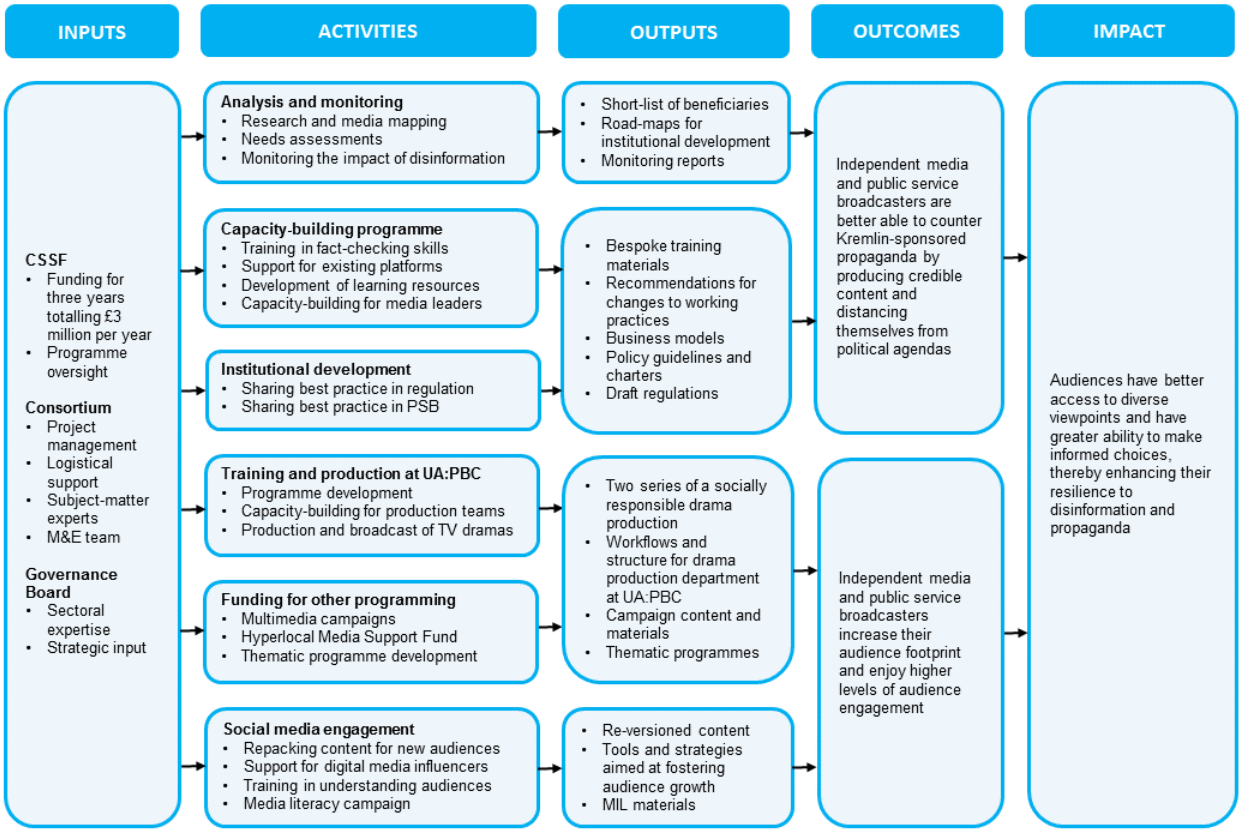
1.4. CONCEPT & METHODOLOGY

1.4.1. Theory of change



1.4.2. Partners

Albany Associates specialises in the provision of strategic communications in support of security and stability programmes and, in recent years, has been working to combat disinformation and propaganda in the Russian-speaking world. Projects have included two CSSF-funded initiatives – a social media-based campaign to promote key Euro-Atlantic themes in the Baltic States and a programme focusing on fact-checking and media literacy in Central Asia. In Ukraine, Albany is working to implement a series of nationwide media campaigns designed to challenge narratives which seek to denigrate the EU's contribution to the country's democratic reform process.

With 73 members in 56 countries, the **European Broadcasting Union** (EBU) is the world's leading alliance of public service media. In the Eastern Partnership countries, the EBU enjoys exceptional credibility as a dynamic catalyst for reform processes and a powerful advocate for editorial independence. Its experts have been instrumental in devising five-year strategies for the three broadcasters in Ukraine, Georgia and Moldova as well as supporting efforts to bring PSB legislation in line with EU standards. The EBU Partnership Programme organises high-level political debates on public service broadcasting, involving parliaments, governments, regulatory authorities and the international community.

Internews-Ukraine has been an active player in the Ukrainian media and communications field for more than 20 years. During this time, it has held over 1,300 different media events engaging more than 30,000 participants; and produced more than 350 TV and 1,300 radio programmes covering political, economic and social topics. In addition, Internews-Ukraine has an exceptional track record in monitoring, countering and studying Russian propaganda and disinformation. To counteract these trends, it works to disseminate objective information about Ukraine as well as promoting media literacy among journalists and the wider public.

Established in 2011, the **Journalism Resource Center** (JRC) specialises in research, media production, training and journalism education. Working in close collaboration with media outlets and universities across Georgia, the JRC has developed curricula and learning resources for the journalism faculties at Batumi, Zugdidi, Kutaisi, Gori, Telavi, and Akhaltsikhe. The Centre also operates a TV studio which produces programming broadcast by more than 20 regional outlets. In 2016, it conducted a cross-platform campaign aimed at improving the provision of information which could act as a counterbalance to Russian-language propaganda in the regions.

Media Alternativa is a Chisinau-based NGO which focuses on developing and enhancing independent media in Moldova. It brings together a diverse body of respected local journalists including Natalia Morari, host of the popular talk-show "Politica", and Igor Boțan, executive director of the Association for Participatory Democracy. Media Alternativa is the driving force behind TV8, one of the country's few independent voices. It produces impartial fact-based TV and digital programming, including edutainment documentaries and video stories aimed at debunking agenda-driven narratives. Media Alternativa works with more than 50 journalists, cameramen, editors, scriptwriters and producers.

Based in New York, **Pilot Media Initiatives** comprises an international team of media professionals who have created Emmy and Peabody award-winning TV shows and dramas in the United States as well as sustainable media development projects in countries such as Kyrgyzstan, Macedonia and Nigeria. With a focus on entertainment formats, these projects promote audience engagement, media literacy and market metric transparency. In all its work, PMI strives to strengthen the capacity of local teams in emerging markets to produce compelling and sustainable media that appeals to target demographics.

1.4.3. Implementation plan

Through a holistic programme of complementary activity strands, selected media outlets in the target countries will benefit from sustained support mechanisms and needs-driven development opportunities. The project will encourage these outlets to sign up to concrete road-maps which are based on realistic goals and which enjoy the buy-in of senior management. It is anticipated that improved audience engagement and measurable growth across the project lifecycle will be key factors in securing and maintaining this institutional buy-in.

Research and analysis

The project partners recognise that a significant body of research has already been conducted in the target countries and, therefore, the primary focus of this strand will be on identifying potential beneficiaries for the CSSF-funded programme. Eligibility criteria will be based on the profile of the existing audience; the perceived potential to expand this audience; and the level of influence in the local (and, in some cases, regional) information space. Following a desk research phase and mapping exercise, the partners will submit a list of recommendations to the CSSF team. Short-listed outlets will be sent a self-assessment questionnaire aimed at capturing internal perceptions of their market position as well as existing development strategies.

Needs assessments

The consortium will use the information provided in the questionnaires to define the scope of the field research programme. This will involve visits to selected media with a view to conducting needs assessments and organisational audits which will look at resources, management, workflow and potential for growth. Sources of income will be reviewed and the effectiveness of revenue-generating activities will be analysed. In addition, a series of Key Informant Interviews will identify skills gaps within editorial teams and senior management. They will also consider the level of participation in previous training programmes and the extent to which skills gained through these initiatives have been applied to the beneficiaries' professional activities. The project's experts will endeavour to flag up any obstacles to positive change within the workforce.

This process will help to establish development road-maps within beneficiary organisations which can be used to shape and target the project's capacity-building efforts. Road-maps will assess the positive benefits of training and co-production on the outlets' market position, in some cases demonstrating how support can assure growth and strengthen financial independence. The road-maps will be presented to the project's Governance Board (Section 1.8) for approval.

Public opinion and media consumption

The three local partners will carry out regular monitoring of the media space with a view to defining the challenges posed by Russian propaganda and establishing the most effective ways of responding to it. The monitoring teams will look at the different messages promoted by pro-Russian platforms as well as the tactics used to disseminate these messages. They will measure audience response, providing insight into social media-based activity and capturing the profile of key consumers. This process will enhance the consortium's understanding of general consumption habits as well as highlighting the types of content which enjoy resonance in the local information space.

This activity strand will benefit from the extensive work carried out by the consortium partners in this sector. As part of the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum Media Sub-Group, Internews-Ukraine has conducted professional monitoring of Russian propaganda and evaluated its impact on local audiences. Albany Associates has also been working with a local agency, E'Comm, to carry out research into media consumption in the framework of its ongoing EU funded project in Ukraine.

Capacity-building programme to promote fact-checking skills

Training for editorial teams will pay due regard to the achievements of previous or ongoing programmes such as the "Strengthening Independent Media" project which is funded by the US Government and implemented by Internews.

Fact-checking and production skills have been at the heart of these programmes and the CSSF-funded project will look to continue the momentum gained whilst avoiding duplication. It will also prioritise targeted support for specific initiatives rather than implementing generic training programmes.

Ukraine: Internews-Ukraine will collaborate with Albany Associates to promote verification techniques which have been developed across the region, with a particular focus on building a community of best practice. Capacity-building activities will draw on the Internews-Ukraine project entitled "Verify: One-Stop Data Verification Tool for the Ukrainian Media Community" which resulted in the launch of an interactive website: http://verify.org.ua and a wealth of complementary resources. The site provides journalists with a set of tools which enable them to fact-check online using a step-by-step guide. Training content and discussion channelled through the website will explore the challenges of working with Russian-language sources, particularly on social media. They will seek to reverse current copy-paste practices which allow propagandistic content to percolate rapidly into the local media space.

Georgia: Here the project will benefit from models pioneered by the Journalism Resource Centre and the Georgian Charter of Journalistic Ethics which are aimed at giving journalism students a thorough grounding in fact-checking techniques. They include practical exercises, quizzes and role-playing games. Content produced by the students is published on a bespoke website which has a dedicated media literacy section. The process empowers students to analyse information received from different types of media, including social networks; to identify examples of disinformation; and prevent its further dissemination. It helps to promote a culture of fact-checking, popularised through its interactive tools, as well as forming the cornerstone for an interdisciplinary module entitled "Teaching Students How to Identify and Verify False Information" which is being developed for six universities in Georgia.

Moldova: As one of the key organisations behind the Stop False initiative in Moldova, Media Alternativa has developed a video format which has proven highly effective in debunking fake news and providing insight into the techniques used to manipulate or distort the facts. Media Alternativa has also devised a training programme which equips media practitioners with the skills to produce equivalent outputs and help audiences to make informed decisions. After each training workshop, video stories produced by the trainees will be published on key online platforms (tv8.md as well as TV8's Odnoklassniki, Facebook, Instagram and Telegram accounts). They will also be broadcast on TV8 at prime time.

Programme development at UA:PBC

During the preparation of this bid, the consortium partners discussed programming priorities with senior stakeholders at Ukraine's public broadcaster. Both Director-General Zurab Alasania and Vice-Chair of the Board Darja Yurovska confirmed that the broadcaster had a strong interest in producing a prime-time TV drama which would enjoy mass appeal whilst strengthening UA:PBC's public service credentials. Ms Yurovska said that a series aimed at its female audience could be particularly effective in encouraging women from different backgrounds to realise their potential. She was unconvinced by the proposal to develop a Ukrainian version of HBO's "Girls" since UA:PBC's target audience is significantly older (50+)

UA:PBC gained a good experience of drama production when working with BBC Media Action on "5 baksiv", a web series funded by the FCO and produced largely by external contributors. However, the initiative failed to attract significant audiences (an average of 30,000 views per episode) and stopped short of building lasting internal capacity. It is, therefore, vital for future initiatives of this kind to establish the resources and systems necessary to facilitate the target programming as well as to create mechanisms for proper product testing and impact evaluation. Proposals to buy scripts from Western broadcasters are considered ill-advised since, in the view of this consortium, the emphasis should be on developing indigenous script-writing talent and creating shows which closely reflect local realities.

The consortium partners note that UA:PBC has a strong preference for developing a political drama in the run-up to the 2019 parliamentary elections. One option, therefore, is to produce a series in the style of the award-winning Danish drama "Borgen" with a strong female lead and significant potential to promote women's empowerment. In the Ukrainian scenario, the heroine might be the mayor or deputy-mayor of a provincial town who is obliged to navigate her way through the corridors of power in order to achieve key policy goals. By presenting positive female role models, the series will help to challenge stereotypes as well as to overturn negative attitudes and behaviour towards women.

The project partners propose following up on the drama with a new series in 2020. They are aware of UA:PBC's interest in using this vehicle to focus on the work of civic activists and promote their ability to achieve positive social change. Appropriate and effective story vehicles will be developed in Year Two: suggested themes include domestic violence and sexual harassment, drawing on key elements of the international #MeToo movement.

Capacity-building at UA:PBC

The capacity-building programme will aim first and foremost to establish the foundations for a sustainable production house at UA:PBC. In order to work towards this goal, international and local experts will provide training in areas such as script development, production management, direction and location filming. The exact focus of the capacity-building efforts will be defined during the needs assessments described above. The experts will also help to develop the wider

marketing and social media strategy, thereby ensuring that issues raised through the drama have wider resonance and can stimulate constructive debate.

The capacity-building programme will benefit from the EBU's unique access to the skills and experience of broadcasters across Europe, including DR, the Danish broadcaster responsible for commissioning "Borgen" and the BBC which, through BBC Worldwide, enjoys exceptional success in securing rebroadcasting deals globally. Furthermore, the project's expert team includes Emmy- and BAFTA-winning producers who have been responsible for creating TV series with vast international appeal. Opportunities for selling the UA:PBC series to other countries in the region will be explored as part of the sustainability strategy for the production house.

The EBU will also lead on discussions with the Ukrainian authorities aimed at introducing a points system which could foster the development of culturally-relevant and market-focused audiovisual productions in Ukraine. This could be modelled on the UK system, whereby proposals for new productions are scored according to their local relevance, their use of local resources and their contribution to local culture.

Programme production at UA:PBC

As noted above, the project has the resources to support two sequential dramas, one in the run-up to the 2019 elections and the second in 2020. It is anticipated that the first will benefit from 100% funding from the project, thereby allowing UA:PBC to put the necessary systems in place and build its reputation for developing this kind of output. The second will be allocated sufficient funding to cover 50% of its costs but will also benefit from sustained mentoring and support.

All creative and leadership decisions related to the drama will be closely linked to its wider sustainability strategy. In this area, consultancy will be provided by Pilot Media Initiatives which employs a reverse engineered content creation approach in which such factors as the distributor, compatible sponsor, programme timeslot and main talent are identified from the outset. Guidance will be offered in identifying approaches that align with distributor market positions and target audiences, and succeed in delivering under-the-radar disinformation narratives. Furthermore, the programme's financial and operational viability will be maximised through developing storylines which are realistic in the context of UA:PBC's internal resources and funding streams.

Funding and capacity-building for other programming

Multimedia campaigns

The project will support multimedia campaigns aimed at raising awareness of key social issues and complementing mainstream TV programming. In Ukraine, the campaign will directly echo the themes addressed by the drama whilst, in Georgia and Moldova, the campaigns will engage PSBs, independent media, bloggers and online activists in a constructive discussion of similar topics. They will benefit from treatment on multiple platforms, thereby allowing a compelling exchange of views or personal testimonies and facilitating outreach across a broad cross-section of society.

The campaigns will demonstrate the value of a sustained collaboration between media and CSOs, thereby helping to forge stronger links between the two sectors. The project will contribute to these initiatives by offering expert advice and covering a portion of the production costs. In particular, funding will be allocated to the innovative use of multimedia platforms and online community management, highlighting the potential of social media to spread positive messages and counterbalance extreme views with moderate narratives.

Hyperlocal Media Support Fund

The project partners will establish and manage a fund aimed at helping regional media to develop new programming strands, access multiple platforms and better serve local populations. Allocated on a competitive basis, the funding is likely to be requested for areas such as infrastructural development (particularly in order to extend broadcasting into regions dominated by Russian channels); technical development of web-based and mobile resources (including apps); expansion of Russian-language teams; and the commissioning of audience studies in order to improve the targeting of content.

Examples might include helping radio stations in Southern Ukraine to start AM broadcasting into Crimea (a project initiated by the Ukrainian Government); or supporting Georgian TV and radio stations in their efforts to reach audiences in Abkhazia and South Ossetia; or engaging with media in Gagauzia to improve the quality of their Russian-language output. The fund could also be used for content-related initiatives designed to combat particular strands of propagandistic messaging on a grass-roots level.

Robust sustainability strategies will be a requirement for all projects supported by the fund. Due diligence will be carried out for all possible grantees, assessing their ability to absorb new activities and cover the associated costs – in time – through revenue-generating activities. In Ukraine, this will be facilitated by Internews-Ukraine's long-term cooperation with more than 200 media outlets in 16 regions of the country. The Journalism Resource Centre's network of 20 regional TV and radio stations in Georgia will also ensure that the fund can hit the ground running.

Engaging with audiences on social media

Repackaging content for new audiences

There is a growing perception that high-quality independent content often fails to reach the audiences which are most vulnerable to Russian propaganda. This is because, in its original form, it does not reflect the consumption habits and sharing trends common to younger audiences. For example, a lengthy and complex investigative report with a dry factual headline may have little appeal for social media users accustomed to the rapid consumption of clickbait. By rewriting the headline to give it an ironic twist and creating an infographic which synthesizes the article's main findings, its exposure may be dramatically increased.

Beneficiaries will, therefore, be offered training in creative re-versioning and repackaging of content to ensure that it enjoys resonance on diverse platforms and reaches new audiences (e.g. through the use of creative headlines, humour, multimedia elements and proactive dissemination). Participants will also be encouraged to forge links with online influencers (e.g. bloggers) who can drive or promote credible content amongst their own followings.

Training and support for influencers

The impact and resonance of digital media influencers will be strengthened through the development of new skills (e.g. video-blogging) and tools which can serve to expand online audiences. The project will include a series of hackathons during which stakeholders will be invited to present new ideas and solutions (e.g. mobile applications and news aggregators). Financial support will be offered to those participants who can demonstrate a viable strategy for using these tools to enlarge their audience base and, in particular, to reach new identity groups.

Training will also be provided to CSO activists whose online materials currently enjoy a limited following. They will learn how to launch successful blogs, proactively market their content and, in some cases, monetize their outputs. A series of social media camps – networking events which bring together bloggers, activists, citizen journalists and media practitioners – will help to foster collaboration in this sector.

Understanding audiences

Members of this community will be invited to attend training courses designed to equip them with the skills to track, monitor and evaluate the performance of social media content. They will learn to interpret social media data and understand what makes audiences tick. This insight will improve their ability to bring their editorial strategy in line with audience needs and consumption habits. The training programme will cover software solutions such as CrowdTangle which enable users to gain an overview of social media performance through an online dashboard.

Media literacy campaign

Over the past few years, media and information literacy (MIL) initiatives have focused on integrating educational programmes into school curricula and facilitating multilateral negotiations with education ministries to accept externally produced content. This process has been subject to many frustrations and, whilst it will eventually have a positive impact on future generations, it does little to address the vulnerability of today's media audiences.

The project will, therefore, use social media as a platform for media literacy content and discussion, tackling themes such as the value of public service broadcasting in a democratic society (an issue which has been prioritised by both regulators and broadcasters in all three countries). This initiative will involve multiple formats including visuals, infographics, cartoons, educational videos, contests and online games aimed at promoting critical thinking. Cooperation agreements with mobile phone operators may also be negotiated.

Capacity-building for media leaders

Public service broadcasting

A consultancy programme for the three public service broadcasters will reflect the need to streamline internal processes and respond to audience needs and consumption habits. It will build on the work carried out by the European Broadcasting Union in this field, encouraging better newsroom integration in order to improve resource allocation as well as recommending improvements to departmental management and editorial policy. EBU experts will assist the broadcasters in devising appropriate functional strategies for human resources, internal organisation and financial management. They will moderate discussions with government-level stakeholders, where necessary.

Independent media

Formal training and on-site mentoring will be aimed at helping media outlets to explore new revenue-generating opportunities or to enhance existing systems. They will look at using audience data to improve the focus and scope of marketing efforts as well as considering what can be achieved by pooling the efforts of multiple broadcasters. The consultancy will explore web-based opportunities for revenue-generation as well as hyperlocal advertising (e.g. directories of local services). Beneficiaries will be offered the chance to take part in peer-to-peer exchanges with EU-based counterparts in order to build their understanding of effective approaches and recent innovations.

Sharing best practice in media regulation and self-regulation

The project will provide consultancy to Ukraine's National Council for Television and Radio Broadcasting, the Georgian National Communications Commission and Moldova's Audio-visual Council with a view to exploring regulatory and self-regulatory mechanisms aimed at combating fake news without placing undue limitations on freedom of speech. Areas covered might include codes of conduct and ways of dealing with outlets which consistently and demonstrably flout ethical principles, including appropriate responses to calls by the public and government to sanction or ban certain media outlets. It will build on the direct consultancy which Albany provided to the Ukrainian regulator from 2015 to 2017 and its annual seminars involving the Georgian National Communications Commission. Both were facilitated by the OSCE.

One idea that could be pursued is expanding on and clarifying the legal definitions of propaganda and propaganda for war, as well as accuracy, balance and hate speech, as set out by the European Court of Human Rights. The aim here would be to refine those standards to take the local and regional context into account, while respecting the European ideals of freedom expression to which these countries aspire. This will draw on Albany's 2017 experience of developing self-regulatory guidelines for new and legacy media in Ukraine on a number of issues — including standards addressing propaganda, journalist safety in conflict areas, and online content. Preliminary standards were discussed and outlined, and all stakeholders agreed that more work on these issues was needed.

Regulatory bodies will also be closely involved in the media literacy campaign, considering the impact of fake news, encouraging critical thinking and promoting a better understanding of the role of PSBs in giving a voice to diverse identity groups and facilitating social cohesion. Experience will be shared between regulators through the European Platform for Regulatory Authorities (EPRA) with which Albany has had a close working relationship for many years.

Sharing best practice in public service broadcasting

The EBU is active in all three Eastern Partnership countries:

- In Ukraine, following a dramatic cut in funding for UA:PBC, it has been lobbying the parliament to ensure that its financial commitments are honoured. EBU experts have also been working to change draft legislation which would oblige the broadcaster to allocate airtime to parties and politicians in the run-up to the 2019 elections.
- In Moldova, the EBU has assisted TeleRadio Moldova in devising a 2018-2023 strategy which will help to strengthen TRM's independence and enrich its programming policies. In addition, the EBU is supporting efforts to develop new PSB legislation in line with European standards as well as providing assistance to TeleRadio Gagauzia.
- In Georgia, the EBU has provided legal advice for the development of the Law on the Georgian Public Broadcaster and has agreed amendments to the bill with the Parliamentary Committee on Media. GPB has also expressed an interest in working with the EBU to devise its next five-year strategy.

The CSSF-funded project will be able to build on this exceptional track record and extend the EBU's influencing work to other areas of endeavour. Examples might include:

Gender charters: Gender charters and guidelines for editorial teams are designed to ensure that equality is reflected on screen and in programming teams (particularly in terms of increasing the number of women in decision-making and commissioning positions). This activity has been supported by the EBU in other regions (the Balkans and the Middle East) and has resulted in concrete policy changes which have resonated across the editorial hierarchy.

Audience councils: Another area of PSB activity which could be addressed by the project is the introduction of improved mechanisms to monitor and assess audience needs. Drawing on existing models for Audience Councils (adopted by the BBC, amongst others), the EBU will work with the three public broadcasters to bring together representatives from the general public and the CSO community in an effort to find out what different identity groups – including women and young people – feel is missing in PSB schedules. This initiative will help to bring the broadcasters closer to their audiences as well as enabling them to track changing tastes and consumption habits.

Working with other donors

The consortium recognises that the last two years have seen a proliferation of donor-funded projects which seek to counter Russian propaganda and strengthen independent media in the target countries Current players include: the Global Engagement Center, the Eurasia Media Innovation Challenge (DRL), "Strengthening Independent Media in Ukraine, Georgia and Moldova" (USAID), the Russian-language News Exchange (funded by the European Commission and the Dutch Government), the Good Governance Fund (DFID and the FCO) and the Creative Content Support Fund (EED). Major upcoming projects include the $35 million Media Program in Ukraine and the Moldova TV Fund (USAID).

Improved coordination mechanisms will help to explore synergies between ongoing programmes and avoid duplication. The partners are aware of the regular exchanges between key donors active in this field (including the biannual meeting coordinated by the Latvian Government) but it is thought that a regional group bringing together donors with a shared interest in combating Russian propaganda could play an important role in facilitating knowledge management in this sector, in particular exchanging the results of ongoing research and monitoring work as well as sharing lessons learned. Outputs could include a closed mailing list, events calendar and newsletter.