

# Assessment Report

## European Media and Information Fund 2021 - 2022

### 0. Executive Summary

This report **assesses the first year of activities of the European Media and Information Fund, EMIF**, with the aim to understand, if this programme has been set up according to the agreed structure and rules and has the capacity to effectively address the challenge of disinformation in Europe.

On 25 March 2021 the EMIF started its activities. It has been set up by the **Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation** and the **European University Institute** as a multi-donor fund to tackle the disinformation challenge across 32 countries. The Fund accepted in 2021 **Google's** inaugural contribution of €25,000,000 over five years and until today has funded 33 projects in 21 countries. Furthermore the programme is operating under the scientific guidance of the **European Digital Media Observatory (EDMO)**. EDMO advises on the evaluation process and selects experts to serve as evaluators, ensuring complete independence and relevant competence for each of the EMIF's intervention areas:

1. Boosting fact-checking actions in Europe
2. Multidisciplinary investigations on disinformation
3. Research – studies and sandboxes
4. Supporting research into media, disinformation and information literacy across Europe

This assessment report is explaining in its introduction the purpose of this report. In the 2<sup>nd</sup> chapter readers receive all information needed in order to understand the reason for the EMIF's work. The criteria introduced in chapter 3 are the basis for the evaluation in chapter 4. This chapter assesses in detail (A) the governance, (B) the programme, (C) the internal and external communications and (D) the robustness of the programme. In chapter 5 the report shares its analysis by highlighting key insights, successes, short-comings and provides recommendations.

The **assessment report comes to the conclusion** that the EMIF lives up to its principles of independence, is a highly professional programme, led by experienced and trusted partners, has a high geographical outreach, attracts a relevant range of applications and successfully builds a community of people and organisations tackling disinformation across Europe. **The report recommends** to the EMIF to increase the diversity of its donors, set-up the Steering Committee as foreseen in the original agreement, develop a multistakeholder partnership approach for collective impact and become a gender balanced organization.

## Table of content

1. Executive Summary	page 1
Table of content	page 2
2. Introduction	page 3
3. Background information	page 4
4. Criteria	page 6
5. Evaluation	page 7
A. Governance	page 7
B. Programme assessment	page 10
C. Internal and external communications	page 16
D. Robustness of the programme	page 18
6. Conclusions	page 23
ANNEX	page 26

## 1. Introduction

This assessment report has been conducted upon the request of the European Media and Information Fund's, EMIF's, Management Committee, to **assess the relevance of the overall EMIF approach and its compliance with the set of standards** during the first year of its operation, between 25 March 2021 – 24 March 2022.

This assessment refers to the functioning of the governance of EMIF, including its decision making processes, the programme, including its products and the allocation of its funds, EMIF's internal and external communication as well as the overall robustness of the programme.

The basis for this evaluation is EMIF's 2021 – 2022 Annual Progress Report, published on the EMIF website on 8 November 2022, the EMIF Implementation Framework, and the EMIF Management Committee's Internal Rules. The evaluator had access to all relevant documents, including the Agreement establishing the European Media and Information Fund between European University Institute and Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation, the minutes of the Management Committee meetings, the signed "Declaration of Commitment on Impartiality, Independence, Conflict of Interest, Confidentiality and Personal Data" for members of the Management Committee and expert evaluators, and the grant agreements with grantees.

In addition he had the opportunity to speak with members of the EMIF Management Committee, some expert evaluators, and members of EMIF's operational team.

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The assessment has been exercised btw. 15 November and 30 November 2022 by Max von Abendroth, former Executive Director of the European Magazine Media Association, EMMA, and the Donors and Foundations Networks in Europe, Dafne. He is today the Chair of the Philanthropy Forum at the World Association of PPP Units and Professionals, WAPPP, and works with the Media Development Investment Fund, MDIF, and the Social Impact Alliance for CEE.

## 2. Background information

Over the past decade, the spread of disinformation online has become a problem facing Europe and the world. Increasingly, domestic and foreign adversaries have used it as a way to undermine democratic processes, upend democratic norms and weaken confidence in public institutions.

In this context the European Media and Information Fund, EMIF, is entrusted with an objective of public interest to support fact-checking and media literacy initiatives, as well as fundamental research projects, with a view to addressing the phenomenon of online disinformation in Europe and promoting a more resilient and fact-based digital information ecosystem. EMIF has been set up in 2021 by **Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation (CGF)** and the **European University Institute (EUI)** as a multi-donor fund.

CGF runs the EMIF Unit that acts as the EMIF secretariat. It ensures EMIF's day-to-day management and executes the decisions taken by EMIF's Management Committee. The EUI is responsible for coordinating academic oversight and the dissemination of project findings to academics, specialists, policymakers and the general public. CGF appoints one representative as a full member of EMIF's Management Committee, who acts as a Chair of the Management Committee. Furthermore EUI appoints one independent member of the Management Committee. An independent expert is appointed by CGF and EUI jointly as third member of the Management Committee.

EMIF is operating under the scientific guidance of the **European Digital Media Observatory (EDMO)**. EDMO advises on the evaluation process and selects experts to serve as evaluators, ensuring complete independence and relevant competence for each of the EMIF's intervention areas.

The Fund accepted **Google's** inaugural contribution of €25,000,000 over five years. Google is not involved in decision-making and does not profit from the intellectual property of any ideas or projects financed through the Fund. The tripartite agreement between CGF, EUI and Google sets out the terms of conditions for Google to contribute to the EMIF.

The governance of the Fund is regulated by Portuguese legislation.

The EMIF has four priority areas of intervention:

1. Boosting fact-checking actions in Europe:

This Call aims at strengthening the European fact-checking ecosystem by focusing on two priority actions: (a) Urgent Actions and (b) Scale-up Projects. This Call's total indicative allocation is €4,350,000 over the period of five years.

Right after the outbreak of the war of Russia against the Ukraine on 24 February 2022, the EMIF swiftly reacted by issuing a special funding round within this priority area. On 4 March 2022, the EMIF opened a Special Funding Round for "Urgent Actions" within this Call, with the deadline for applications being set for 29 April 2022. The total indicative allocation for this special round is €217,000.

2. Multidisciplinary investigations on disinformation  
This Call seeks to address the existing gaps in knowledge regarding the scale and scope of disinformation in Europe and thus gain a better understanding of the policies implemented to counter it. This Call's total indicative allocation is €4,600,000 over the period of five years.
3. Research – studies and sandboxes  
This Call aims at supporting broad and profound scientific studies on the disinformation phenomenon, encompassing its causes, societal impacts and possible responses. This Call's total indicative allocation is €4,600,000 over the period of five years.
4. “Supporting research into media, disinformation and information literacy across Europe  
The key aim of this Call is to support initiatives that enhance digital media and information literacy skills in Europe. This Call's total indicative allocation is €4,600,000 over the period of five years.

It is important to note that this evaluation report is referring to the first year of existence of the EMIF, a period when EMIF has been constituted. The Fund started operating on 25 March 2021.

The activities developed during the **constitutional phase** focused on setting up the EMIF's management and operational structures, as well as its general intervention framework. These activities included the definition and adoption of internal management rules to ensure compliance with applicable laws, the fairness and transparency of operations, independence and the absence of potential conflicts of interest in decision-making processes. Moreover, the Fund's annual budget was adopted, and a number of communication and dissemination initiatives, including the design and activation launching of the EMIF website, newsletters and information events, were carried out in order to build the EMIF's brand and visibility. Furthermore, the EMIF published an implementation framework clarifying its guiding principles and scope of action.

In a **second phase**, the EMIF started its funding operations and, between October 2021 and March 2022, launched four Calls for Proposals, covering all its priority areas of intervention.

This assessment report focusses on the launch year of the EMIF, but will acknowledge in its reflections the development of the EMIF activities in the months following 24 March 2022, since only during these months the relevance of some of the decision taken in the constitution period until 24 March 2022 show.

### 3. Criteria

In this section the criteria for the assessment of the level of achievements of the programme results during the reporting period will be introduced. These lay the basis for the evaluation in chapter 4.

The sources of information to be evaluated have been provided by the EMIF's Management Committee during the briefing process. On this basis the evaluation in chapter 4 will look into the following areas:

#### A. Governance

The assessment report looks into the existence and consistency of EMIF's governance documents. It will assess the established processes within and across the different governance bodies and evaluate their compliance with the standards set in the related documents ruling the governance of the programme. The evaluation will also reflect on how EMIF's governance is meeting today's standards for good governance for non-profit organisations, including:

- Code of conduct for members of the governance bodies
- Inclusion policy to acknowledge diversity and sensitivity for cultural differences
- Conflicts of interest policy
- Privacy policy
- Document retention policy
- Gift acceptance policy
- Self-assessment process
- Whistleblower protection policy

#### B. Programme assessment

The assessment report assesses the fund allocation and the relevance of the programme, including if funds have been allocated in a balanced way and in line with the mission of the EMIF. Furthermore the evaluation will assess the compliance of the processes linked to the distribution of funds, to ensure fair and equal treatment of all applicants and guarantees a segregation of duties. Finally the communication and transparency about the fund allocation process, the decisions taken and the funds disbursed will be assessed.

At the briefing for this evaluation report it was agreed that it is too early to analyse the impact of the EMIF activities. Instead this report looks at the output, outcome and relevance of the programme during the reporting period:

- **“Output”** refers to the numbers related to the calls issued, applications received, projects approved and grants paid out. This report will assess, if the numbers reported are in line with the targets set by the programme.
- **“Outcome”** refers to the projects and initiatives that the EMIF funded. This report will assess, if the projects and initiatives supported by the programme are in line with the objectives of the programme.

- **“Relevance”** refers to how the projects and initiatives funded by the EMIF are addressing the problem of disinformation. This report will also assess, if the EMIF approach is in general fit for purpose when it comes to addressing the disinformation challenge across Europe.

### **C. Internal and external communications**

The report looks at the quantity of communication measures and assesses the effectiveness of internal and external communications. Regarding the internal communication this report will look at how accessible information was ahead of meetings and how decisions have been communicated across EMIF’s governance bodies its operational team. When it comes to external communication the report examines the relevance of the communication measures taken and how they contribute to the visibility and uptake of the programme in the relevant community.

### **D. Robustness of the programme**

The report will evaluate the ability of the programme to drive change, attract the most promising solutions addressing the challenge of disinformation, deal with failure and build trust with all stakeholders involved. It will assess the resilience of the programme in the light of the uncertainty of our times, when it comes to institutional continuity, sustainability of funding and ability to engage with potential grantees.

Conclusions and recommendations will be drawn in chapter 5 of this evaluation report.

## 4. Evaluation

### A. Governance

The European Media and Information Fund, EMIF, is an open, multi-donor initiative established by the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation, CFG, and the European University Institute, EUI, under the terms established in the Fund's agreement regulating their relation. The EMIF has no legal personality and is managed by CGF with no participation. The governance of the Fund is regulated by Portuguese legislation. The starting date of the fund is 25 March 2021.

(a) The EMIF's governance is based on the following **governing documents**:

- **Agreement establishing the European Media and Information Fund**, signed by CFG and EUI:

This agreement defines the name, the purpose, the Management Committee, the role of the Foundation (CGF), the management of the Fund, the Fund's financing and accounting rules, the dissolution and provides miscellaneous provisions.

- **Governance Charter**

This Charter describes the purpose of the EMIF and introduces the "Principles of Governance". These principles refer to the purpose and scope of the Fund, rules that organisations from no fewer than 12 separate countries should be awarded each year, defines the thematic areas, introduces principles of transparency, pluralism, non-discrimination and diversity, rules that at least two thirds of the Fund's endowment will be disbursed in the form of grants, excludes the representation of contributors from the management and any role in the governance structure, introduces the Management Committee, its set up and tasks, introduces the Steering Committee, its set-up and tasks and introduces the concept of an independent selection committee.

- **Management Committee Internal Rules**

The Internal Rules are defining the operating rules of the Management Committee of the EMIF as the decision making body for the design of the Calls for Proposals under the Fund, the selection of projects and the grant of financial support. It provides details about the set-up of the Management Committee, introduces measures to ensure that there is no conflict of interest, outlines the scope of action, rules the frequency and location of meetings as well as the convening, agenda, and describes the decision making procedure.

(b) The EMIF has the following **governance bodies**

- **Management Committee**: execute day-to-day logistics and operations as well as being responsible for the financial management of the calls
  - o CGF appoints one representative as a full member of EMIF's Management Committee, who acts as a Chair of the Management Committee: Mr. Luis Madureira Pires



- Furthermore EUI appoints one independent member of the Management Committee: Mr. Paolo Cesarini
  - An independent expert is appointed by CGF and EUI jointly as member of the Management Committee: Ms Joanna Krawczyk
- **Steering Committee:** to provide general advice to the Management Committee
- One representative of EUI
  - An expert of recognized knowledge and impartiality appointed by EUI
  - A senior representative of CGF
  - Representatives from other foundations recognized for their work on matters of importance for media literacy and resilience and / or European matters
  - Other experts of recognized capacity agreed upon by the CGF and EUI

The Steering Committee still has to be set up.

### (c) Good governance practices

EMIF is applying some of today's practices for good governance for non-profit organisations, such as:

- Code of conduct for members of the governance bodies  
The Management Committee has approved a set of Internal Rules on 5 May 2022.
- Conflicts of interest policy  
The Governance Charter (Art. 13) as well as the Internal Rules of the Management Committee (Art.3) are explicitly introducing rules to avoid conflict of interest.
- Privacy policy  
The EMIF has no explicit privacy policy, but this is covered by the privacy policy of CGF that is managing the EMIF.

#### **Evaluation:**

- The assessment of the governing documents and the related processes leads to the conclusion that the EMIF structure has been set in compliance with its own rules.
- The reporting period of this assessment is covering the constitutional phase of the EMIF. The Fund has been launched on 25 March 2021. The first meeting of the Management Committee took place on 9 August 2021 with the two members of the Management Committee appointed by then: Mr. Luis Madureira Pires, appointed by CGF as Chair of the Management Committee, and Paolo Cesarini, appointed by EUI as a member of the Management Committee. The third member of the Management Committee, Ms Joanna Krawczyk, joined on 5 May 2022, which is after the reporting period of this assessment.

The Internal Rules have been adopted at the Management Committee meeting on 5 May 2022.

- The Steering Committee still has to be set up.
- Between October 2021 and March 2022, EMIF launched four Calls for Proposals, covering all its priority areas of intervention. Only one Call for Proposals for the priority area “Boosting Fact-checking Activities in Europe” has been closed during the reporting period on 2 March 2022.
- At its meeting on 4 March 2022 the Management Committee selected the expert evaluators for the applications of the first closed Call for Proposals. At the same meeting the Management Committee agreed on the terms and conditions for opening the special funding round addressing the situation on Ukraine, under the Call for Proposal for “Boosting Fact-checking Activities in Europe”. This special fund Call for Proposals opened on 4 March 2022.
- The pace of as well as the thoughtfulness of the implementation of the EMIF and its very tangible outcomes in year one (see also “B. Programme assessment”) reflects the high commitment of the people involved in the team and in the governance of the EMIF.
- Regarding good governance practices for non-profit organisations the EMIF is covering some relevant policies already. Additional policies for EMIF to consider are:
  - Inclusion policy to acknowledge diversity and sensitivity for cultural differences
  - Document retention policy
  - Gift acceptance policy
  - Self-assessment process
  - Whistleblower protection policy

## B. Programme assessment

In the reporting period the first Call for Proposal on the EMIF priority area “Boosting Fact-Checking Activities in Europe” has been implemented. The Call opened on 2 November 2021 and closed on 2 March 2022. From the 20 applications from 14 countries, 7 projects from 5 countries have been selected and funded. The total funding for the seven projects amounts to €413,665.33 (with the funding per proposal ranging from €35,636.20 to €79,999).

The Calls for the other 3 priority areas opened during the reporting period, but only closed on 29 April 2022; therefore this assessment is only looking at the 7 projects referring to the priority area “Boosting Fact-Checking Activities in Europe, selected during the reporting period.

### a. Output:

- i. **Assessment of the numbers reported in the light of being in line with the targets set by the programme**
  - **Split of geography**
    - **Target:** 12 Member States per year

- **Achieved:** Throughout the 12 months following the opening of the first Call for Proposal on 2 November 2022, projects from 21 countries have been selected.
- **Eligibility of applicants and projects**  
When the Call for Proposals closed on 2 March 2022 the EMIF has received 20 applications. During the due diligence process as well as the evaluation of the projects by the expert evaluators 9 projects complied with the programme criteria and were presented to the Management Committee with the respective scores and justifications. The Management Committee approved 7 out of these 9 projects that then have received funding.

Urgent projects:

- Target: geographical scope included EU, EEA, UK
- Target: duration of the project up to 6 months
- Target: up to 55.000 EUR funding per project
- Achieved:
  - Inevitable and Fundamental, Limited Society:
    - Portugal
    - 6 months
    - 39.253,63 EUR
  - The Baltic Center For Investigative Journalism “Re-Baltica”:
    - Latvia
    - 4 months
    - 50.032,85 EUR
  - JSC Delfi & Centre for East European Policy Studies:
    - Latvia
    - 6 months
    - 35.636,20 EUR
  - Foundation “Counteracting Disinformation”
    - Poland
    - 6 months
    - 54.858,00 EUR

Scale-up projects:

- Target: geographical scope includes EU, EEA, UK
- Target: duration of the project up to 12 months
- Target: up to 80.000 EUR funding per project
- Achieved:
  - European Institute Foundation & Bulgarian National Radio:
    - Bulgaria
    - 12 months
    - 79.970,56 EUR
  - Foundation Centre for Civic Monitoring OKO:
    - Poland

- 12 months
- 79.999,00 EUR
- Full Fact:
  - United Kingdom
  - 12 months
  - 73.915,09 EUR

**Evaluation:**

- Throughout the 12 months following the opening of the first Call for Proposals on 2 November 2022, 32 projects from 21 countries have been selected across all 4 priority areas. This confirms the ability of the EMIF to reach a wide geographical reach.
- This assessment is only looking at the 7 projects selected during the reporting period in the priority area “Boosting Fact-checking Activities in Europe”:
  - All Urgent Actions projects selected during the reporting period are eligible according to the targets set by the programme.
  - All Scale-up projects selected during the reporting period are eligible according to the targets set by the programme.
- The funds disbursed are in line with the targets set by the programme and seem fair and balanced.

ii. **Assessment of the delivery mechanism in the light of being in line with the guidelines set by the programme**

Within the reporting period:

- **Target:** Call for applications published on the fund’s website and other media (see Art. 4 of the EMIF Implementation Framework)
- **Achieved:** The 1<sup>st</sup> Call for Proposal in the priority area “Boosting Fact-checking Activities in Europe” has been published on the EMIF website on 2 November 2021. The calls for the 3 other areas have been published on 1 February 2022. The call for the special funding round related to the Ukraine has been published on 4 March 2022. EUI, the EUI School of Transnational Governance and EDMO repeatedly flagged the open Calls in its internal and external newsletters and on its organic social media channels, focusing on LinkedIn, Twitter, Facebook and Instagram.
- **Target:** Call notice according to set criteria (see art 4.1 in the EMIF Implementation Framework)
- **Achieved:** All Calls published in the reporting period address all criteria listed in Art. 4.1 in the EMIF Implementation Framework.

- **Target:** Checking eligibility of the projects to set up the final list of admitted projects for the expert evaluators (see Art. 4.2 in the EMIF Implementation Framework)
- **Achieved:** The EMIF Secretariat checked the admissibility of the applications in the priority area “Boosting Fact-checking Activities in Europe” right after the Call for Proposals closed on 2 March 2022.

Outside the reporting period:

- **Target:** Evaluation and selection by independent expert evaluators (see Art. 4.3 of the EMIF Implementation Framework)
- **Achieved:** The final list of admitted projects has been made accessible on the online platform to EDMO right after the EMIF Secretariat finalized the admissibility check. The expert evaluators did their evaluation and sent the results of the evaluation process to the Management Committee in time for its meeting on 5 May 2022.
- **Target:** Decision making by Management Committee (see Art. 4 (h.iii) of the Internal Rules of the Management Committee of the EMIF)
- **Achieved:** At its meeting on 31 May 2022 the Management Committee reviewed the ranked list of the expert evaluators and approved the selected list of proposals under the Call for Proposals “Boosting Fact-checking Activities in Europe”.
- **Target:** Contracting: grant agreements signed
- **Achieved:** The grant agreements of the 6 out of 7 projects selected during the reporting period have been signed by the end of July 2022. Upon the request of the grantee the 7<sup>th</sup> project has only be signed in September 2022. Today 19 out 33 selected projects across all Calls have been signed.

**Evaluation:**

- The delivery mechanism for the 1<sup>st</sup> Call for Proposals is partly outside the reporting period. It starts with the opening of the Call for Proposals on 2 November 2021. The Call for Proposals closes on 2 March 2022. The calls for the 3 other priority areas have been published on 1 February 2022. Other important elements of the delivery mechanism take place after the end of the reporting period, ending on 24 March 2022.
- The delivery mechanism is in line with the guidelines set by the programme in the EMIF Implementation Framework.
- To guarantee the independence of expert evaluators involved in the selection process, they have signed a “Declaration of Commitment on Impartiality, Independence, Conflict of Interest, Confidentiality and Personal Data”.

- To guarantee the independence of the members of the Management Committee have signed a “Declaration of Commitment on Impartiality, Independence, Conflict of Interest, Confidentiality and Personal Data”.

## b. Outcome:

Assessment of the projects and initiatives supported by the programme in the light of being in line with the objectives of the programme.

### Urgent actions

Under this category, the Fund will primarily support

- projects designed to increase coverage, accuracy and speed of fact-checking activities by organisations that commit to produce regular flows of fact-checks in response to critical events (e.g. elections, public health or public security crises) affecting one or more European countries.
- projects aimed at improving detection of disinformation narratives in topical areas of public interest (e.g. climate change, economic recovery, immigration, geopolitical issues, EU policies)
- projects fostering knowledge sharing and public awareness, will also be in scope.

### Scale-up projects

Free-lance collaborations within fact-checking newsrooms and/or use of state-of-the-art technologies for content verification and media and social media monitoring may be efficient ways for small organisations to boost their activities and grow. Under this category, the Fund will support

- structured and time-framed collaborations with specialists (journalists, but also subject-matter experts or data analysts) that could bring new knowledge and methodological approaches into fact-checking newsrooms and pave the way for more stable job opportunities.
- Such free-lance collaborations should enable coverage of new topics and journalistic activities by the beneficiary.
- Moreover, as information manipulation tactics and techniques employed by hostile actors become increasingly sophisticated, debunking activities depend more and more on access to adequate tools for content verification and network analysis. Due to their cost, these tools often fall out of small organisations’ reach. Therefore, the Fund will also support the licensing or acquisition of such tools.

### Evaluation:

- The 7 projects selected and approved by the Management Committee in the priority area “Boosting Fact-checking Activities in Europe” have been evaluated by the expert evaluators suggested by EDMO. These expert evaluators have been selected by the Management Committee at its meeting on 4 March 2022.
- The task of the expert evaluators is to do an evaluation of the projects’ merit by scoring the pre-set evaluation criteria:

- Relevance: contribution of the project's expected results to the Call's objectives.
  - Quality of content and activities: adequacy of the proposed methodologies to reach the Call objectives.
  - Project management: feasibility of the proposed project.
  - Dissemination: expected impact of the proposed project.
- The expert evaluators sent the results of the evaluation of the 9 eligible projects to the Management Committee in time for its meeting on 5 May.
  - The scores for the 7 winning projects are in a clear "winning range" with scores ranging from 6 to 9 on a range from 1-10 for all four evaluation criteria. This proves that the projects selected are in line with the objectives of the programme.

### c. Relevance

The EMIF aims at supporting fact-checking and media literacy initiatives, as well as fundamental research projects, with a view to addressing the phenomenon of online disinformation in Europe and promoting, in particular, a more resilient and fact-based digital information ecosystem. The EMIF conducts its funding activities in a way that is consistent with, and complementary to EDMO's overall mission, which is to bring together a multidisciplinary community of fact-checkers, media literacy experts, and academic researchers, in order to foster a better understanding and analysis of disinformation, in collaboration with media, civil society organisations and online platforms.

#### **Evaluation:**

- The results from this reporting period give a first indication of the EMIF's ability to unlock the potential of organisations and individuals to come up with relevant initiatives addressing the disinformation challenge across Europe.
- The first Call for Proposals managed to attract 20 applications from 14 countries. This shows that EMIF already at its start has a very good geographical outreach, which is essential for a European fund.
- 9 out of 20 applications were eligible for the programme. It is too early to draw conclusions from this first call on the overall programme. Still it would be good to keep an eye on maintaining and increasing the quality of the applications. As some of the projects that were not eligible in the first round have successfully applied in one of the following funding rounds for this same Call, it implies that the potential for quality projects is there.
- 2 of the 7 projects funded under this first call are collaborative projects. Since it is the objective of the EMIF to build a multidisciplinary community of fact-checkers, media literacy experts, and academic researchers and incentivize collaboration with media, civil society organisations and online platforms the

ratio of collaborative projects should increase in order to meet the objectives of the programme and ensure a sustainable impact.

- The delay of 13 weeks between the closing of the Call for Proposals and the selection and approval of the projects to be supported by the Management Committee is too long for fact checking projects linked to a particular event, like an election. If the EMIF wants to remain relevant also for these kind of time sensitive projects, the delay needs to be reduced. The selection processes of the following calls – outside this reporting period – have reportedly being significantly shorter.
- On the other hand it is impressive to see that the EMIF was able to launch within days after the invasion of Russia into Ukraine a special funding round “Urgent Actions – Ukraine”. The deadline for this Call for Proposal was on 29 April 2022 and therefore outside the reporting period of this assessment.

## C. Internal and external communications

### Internal Communications

“Internal Communications” refers to the communications within the EMIF programme, between the governance bodies, the team and the partners involved. The Management Committee’s Internal Rules outline the timelines for sending information ahead of its meetings and in the follow up to the meeting. In the conversations with the different representatives of the EMIF programme in the context of this assessment report, there were no comments about any potential deficits in the internal communications.

### External Communications

“External Communications” refers to the communication with the general public, the potential applicants and other relevant stakeholders. The means of communications are the EMIF website, annual progress report, newsletters, social media, advertising, events and the partnership search directory.

- **Website**

The EMIF website <https://gulbenkian.pt/emifund/> has been launched on 4 October 2021 and is the primary access point to the EMIF. On the website all information is easily accessible for all audiences. It is constantly updated with news, open calls, information about the organization, its governance and team, the funding principles and information related to the grants. It provides access to the EMIF Directory for Partner Search.

The traffic on the website is building up each time the closing date of a Call for Proposal is getting closer and showed in February 2022 (closing date for the 1<sup>st</sup> Fact Checking Call) more than 40.000 sessions and in total during the reporting period 72.133 sessions and 125.797 page views. The 2021 – 2022 Progress Report provides the details of the traffic on the EMIF website.



- **Annual Progress Report**

In Art. 3 (b) in the tripartite agreement the signing parties agreed that there would be an Annual Progress Report issued within one month after the anniversary of the Fund Start date. Since this report was due after the reporting period of this assessment the evaluation of the process and the content is not part of this report.  
The 2021-2022 Progress Report is available online on the EMIF website.
- **Newsletter**

Once the website was launched, a newsletter subscription option was immediately made available on the website. The 9 newsletters sent out during the reporting period are dedicated to announcing the opening of funding Calls and are related to the EMIF events. The opening rates are up to 62% and the click rates up to 28%.
- **Social media**

LinkedIn EMIF profile [<https://www.linkedin.com/company/emifund/>] has 455 followers and started posting 5 months ago (June 2022): promoting the EMIF mission, open Calls for Proposal, projects funded by EMIF, EMIF events as well as events of partner organisations, job openings, related blog posts.

Twitter @EMIF\_Fund and #EMIFund has 1.138 followers and is active since 27 June 2022: promoting the EMIF mission, open Calls for Proposal, projects funded by EMIF, EMIF events as well as events of partner organisations, job openings, related blog posts.

The EMIF's social media activities are supported by the social media accounts on LinkedIn, Twitter, Facebook and Instagram of the European University Institute (EUI), EUI School of Transnational Governance and EDMO.

- **Advertising**

The EMIF's communication strategy featured a considerable awareness and traffic-generation component with advertising in Politico and social media campaigns on Twitter, LinkedIn, and Facebook/Instagram. The Politico campaign ran between 15 January and 28 February 2022 and included various elements: Interscroller ads generated 200,000 impressions and 658 clicks, while a one-week Tech newsletter sponsorship generated a total of 489 clicks, and the newsletter banners resulted in 100,000 impressions and 71 clicks.
- **Events**

During the reporting period the EMIF held its first information session on 16 February 2022, when the Management Committee presented the Open Calls. 190 people from 29 countries attended this online session. The presentations of the information session are available on the EMIF website in the news section.

There were no other events organized during the reporting period. Since then the EMIF has been represented at a multitude of events across Europe (i.e.: 27th Edition of the Lisbon Forum 2021, an initiative of the Council of Europe and the North-South Centre, on 9 and 10 December 2021) and with a promotional stand (i.e. WEB Summit in November 2022 in Lisbon).

- **Partnership Search Directory**

To foster knowledge-sharing and facilitate the creation of European networks in the ecosystem of fact-checking, debunking disinformation and research, the EMIF initiated the development of a directory of entities which is today accessible on the Fund's website. By today 43 organisations from 17 countries have registered themselves in this Directory with a link to their website, the name and email address of a contact person.

**Evaluation:**

- The internal communication of the EMIF programme meets the standards set by the founding organizations. There is no information about insufficient communication within the organization.
- The external communications has been developed throughout the constitution phase of the EMIF. The external communication meets the standards set by the founding organisations.
- The Management Committee shows awareness of the need to be fully transparent with all information related to the Calls for Proposals, the selection criteria, the selection process and sharing information publicly about the selected projects, their objectives and the related funding volume.
- The statistics of the use of the website, the newsletter, and the social media channels show that the EMIF Management Committee and the EMIF secretariat have successfully implemented the EMIF's external communications throughout the reporting period and thereafter. During the reporting period all relevant information is up to date, published in a timely manner and fully accessible for the public.
- The EMIF made a particular effort to support building the community in a sustainable way by introducing a Partnership Search Directory on its website. This tool allows interested parties across the disinformation community to connect with each other. The introduction and take up of this Directory by members of the community underlines the important role that the EMIF has in further building this community.

**D. Robustness of the programme**

This assessment report looks at the "robustness of the programme" through a variety of lenses that are (a) considered as relevant for the sustainable impact of the programme on fighting disinformation and (b) contribute to the resilience of the programme in the light of the uncertainty of our times.

**(a) Sustainable impact of the programme on fighting disinformation**

- **Driving change:**

Over the past decade, the spread of disinformation online has become a problem facing Europe and the world. Increasingly, domestic and foreign adversaries have used it as a way to undermine democratic processes, upend democratic norms and weaken confidence in public institutions.

In this context the EMIF is entrusted with an objective of public interest to support fact-checking and media literacy initiatives, as well as fundamental research projects, with a view to addressing the phenomenon of online disinformation in Europe and promoting a more resilient and fact-based digital information ecosystem.

In the EMIF Implementation Framework it says in Art 2 that the programme needs to attract proposals that are innovative (no “business-as-usual” projects) and have a multiplier effect (e.g. scalable approaches to disinformation detection, analysis and exposure; networked knowledge exchanges; solid dissemination plans that foster information sharing and follow-on research).

Furthermore the programme is operating under the scientific guidance of the European Digital Media Observatory (EDMO). EDMO advises on the evaluation process and selects experts to serve as evaluators, ensuring complete independence and relevant competence for each of the EMIF’s intervention areas.

Looking at the projects selected until today in the four priority areas fact-checking, combatting disinformation, research and media literacy, the EMIF was able to select 33 disinformation projects across 21 countries within its geographical scope: all 27 EU Member States, the EEA member countries and UK. According to the expert evaluators’ evaluation reports for each projects, all selected projects are innovative and have a multiplier effect, in line with the criteria mentioned in Art 2 in the EMIF Implementation Framework.

As all projects selected are still in the implementation phase it is too early to say for this assessment report to what extent they are driving change in respect to the overall disinformation challenge.

- **Attract the most promising solutions addressing the challenge of disinformation**

In order to attract the most promising solutions addressing the challenge of disinformation, the EMIF has put an approach in place that is independent and trusted by the applicants because of its transparent decision making based on scientific priorities.

EDMO’s Scientific Focus provides a framework to guide the scientific priorities of the EMIF’s interventions in all relevant areas, with a view to addressing the phenomenon of online disinformation in Europe. Moreover, based on EDMO’s Scientific Focus, EDMO’s

Advisory Board sets the scientific priorities for the EMIF's interventions in funding "Multidisciplinary Investigations on Disinformation", "Research – Studies & Sandboxes", and "Actions in Support of Media Literacy".

EDMO performs its role in complete independence from the Fund and its donors. The Chairs of EDMO's Advisory Board and Executive Board are responsible for validating the Call texts ahead of publication. The EUI is not allowed to participate in Calls for Proposals organised by the Fund. EDMO advises on the evaluation process and selects experts to serve as evaluators, ensuring complete independence and relevant competence for each of the EMIF's intervention areas.

- **Deal with failure**

The organization has not had the opportunity to deal with failure throughout the constitution phase. But the EMIF showed its ability to learn and react to unforeseen circumstances by setting up a special funding round on Ukraine only days after the invasion of Russia into Ukraine. Already on 4 March 2022 the EMIF published an update to its Call "Boosting Fact-checking Activities in Europe" to elicit fact-checking projects addressing the increasingly complex Russia-Ukraine conflict at a time when military actions are being sustained by large-scale, coordinated, state-controlled disinformation campaigns and influence operations targeting both the Russian population and the public opinion in neighbouring countries, the European Union and beyond. The fact that the Ukraine is outside the geographical scope of the EMIF has been respected, as only grantees have been accepted from the eligible region addressing the specific issue of disinformation related to the war in Ukraine.

- **Build trust with stakeholders involved**

For the sustainable impact of the EMIF programme on fighting disinformation, the trust into the programme is essential. Elements for building trust are the professionalism of the people and organisations involved in the implementation of the programme, the reliability of the communication, selection and grant making processes, the transparency of the decision making and the independence of all individuals and organisations involved.

The EMIF is run and managed by the EMIF Unit, a team of professionals working for the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation in Portugal, a leading private philanthropic institution, open to the world, which contributes to a more just and united society preparing citizens of the future.

The programme is supported by colleagues from the European University Institute in Italy, the leading institute in Europe dedicated to social sciences and humanities. Founded in 1972 by the six original members of the then European Communities, the EUI has earned a reputation as a transnational hub of research and higher learning.

As assessed in previous chapters of this assessment report, the communication and the selection and grant making processes comply with the highest standards. Also the transparency of decisions taken is in line with the standards set by the founding organisations.

**(b) Resilience of the programme in the light of the uncertainty of our times****• Institutional continuity**

The EMIF has been set up by two very strong organisations that have at their core the grant making as well as the disinformation challenge respectively. Both organisations are well respected institutions in the European context, their existence does not depend on the financial situation of the EMIF and they attract highly qualified professionals from across Europe as employees and partners.

- Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation (CGF) in Portugal is a leading private philanthropic institution, which contributes to a more just and united society preparing citizens of the future. It has been created in 1956 by the last will and testament of Calouste Sarkis Gulbenkian, a philanthropist of Armenian origin who lived in Lisbon between 1942 and the year of his death, 1955.
- European University Institute (EUI) in Italy is the leading institute in Europe dedicated to social sciences and humanities. Founded in 1972 by the six original members of the then European Communities, the EUI has earned a reputation as a transnational hub of research and higher learning.

**• Sustainability of funding**

The multi-donor European Media and Information Fund, EMIF, welcomes contributions from donors believing in its mission and subscribing to its principles of scientific autonomy and freedom.

The Fund accepted Google's inaugural contribution of €25,000,000 over five years. Therefore EMIF's funding is secured for the first five years of its existence as from March 2021. If the EMIF aims to continue its activities beyond this five years' period and extend the funding opportunity per year, additional donors have to be brought on board.

**• Ability to engage with potential grantees**

The EMIF has the potential to engage with a wide range of potential grantees across its geographical scope, as the outcome of the first set of Calls for Proposals confirms. With 33 projects from 21 countries EMIF has been very successful in reaching out to a wide and diverse community. EMIF is the result of a cooperation between CGF and EUI with their extended networks across Europe and beyond. Both organisations do actively support the outreach of the EMIF. The EMIF is also an organization that is open for partnerships and collaboration to increase the overall impact on fighting disinformation.

**Evaluation:**

- Even though the reporting period for this assessment is mainly covering the constitution period of the EMIF, it can be confirmed that a few key elements securing the robustness of the programme are in place.

- This starts with the two founding organisations CGF and EUI. Both organisations enjoy a very high reputation in their field at European level, they are financially independent from the EMIF programme and they guarantee high quality of processes.
- The inaugural contribution of Google for a period of 5 years gives the EMIF programme the continuity and funding certainty it needs to reach a significant impact level in a space that is generally underfunded.
- The fact that EDMO provides a framework to guide the scientific priorities of the EMIF's interventions, advises on the evaluation process and selects experts to serve as evaluators, ensuring complete independence and relevant competence for each of the EMIF's intervention areas, is a guarantee for the quality of the programme.
- All processes related to the communication of the Calls for Proposals, the selection of projects and the decision making are well defined and professionally implemented. This creates a high trust level with all partners, including potential grantees.
- That the EMIF is able to react quickly to changing circumstances has been proven in the context of the Russian invasion into Ukraine. Only days after the Russian invasion the EMIF launched a Call for Proposals for a special Ukraine fund. This confirms a "can do" mentality which is an important criteria for the robustness of the programme.

## 5. Conclusions

The EMIF project started on 25 March 2021. This assessment report is referring to the first year of the EMIF activities, ending on 24 March 2022 and uses as a basis the 2021 – 2022 Progress Report as well as all relevant governance documents, project evaluation reports and interviews with members of the Management Committee and expert evaluators.

Even though this assessment is limited to the first constitutional year of the programme, it takes into consideration the developments between 24 March 2022 and November 2022, since many of the activities of the reporting period showed results only in the following weeks and months.

Until November 2022, the European Media and Information Fund (EMIF) has distributed €5,751,721 in grants supporting 33 projects across 21 countries, aimed at countering disinformation across the continent.

From the overall assessment this report draws the following conclusions for the EMIF and suggests a couple of recommendations:

### 1. Conclusion: The EMIF lives up to its principle of independence

Securing the independence of the decision making processes across the programme is at the core of all relevant governance documents, including the *Agreement establishing the European Media and Information Fund*, signed by Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation (CGF) and European University Institute (EUI), the *Governance Charter, Management Committee's Internal Rules* and the *EMIF Implementation Framework*. Members of the Management Committee and the expert evaluators have signed a "Declaration of Commitment on Impartiality, Independence, Conflict of Interest, Confidentiality and Personal Data".

Furthermore when the Fund accepted Google's inaugural contribution of €25,000,000 over five years it was agreed that Google is not involved in decision-making and does not profit from the intellectual property of any ideas or projects financed through the Fund. This rule will apply to any future funder joining EMIF.

Finally the European Digital Media Observatory (EDMO) agreed to provide scientific advice to the Fund, on condition that it would be allowed to perform its role in complete independence from the Fund and its donors.

Following this assessment it can be confirmed that the individuals involved in running and implementing the programme are in compliance with the strict independence rules set by the organization.

### 2. Conclusion: The EMIF is a highly professional programme, led by experienced and trusted partners

The two founding organisations Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation (CGF) and European University Institute (EUI) enjoy both a very high reputation for integrity and excellence at European level. They are financially independent from the EMIF programme and they guarantee high quality of processes. This is reflected in the lean and robust governance structure, and in a high level of legal, ethical, and professional standards.

Furthermore the programme is operating under the scientific guidance of the European Digital Media Observatory (EDMO). EDMO advises on the evaluation process and selects experts to serve as evaluators, ensuring complete independence and relevant competence for each of the EMIF's intervention areas. EDMO ensures the quality of the Call for Proposals and the selection process for each single Call of the Fund.

### **3. Conclusion: The programme has a high geographical outreach and attracts a relevant range of applications**

During the first year of the programme – since the opening of the first Call for Proposals on 2 November 2022 – 33 projects from 21 countries have been selected to receive funding. This geographical outreach is significantly higher than originally aimed for. In February 2022 a special funding round for urgent actions related to disinformation in the context of the Russian invasion into the Ukraine has been launched ad hoc, which attracted a couple of more projects from the EMIF's geographical scope of 32 countries.

The evaluations of the applicants by the independent expert evaluators confirm that all selected projects across the four priority areas of the EMIF score relatively high as they match most of the criteria, including the need to be innovative and having a multiplier effect, as stated in the EMIF Implementation Framework. This outcome confirms that the EMIF succeeds in attracting relevant projects from across Europe in the areas of fact-checking, multidisciplinary investigations on disinformation, research and media literacy.

### **4. Conclusion: The EMIF successfully builds a community of people and organisations tackling disinformation**

The EMIF made a particular effort to support building the community of actors tackling disinformation. The introduction of a Partnership Search Directory on its website, that allows interested parties in the disinformation community to connect with each other, the organization of online information sessions, the creation of moments for the members of this community to come together and connect, like the Annual Event, underlines the important role that the EMIF has in further building the community in the disinformation space. During the assessment it became evident that the EMIF is well positioned to stimulate collaboration across disciplines and countries, between organisations and their projects as the Calls for Proposals incentivize joint applications.

Based on the findings of the assessment report, this report also takes the opportunity to provide some recommendations to the EMIF:

#### **1. Recommendation: Increase the diversity of donors**

The multi-donor European Media and Information Fund is set up to welcome contributions from a range of donors believing in its mission and subscribing to its principles of scientific autonomy and freedom. By diversifying its range of donors and increasing the overall volume of funding, EMIF will scale its proven impact, will sustain its professional and independent approach in funding relevant projects tackling disinformation and has the opportunity to further position itself as a connector enabling cross-discipline and cross-border collaboration for collective impact in the area of its mission.



**2. Recommendation: Set up Steering Committee**

In the agreement establishing the European Media and Information Fund, signed by the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation and the European University Institute, Article 4.2 foresees the set-up of a Steering Committee that has the role to provide general guidance and oversight to the Management Committee. To complete the governance structure of the EMIF, this Steering Committee still has to be set up.

**3. Recommendation: Develop a multistakeholder partnership approach for collective impact**

Reflecting on the role the EMIF has taken in the anti-disinformation ecosystem, the programme could leverage its impact through strategic partnerships. These partnerships could amplify the voice of the programme and its grantees vis-à-vis the public (e.g. media partners), increase its local impact (e.g. community foundations), leverage its impact with commercial actors in the public sphere (e.g. media companies and social media platforms) and make available systematically its knowledge and insights to partners across the ecosystem (e.g. think tanks, universities). When connecting all these dots the EMIF could become a driver of collective impact in fighting disinformation even more effectively.

**4. Recommendation: Become a gender balanced organisation**

A diverse workforce brings varied perspectives that contribute to an organisation's prosperity. The EMIF's leadership should explore how a gender balanced approach could attract, retain and leverage top talent to cultivate a more diverse workforce. Overcoming the current disparity is critical to the success of the EMIF as it is for any organization. This is why it should be considered to also apply the gender balance criteria to the projects funded by the EMIF.

Brussels, 30 November 2022



Max von Abendorff

## ANNEX:

### The documents consulted for this assessment include:

- EMIF 2021 – 2022 Annual Progress Report
- Agreement establishing the European Media and Information Fund, signed by CGF and EUI
- EMIF Governance Charter
- EMIF Management Committee Internal Rules
- EMIF Implementation Framework
- Minutes of the Management Committee meetings during the reporting period
- Declaration of Commitment on Impartiality, Independence, Conflict of Interest, Confidentiality and Personal Data – signed by the members of the Management Committee
- Declaration of Commitment on Impartiality, Independence, Conflict of Interest, Confidentiality and Personal Data – signed by expert evaluators
- Guidelines for evaluators (March 2022)
- Call for Proposals “Boosting Fact-checking Activities in Europe” – guideline
- EDMO Guidance February 2022
- EDMO Scientific Focus
- EMIF Evaluators Survey
- EMIF Grantees Survey
- Calls for Proposals Fact Checking
- Calls for Proposal Urgent Actions Ukraine
- Calls for Proposal Multidisciplinary Investigations on Disinformation
- Calls for Proposal Supporting Research into Media Disinformation and Information Literacy
- Call for Proposals Media and Information Literacy
- Grant Agreements
- Evaluators’ reports for all priority areas

### List of countries that are represented by the projects selected until November 2022:

- |                   |                    |
|-------------------|--------------------|
| 1. Austria        | 12. Latvia         |
| 2. Belgium        | 13. Lithuania      |
| 3. Bulgaria       | 14. Netherlands    |
| 4. Croatia        | 15. Poland         |
| 5. Czech Republic | 16. Portugal       |
| 6. Finland        | 17. Romania        |
| 7. France         | 18. Slovakia       |
| 8. Germany        | 19. Spain          |
| 9. Hungary        | 20. Sweden         |
| 10. Ireland       | 21. United Kingdom |
| 11. Italy         |                    |