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CALL FOR PROPOSALS

Promotion of Freedom of Expression and Freedom of Media in Montenegro HFII-BH4688 Grant scheme for media (JUFREX 2)

Project	Horizontal Facility II – Joint European Union/Council of Europe Action « Freedom of Expression and Freedom of the Media in Montenegro»
Awarding entity	COUNCIL OF EUROPE Council of Europe
Funding	Council of Europe and European Union
Duration	Projects shall be implemented by 30 September 2021. Reporting requirements shall be completed by 22 October 2021.
Estimated starting date	01 March 2021
Issuance date	16 November 2020
Deadline for applications	07 December 2020

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APPENDICES:

- Appendix I - Application Form
- Appendix II - Provisional budget (Template)
- Appendix III - Template Grant Agreement (for information only)

HOW TO APPLY?

- Complete and sign the **Application Form** (See **Appendix I**)
- Attach a provisional budget (using the template reproduced in **Appendix II**)
- Attach the other supporting documents:
 - Documents certifying the registration of the NGO;
 - Bank/financial statements authorised by a financial officer of the NGO;
 - CVs of staff members who will be involved in project implementation;
 - Contact details of three relevant referees.
- Send these documents in electronic form (Word .and/or PDF) to the following e-mail address: Education.podgorica@coe.int. Emails should contain the following reference in subject: Application - School based projects (Quality ED-MNE).

I. INTRODUCTION

This call for proposals is launched within the framework of the action “Freedom of Expression and Freedom of the Media in Montenegro” in Montenegro as a part of the joint European Union/Council of Europe programme “Horizontal Facility for the Western Balkans and Turkey 2019-2022”.

The call aims to fund projects of independent local media aiming to promote Freedom of Expression and Freedom of Media.

Project proposals shall aim to produce an added value to the Council of Europe efforts in this domain.

II. BACKGROUND INFORMATION ON THE COUNCIL OF EUROPE PROJECT

The purpose of the Action is to promote freedom of expression and freedom of the media in Montenegro in line with European standards and create a safer and more pluralistic media environment. In more concrete terms, the Action has three aims:

- to enhance the acting capacities of members of the judiciary, law enforcement officials and legal professionals (i.e. judges, prosecutors, police officers and lawyers) in accordance with Council of Europe standards in the areas of Freedom of Expression and Freedom of Media, particularly the relevant case-law of the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR);
- to work with Montenegro’s media regulatory authorities and governmental bodies to align the media legislative framework with the European standards
- to support the media associations and universities to apply best practices in teaching and promoting Freedom of Expression and Freedom of Media.

The partners of the Action include: the Centre for Training in Judiciary and State Prosecution, the Police Academy, the Bar Association, the Ministry of Interior/Directorate of Police, the Ministry of Culture, the Agency for Electronic Media, the Faculty of Political Science, the Law Faculty Podgorica, the Association of Professional Journalists of Montenegro, the Trade Union of Media of Montenegro.

III. BUDGET AVAILABLE

The indicative available budget under this call for proposals is €80 000 (eighty thousand Euros). The Council of Europe intends to award five grants of a maximum amount of €16 000 (sixteen thousand Euros) each.

Subject to the availability of funds and extension of the Project initial duration, the Council of Europe reserves the right not to award all available funds, and/or to redistribute the available funds in a different manner depending on the project proposals received and on the outcome of the call for proposals.

IV. REQUIREMENTS

1. General objective

The grants will fund projects designed to address the risks posed by the COVID-19 pandemic to freedom of expression and freedom of media in Montenegro.

In line with the **Council of Europe’s Guidelines on protecting freedom of expression and information in times of crisis**¹, no crisis situation should be used as a pretext for restricting the public's access to information or for introducing restrictions on media freedom beyond the limitations allowed by Article 10(2) of the European Convention on Human Rights.

Furthermore, the Council of Europe’s report **The impact of the sanitary crisis on freedom of expression and media freedom**² outlined several challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic to the functioning of the media, in particular the diminishing of media revenues or the increased pressure to provide verified and timely information to satisfy the demand for information on the pandemic.

When it comes to the challenges to public discourse and democratic participation, the Council of Europe report specifically highlighted the spread of disinformation (targeting science, technology and health) and the raise of hate speech.³

Disinformation and hate speech often result in *“high levels of engagement on social media platforms, where nuanced views are crowded out in favour of polarised perceptions of “true” and “false”, which can also have divisive effects in the real world”*.⁴ This phenomenon calls for strong action from different stakeholders to promote media as a trusted source of information and supporting it to develop *“diverse content on the pandemic, informed debates and broader democratic participation”*.

As regards the situation of freedom of expression and freedom of media in Montenegro, a recent report of the European Commission⁵ pointed that despite the recent reform of media legislation, the media environment in Montenegro has deteriorated and experienced an increase in *“arrests and proceedings against editors of on-line portals and citizens for content they posted or shared online”*. In addition, the report showed that there has been a *“growing volume of region-wide disinformation”* causing social and political polarisation, particularly in relation to political campaigns.

Given this context, it is expected that the projects will address one or more of the following issues:

- European standards on freedom of expression and freedom of media and their observance during the COVID-19 pandemic;
- Measures intended to limit disinformation, online harassment or hate speech in view of the European standards on the freedom of expression and freedom of the media;
- Media literacy, as one of the core response mechanisms to the increase of disinformation;
- The growing importance of social media, as new channel to create and disseminate (dis)information, hate speech, stereotypes and discriminatory practices.

2. Means of action

Projects may include but are not limited to:

- Investigative and informative articles for print and online media;
- TV and radio materials to be broadcasted in prime-time slots;

¹ https://search.coe.int/cm/Pages/result_details.aspx?ObjectID=09000016805ae60e

² <https://rm.coe.int/16809ef1c7>

³ According to the report: *“COVID-19 related hate speech encompasses a broad range of contemptuous expressions against certain individuals and groups due to their link or presumed link with the virus, sometimes as a result of breaches of data protection laws. Scapegoating, stereotyping, stigmatisation and the use of derogatory and sometimes violent expressions have been observed particularly against already marginalised populations, including older persons, Roma, LGBTI people, minorities, migrants and foreigners.”*.Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/sites/near/files/montenegro_report_2020.pdf

- Series of live talk shows with relevant guests;
- Awareness-raising and communication campaigns on social media.

3. Implementation period

The implementation period of the projects should start on 1 March 2021 (see indicative timetable under VIII. below) and shall not extend beyond 30 September 2021.

Reporting requirements shall be completed on 22 October 2021 **at the latest**.

Projects completed prior to the date of submission of the applications will be automatically excluded. As regard projects started prior to the date of submission of the applications, or prior to the date of signature of the grant agreement, only those costs incurred after the date of submission of the grant application could be eligible (provided the agreement concerned so provides).

4. Target stakeholders

Projects should target in particular the following key stakeholders:

- General population, with specific focus on youth and online community;
- Journalists and editors;
- The Agency for Electronic Media and other relevant public bodies at state and municipal level responsible for media policies and the work of public media.

The above list is not exhaustive and projects may propose targeting other relevant stakeholders, while keeping in mind the general objective of the Project.

5. Budgetary requirements

Project proposals shall be accompanied by a draft budget (See **Template Budget, in Appendix II**) amounting to a maximum of €16 000 (sixteen thousand Euros). The estimated budget must be consistent, accurate, clear, complete and cost-effective, in the light of the activities proposed.

Each Grantee shall also be required to contribute to the project either by way of its own resources or by contribution from third parties. Co-financing may take the form of financial or human resources, in-kind contributions or income generated by the action or project.

6. Projects to be given preference

Further to the general objective, preference will be given to:

- Projects/actions emphasising the correlation between freedom of expression/freedom of media and other human rights;
- Projects/actions exploring the work of public and judicial bodies during the pandemics;
- Projects/actions underlining the importance of media literacy as the effective instrument to combat disinformation and contribute to the healthy media environment;
- Projects/actions with ability engage with online audiences via social media networks;

7. Ineligible Projects/Actions

The following types of action will not be considered:

- Projects/actions providing financial support to third parties (re-granting schemes);
- Projects/actions concerning only or mainly individual scholarships for studies or training courses;
- Projects/actions supporting political parties.

8. Funding conditions

The funds for each grant should in principle be distributed as follows:

- 80 % will be paid when the Grant Agreement between the two parties is signed;
- the balance will be paid based on actual expenditures incurred, and after the presentation and acceptance by the Council of Europe of the final narrative and financial reports for the Grant implementation.

9. Reporting requirements

- **narrative reporting** requires a full narrative report on the use made of the grant and a copy of the register of the persons present during each of the activities, including names and signatures of participants.
- **financial reporting** requires in particular a statement in the currency in which the Grant Agreement will be concluded (Euros or local currency), in English, stating the payments made for the implementation of the activities, certified by the responsible financial officer of the Grantee, accompanied by “appropriate original supporting documents” (see below). The Council of Europe reserves the right to ask for summary translations of invoices into English. If for legal reasons the original documents must be retained by the Grantee, certified copies must be submitted with the financial statement.

“Appropriate original supporting documents” refers to signed contracts, invoices and acceptances of work (for all transactions), payment authorisation for all transactions should also be provided in case the Grantee uses such practice, and reliable evidence of payment (authorised payment order and bank statement).

As regards roundtables or conferences, presenting “appropriate original supporting documents” requires presentation of a programme indicating the title, dates, venue, and agenda of the event; the names of persons facilitating the event, a signed list of participants, the contracts with the owner of venue of the event (e.g. hotel) for the rent of premises, food and beverages of participants, invoices from the owner of the venue of the event for the above services, and a report on the results of the event (see narrative reporting above).

As regards consultancy services, presenting “appropriate original supporting documents” requires presentation of evidence of the outputs produced, contracts with experts and consultants containing a specific description of services to be carried out, invoices produced after the works have been performed and delivered (the specialities of the consultants shall correspond to the nature of activities for which they are contracted).

As regards travel fees / lodging of experts and participants, presenting “appropriate original supporting documents” requires presentation, where relevant, of contracts with a travel agency for travel fees and lodging, invoices of the travel agency indicating destinations, dates, ticket costs, and names of the travelling persons, a programme of the event indicating the names of the experts and signed lists of participants.

The above description is not comprehensive. Any doubt regarding the interpretation of the notion of “appropriate original supporting documents” should lead the Grantee to consult the Council of Europe.

V. HOW TO APPLY?

1. Documents to be submitted

Each application shall contain:

- the completed and signed **Application Form** (See **Appendix I**);
- a provisional budget (using the template reproduced in **Appendix II**);
- the other supporting documents:
 - Registration and/or Certification documents from the Ministry of Culture (for print media) or Agency for Electronic Media (for broadcasting media and online portals);
 - Financial statements/Balance sheets for the past 3 years;
 - CVs of staff members who will be involved in project implementation;
 - Links to five relevant stories/articles produced and broadcasted/published on the topics relevant for the objective of this call;
 - Information on the circulation (for print media) and audiences (for electronic media, including number of visitors for online portals and interactions with media social networks accounts) for 2019 and 2020.

Applications that are incomplete will not be considered.

2. Questions

General information can be found on the website of the Council of Europe: <https://www.coe.int/en/web/podgorica/home>

Other questions regarding this specific call for proposals must be sent at the latest one week before the deadline for the submission of proposals, in English and shall be exclusively sent to the following address: podgorica@coe.int, with the following reference in subject: Questions and clarifications: HFII-BH4688 Grant scheme for media (JUFREX 2).

3. Deadline for submission

The application form, **completed and signed**, together with the supporting documents, must be submitted in electronic form (Word and/or PDF) to the following e-mail address: podgorica@coe.int. Emails should contain the following reference in subject: Application - Grant scheme for media (JUFREX 2).

Applications must be received **before 7 December 2020 (at 00:00 CET)**. Applications received after the above mentioned date will not be considered.

4. Change, alteration and modification of the application file

Any change in the format, or any alteration or modification of the original application file, will cause the immediate rejection of the application concerned.

VI. EVALUATION AND SELECTION PROCEDURE

The projects presented will be assessed by an Evaluation Committee composed of

- 3 representatives of the Council of Europe and
- 2 international media experts.

The procedure shall be based on the underlying principles of grant award procedures, which are transparency, non-retroactivity, non-cumulative awards, not-for-profit, co-financing and non-discrimination, in accordance with [Rule 1374 of 16 December 2015 on the grant award procedures of the Council of Europe](#).

The applicants, and their projects, shall fulfil all of the following criteria:

1. Exclusion criteria

Applicants shall be excluded from the grant award procedure where they:

- a. have been sentenced by final judgment on one or more of the following charges: participation in a criminal organisation, corruption, fraud, money laundering;
- b. are in a situation of bankruptcy, liquidation, termination of activity, insolvency or arrangement with creditors or any like situation arising from a procedure of the same kind, or are subject to a procedure of the same kind;
- c. have received a judgement with *res judicata* force, finding an offence that affects their professional integrity or constitutes a serious professional misconduct;
- d. do not comply with their obligations as regards payment of social security contributions, taxes and dues, according to the statutory provisions of the country where they are established;
- e. are or if their owner(s) or executive officer(s), in the case of legal persons, are included in the lists of persons or entities subject to restrictive measures applied by the European Union (available at www.sanctionsmap.eu).

By signing the Application Form, applicants shall declare on their honour that they are not in any of the above-mentioned situations (See **Appendix I: Application form, Item 12**).

The Council of Europe reserves the right to ask applicants at a later stage to supply the following supporting documents:

- for the items set out in paragraphs a), b) and c), an extract from the record of convictions or failing that an equivalent document issued by the competent judicial or administrative authority of the country where the applicant is established, indicating that these requirements are met;
 - for the items set out in paragraph d), a certificate issued by the competent authority of the country of establishment;
1. for the items set out in paragraph e);
 1. for natural persons, a scanned copy of a valid photographic proof of identity (e.g. passport)
 2. for legal persons, an extract from the companies register or other official document proving ownership and control of the applicant.

2. Eligibility criteria

In order to be eligible for a grant, an applicant must:

- be legally registered as a media outlet in Montenegro;
- be entitled to carry out the activities described in its project proposal;
- have been active for at least 3 years in the field of promoting freedom of expression and freedom of media principles;
- have sufficient financial capacity (stable and sufficient sources of funding) to maintain its activity throughout the period for which the grant is awarded and to participate by way of its own resources (including human resources or in-kind contributions);
- have sufficient operational and professional capacity, including staff, to carry out activities described in its project proposal;

- have a bank account.

Multiple applications are not allowed and shall lead to the exclusion of all applications concerned.

3. Award criteria

Applications will be assessed against the following criteria:

- the relevance and added value of the project with regards to the objective of the call (20%);
- the extent to which the action meets the requirements of the call (20%);
- the quality, accuracy, clarity and cost-effectiveness of the application and the estimated budget (20%);
- the relevance of the experience of the applying organisation and staff (40%).

VII. NOTIFICATION OF THE DECISION AND SIGNATURE OF GRANT AGREEMENTS

On completion of the selection process, all applicants will be notified in writing of the final decision concerning their respective applications as well as on the next steps to be undertaken.

The selected Grantees will be invited to sign a Grant Agreement (See Appendix III, for information only), formalising their legal commitments. **Potential applicants are strongly advised to read the draft contract, in particular its requirements in terms of payment and reporting.**

VIII. INDICATIVE TIMETABLE

Phases	Indicative timing
Publication of the call	16 November 2020
Deadline for submitting applications	7 December 2020
Information to applicants on the results of the award procedure	15 February 2021
Signature of the grant agreements	20 February 2021
Implementation period	1 March 2021 – 30 September 2021

The Council of Europe reserves the right to modify the calendar and planning, including the implementation and reporting periods, if this is necessary to comply with instructions issued by national, regional or local authorities or may be necessary to protect the health of the persons involved in the project's implementation.

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