

# Assessment Report

## European Media and Information Fund 2022 - 2023

### 0. Executive Summary

This report assesses the second year of activities of the European Media and Information Fund, EMIF, starting on 25 March 2022 and ending on 24 March 2023.

The EMIF has started its activities on 25 March 2021 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 light of this context this report is building on the structure of the 1<sup>st</sup> assessment report evaluating the first year of the EMIF:

This assessment report describes in its introduction the purpose of the report and is providing in its 2<sup>nd</sup> chapter background information about the EMIF and its purpose. In its 3<sup>rd</sup> chapter the report is defining the evaluation criteria and is applying those in the following 4<sup>th</sup> chapter across the following areas: governance of the programme; programme assessment; internal and external communications; and robustness of the programme.

In the 5<sup>th</sup> chapter the report shares its analysis by highlighting key insights, successes, shortcomings and provides 3 recommendations.

The **assessment report comes to the conclusion** that the EMIF attracts relevant projects, successfully extends its geographical reach, lives up to its high governance standards, and applied learnings to the 2<sup>nd</sup> round of Calls for Proposals.

**The report recommends** to the EMIF to continue the community building for enhanced collaboration, increase the diversity of its donors, and apply an impact framework for its programme.

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## 1. Introduction

The European Media and Information Fund's, EMIF's, Management Committee has commissioned this report to assess the relevance of the overall EMIF approach as well as its compliance with the set of standards laid out in the governing documents of the fund.

This assessment report is covering the 2<sup>nd</sup> year of operation of the EMIF, starting on 25 March 2022 and ending on 24 March 2023. It is building on the first assessment report that has been presented at the first Annual Event of the EMIF on 2 December 2022 in Lisbon.

The basis for this evaluation is EMIF's 2022 – 2023 draft Annual Progress Report. The final Annual progress Report will be published on 30 June 2023. Furthermore the EMIF Implementation Framework, and the EMIF Management Committee's Internal Rules acted as a basis for this evaluation. 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.

During its second year the EMIF has implemented the full scope of the fund across its four funding areas: (1) support of fact-checking, (2) investigations into disinformation, (3) supporting research into media, disinformation and information literacy and (4) media and information literacy for citizens empowerment. In 2022/2023 40 projects have been funded. In addition the EMIF has launched in September 2022 the "Policy Leader Fellow Programme", a research support for master students and Policy Leader Fellows at the EUI.

The assessment has been exercised btw. 22 May and 22 June 2023 by Max von Abendroth. He is the Chair of the Philanthropy Forum at the World Association of PPP Units and Professionals, WAPPP, works as Senior Advisor for Europe & Germany at the Media Development Investment Fund, MDIF, and is project lead at The Partnering Initiative, an Oxford based think tank. Max is the former Executive Director of the European Magazine Media Association, EMMA, and the Donors and Foundations Networks in Europe, Dafne.

## 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. This phenomenon has been reinforced over the last year by technology innovations, such as Artificial Intelligence (AI) as well as geopolitical conflicts leading to significantly enhanced disinformation campaigns by Russia and China.

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 and is now in its third year of operations. This report looks at the second year of the EMIF operations.

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 EUR 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 EUR over the period of five years.
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 EUR 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 EUR over the period of five years.
4. Actions in support of media literacy  
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 EUR over the period of five years.

Out of 102 applications across all four funding areas, 40 projects have been funded during the reporting year 2022/2023 with a total grant amount of 6.145.346,35 EUR. Also during this year

the Management Committee took the decision to reallocate parts of the budget to respond to the high demand for funding in the field of media literacy. Furthermore the Management Committee applied some of its learnings from the first round of calls for proposal in Spring 2022 for all four funding areas and adjusted the criteria for the second round of calls for proposals in Spring 2023.

This second year of the EMIF showed also significantly enhanced outreach in terms of communication activities as well as event formats to build the community of fact checkers and organisations fighting disinformation across Europe.

In response to the recommendations of the 2021/2022 assessment report during the evaluation period of this report the EMIF

- has launched the process of completing its governance structure by setting up a Steering Committee that will be fully functional before the end of 2023,
- has explored the diversification of funding – so far with no further funding commitments -,
- has lived up to its interdisciplinary approach to build multistakeholder partnerships for collective impact by ensuring that the projects funded are involving different stakeholder groups, such as media outlets, think tanks, academia and civil society organisations, and
- has introduced the criteria of gender balance in its calls for proposals launched in Spring 2023.

Since September 2022 the EMIF, as part of its mission to contribute to the fight against disinformation, supports selected students of the EU's Master of Arts in Transitional Governance and mid-career professionals being part of the Policy Leader Fellow programme. The selected individuals must show an interest in disinformation. The fund is currently supporting four master students and two Policy Leader Fellows (PLFs) at the EU.

### 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 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.

In line with the first evaluation report published on 2 December 2022 this evaluation report looks at the output and outcome of the programme during the reporting period. This report will for the first time provide a first assessment of the impact of the EMIF programme:

- **“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.

#### **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 the accessibility of relevant information across the EMIF’s governance. 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.

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, CGF, 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.

In its second year of existence the EMIF has further implemented its governance procedures in compliance with the **governing documents**:

- **Agreement establishing the European Media and Information Fund**, signed by CGF and EUI on 29 March 2021:  
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** is the Appendix 2 of the above mentioned agreement between CGF and EUI:  
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, defines the thematic areas, introduces principles of transparency, pluralism, non-discrimination and diversity, 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.
- The **Management Committee 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.

The EMIF has the following **governance bodies**:

- **Management Committee** executes day-to-day logistics and operations as well as being responsible for the financial management of the calls. 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** provides general advice to the Management Committee. It is set up by 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 and other experts of recognized capacity agreed upon by the CGF and EUI.

The Steering Committee is in the process of being set up.

The 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.
- Whistleblower protection policy  
The EMIF has no explicit whistleblower protection policy, but this is covered by the whistleblower protection policy of CGF that is managing the EMIF.

#### **Evaluation:**

- The **Management Committee** has met 9 times throughout this reporting year. In the beginning of this reporting period only two members of the Management Committee had been appointed: 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, within the reporting period of this assessment.

- The **Internal Rules** of the Management Committee have been adopted at the Management Committee meeting on 5 May 2022.
- In line with Internal Rule of the Management Committee, the Management Committee at its meeting on 4 August 2022 decided to allow the **reallocation of funding** from one funding area to another funding area, if the funding in one funding area is not used up. This has been implemented in this evaluation period when funding has been transferred to media literacy initiatives, since the demand for funding was uneven across the four EMIF intervention areas, with a stronger stakeholders' participation to the call in the media literacy area.
- The **Steering Committee** is in the process of being set up.
- 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

## B. Programme assessment

In the reporting period the following Calls for Proposal have been closed:

### 1) Support of Fact-Checking

- **29 April 2022:** Special Funding Round for Urgent Actions within the “Boosting Fact-Checking Activities in Europe”
- **30 June 2022:** second funding round
- **31 October 2022:** third funding round
- **28 February 2023:** fourth funding round

### 2) Investigations into Disinformation

- **29 April 2022:** 1<sup>st</sup> call “Multidisciplinary Investigations on Disinformation in Europe.”

### 3) Research – Studies & Sandboxes

- **29 April 2022:** 1<sup>st</sup> call “Supporting Research into Media, Disinformation and Information Literacy Across Europe” call for proposals

### 4) Actions in Support of Media Literacy

- **29 April 2022:** 1<sup>st</sup> call “Media and Information Literacy for Citizens Empowerment”

#### 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 (Art. 4 EMIF Governance Charter)
- **Achieved:** Throughout the evaluation period funds have been awarded directly to 40 organisations acting as consortium leaders, based in 16 countries. Taking the partner organisations of the grantees into account the funding reached organisations in 23 countries.

##### ▪ Eligibility of applicants and projects

Throughout the 4 funding areas the EMIF has received during the evaluation period 102 applications out of which 80 have been admitted and 40 have been accepted and grant agreement have been signed. The total funding EMIF allocated for these 40 projects within this evaluation period is 6.145.346,35 EUR.

##### 1) Support of Fact-Checking

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#### **Urgent Action:**

##### **Target:**

- Target: up to 55.000 EUR funding per project
- Target: duration of the project up to 6 months
- Target: geographical scope included EU, EEA, UK

##### **Achieved:**

Out of the 24 approved projects, 13 are under the “urgent action” typology with an average financial allocation of 50.996,57 EUR and an average duration of 6 month. All projects are within the geographical scope of the EMIF.

#### **Scale Up**

##### **Target:**

- Target: up to 80.000 EUR funding per project
- Target: duration of the project up to 12 months
- Target: geographical scope included EU, EEA, UK

##### **Achieved:**

Out of the 24 approved projects, 11 projects are under the “scale up” typology with an average financial allocation of 72.770,89 EUR and duration of 12 months and an average. All projects are within the geographical scope of the EMIF.

## **2) Investigations into Disinformation**

- **29 April 2022:** 1<sup>st</sup> call “Multidisciplinary Investigations on Disinformation in Europe.”

##### **Target:**

- Target: up to 130.000 EUR funding per project
- Target: duration of the project up to 12 months
- Target: geographical scope included EU, EEA, UK

##### **Achieved:**

4 projects have been approved with a total grant amount of 515.068,89 EUR and an average financial allocation of 128.767,22 EUR. The duration of the projects is 11 months in average. All projects are within the geographical scope of the EMIF.

## **3) Research – Studies & Sandboxes**

- **29 April 2022:** 1<sup>st</sup> call “Supporting Research into Media, Disinformation and Information Literacy Across Europe” call for proposals

**Target:**

- Target: up to 400.000 EUR funding per project
- Target: duration of the project up to 18 months
- Target: geographical scope included EU, EEA, UK

**Achieved:**

4 projects have been approved with a total grant amount of 1.419.917,75 EUR and an average financial allocation of 354.979,44 EUR. The duration of the projects is 18 months in average. All projects are within the geographical scope of the EMIF.

**4) Actions in Support of Media Literacy**

- **29 April 2022:** 1<sup>st</sup> call “Media and Information Literacy for Citizens Empowerment”

**Target:**

- Target: up to 400.000 EUR funding per project
- Target: duration of the project up to 18 months
- Target: geographical scope included EU, EEA, UK

**Achieved:**

8 projects have been approved with a total grant amount of 2.746.924,54 EUR and an average financial allocation of 343.365,57 EUR. The duration of the projects is 18 months in average. All projects are within the geographical scope of the EMIF.

**Evaluation:**

- The EMIF programme attracted **47 applications for the Fact Checking** funding area, out of which 37 projects were admitted and 24 were funded.
- The EMIF programme attracted **55 applications across funding areas 2 (investigation), 3 (research) and 4 (media literacy)**, out of which 43 projects were admitted and 16 were funded. These numbers indicate that the EMIF manages to attract a good number of applications across the field.
- Throughout the 2<sup>nd</sup> year of its existence the **EMIF granted 6.145.346,35 EUR** to 40 projects in all 4 funding areas. The organisations directly and indirectly funded are based in 23 countries across the geographical scope of the EMIF programme. This confirms the ability of the EMIF to establish a wide geographic reach.
- This assessment is looking at the **40 projects selected** during the reporting period in all four funding areas:
  - All 13 projects selected under **Fact Checking “Urgent Actions”** during the reporting period are eligible according to the targets set by the programme.
  - All 11 project selected under **Fact Checking “Scale-up”** during the reporting period are eligible according to the targets set by the programme.

- All 4 projects selected under **Investigations into Disinformation** during the reporting period are eligible according to the targets set by the programme.
  - All 4 projects selected under **Research, Studies & Sandboxes** during the reporting period are eligible according to the targets set by the programme.
  - All 8 projects selected under **Media and Information Literacy** during the reporting period are eligible according to the targets set by the programme.
- The **Media and Information Literacy** call has been published with a target of 1.600.000 EUR for the call that closed on 29 April 2022. Since the quality of the applications for this call was in particular high, the Management Committee decided in August 2022 to move unused funds from funding area 2 (1.084.929,91 EUR) and 3 (61.994,63 EUR) to the Media and Information Literacy call. Therefore a total amount of 2.746.924,54 EUR could be allocated to this funding area during the evaluation period.
  - The funds disbursed are in line with the overall targets set by the programme.

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

- **Target:** Call for applications published on the fund's website and other media (see Art. 4 of the EMIF Implementation Framework)
- **Achieved:** All Calls for Proposal have been published in time on the EMIF website.
- **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 right after the respective Calls for Proposals closed.
- **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.
- **Target:** Decision making by Management Committee (see Art. 4 (h.iii) of the Internal Rules of the Management Committee of the EMIF)
- **Achieved:**  
**Fact Checking Call:** 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.

**Multidisciplinary Investigations on Disinformation in Europe:** At its meeting on 4 August 2022 the Management Committee reviewed the ranked list of the expert evaluators and approved the selected list of proposals.

**Research into Media, Disinformation and Information Literacy:** At its meeting on 4 August 2022 the Management Committee reviewed the ranked list of the expert evaluators and approved the selected list of proposals.

**Media and Information Literacy for Citizens Empowerment:** At its meeting on 4 August 2022 the Management Committee reviewed the ranked list of the expert evaluators and approved the selected list of proposals.

- **Target:** Contracting: grant agreements signed
- **Achieved:** The grant agreements of all 38 of the 40 projects selected during the reporting period have been signed by the termination of this assessment report. The 2 pending projects have requested to postpone the signing of the grant agreement in order to postpone the start of the project.

In 2022/2023 the EMIF's overall average delay between the application deadline and the notification of the grant to the project is 93,5 days: in the funding area "fact-checking" it is 90 days, in the funding areas "investigations" "research" and "media literacy" it is 97 days respectively.

However the average delay between the closing date for applications and the grant agreement signature date during the reporting period is 194 days. This was 188 days in the grant area "fact checking", 187 days in the grant area "investigations", 200 days in the grant area "research" and 205 days in the grant area "media literacy". This delay is partly because of some grantees' preference to postpone the starting date of their project and therefore the signing of the grant agreement is delayed.

#### **Evaluation:**

- The **delivery mechanism** is in line with the guidelines set by the programme in the EMIF Implementation Framework.
- The **average delay** between the closing date of the Call for Proposals and the notification of the grant approval to the project was 93,5 days.
- The **average delivery time** between the closing date of the Call for Proposals and the signing of the grant agreement is 194 days.
- 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 the members of the Management Committee** have signed a "Declaration of Commitment on Impartiality, Independence, Conflict of Interest, Confidentiality and Personal Data".

- In response to discussions held by members of the Management Committee (MC) over some MC meetings, the MC approved at its meeting on 26 January 2023 the following **adjustments to the Calls for Proposals**: (1) insertion of gender balance criteria to the criteria subject to evaluation, (2) need to start the project within 3 months from the approval notification and (3) obligation to hold a final closure meeting to the projects where a representative of the EMIF is invited to attend.

## 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.

### Fact Checking “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.

### Fact Checking “Scale-up”

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.

### Multidisciplinary Investigations on Disinformation

The key aim of the Call Multidisciplinary Investigations on Disinformation in Europe is to address the existing knowledge gaps on the scale and scope of disinformation in Europe and gain a better understanding of the policies implemented to counter it.

### Research into Media, Disinformation and Information Literacy

The Call Supporting Research into Media, Disinformation and Information Literacy Across Europe aims at supporting wide and deep scientific studies on the disinformation phenomenon, encompassing its causes, societal impacts and possible responses.

### Media and Information Literacy

The key aim of the Call Media and Information Literacy for Citizens Empowerment is to support initiatives that enhance digital media and information literacy skills in Europe.

#### **Evaluation:**

- All 80 projects selected and admitted by the EMIF Secretariat in all 4 funding areas have been **evaluated by the expert evaluators** suggested by EDMO and selected by the Management Committee.
- 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 **eligible projects** to the Management Committee.
- The scores for the 40 winning projects are generally in a clear **"winning range"** with scores ranging from 6 to 9 on a range from 1-10 for all four evaluation criteria. The average score across the 40 projects is 8 out of 10. This proves that the projects selected are in line with the objectives of the programme.

#### **c. Relevance**

The EMIF aims at supporting fact-checking, investigation, research and media literacy 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.

In the evaluation period 2022/2023 the fund has attracted 102 applications across the 4 funding areas, out of which 40 have been funded. All 40 projects accepted ranked in the winning range 6-10 on a scale of 1-10 in the evaluators' opinions when selecting the projects.

Funded entities represent a wide range of organisations, including small and bigger media outlets, academic institutions, think tank as well as CSOs.

The learnings from this process have led to strategic modifications in the 4 funding areas in time for the launch of the calls to proposal in Spring 2023. These modifications include (a) to ensure gender balance in the projects, (b) shortening the duration of the “investigations on disinformation” funding area and instead creating a special track for follow-on research or media literacy proposals, (c) broaden the scope of the call for funding area 2 “investigations into disinformation” and better align the objectives between funding areas 2 and 3, while creating a clearer link with public policy goals, and (d) broadening the objectives of the media literacy call.

#### **Evaluation:**

- The results from the 2022/2023 evaluation show **EMIF’s ability to unlock the potential** of organisations and individuals to come up with relevant initiatives addressing the disinformation challenge.
- The **geographical outreach of the EMIF** across 23 countries during this evaluation period is exceeding expectations. This geographical outreach bears the potential for more cross-border collaboration between organisations implementing projects funded by the EMIF and could pave the ground for significant impact across Europe.
- Funded projects represent a **wide and diverse cross-section of organisations**, including small and bigger media outlets, academic institutions, think tank as well as CSOs.
- The **strategic modifications** applied for the Calls for Proposals launched in Spring 2023 in all 4 funding areas, reflects the ability of the EMIF governance to listen to its stakeholders, reflect on the changes needed and implement them instantly to further increase the relevance of the EMIF for the ecosystem of actors fighting disinformation.

### **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 has been updated significantly throughout the second year of the EMIF's existence. All calls for proposal are published and all projects funded by the EMIF are presented on the website. 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 high number of visitors, in particular as a consequence of online advertising campaigns, suggests that the website is the main gateway for interested stakeholders to access information around EMIF.
- **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. The 2021-2022 Progress Report has been published in October 2022 and is available online on the EMIF website.
- **Newsletter**

The EMIF has sent 14 newsletters out during the reporting period. They are dedicated to announcing the opening of funding Calls and are related to the EMIF events. Compared to the previous year the subscriptions went up by 233 to a total of 1005. The opening rate is up to 56% which is 6 percent points less than in the previous reporting period.
- **Social media**

LinkedIn EMIF profile <https://www.linkedin.com/company/emifund/> has 957 followers and started posting in 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 and 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 launched an online advertising campaign in Q1 2023 around the launch of calls for proposals in its three main areas of intervention. This campaign ran across a range of platforms including LinkedIn ads, Google Display, Google Ads, and Politico.eu (website and Daily Tech newsletter). The campaign got a total of 23.420 website clicks and 4 million impressions in the fund's intended target countries. The primary objective of the campaign was to drive website traffic to the call for proposal pages and increase the number of applicants.
- **Events**

The EMIF runs its own events and participates in events of others to increase the engagement level with relevant audiences across Europe:

### Fighting Misinformation Online series

The EMIF actively participated in three noteworthy events of this series, including the Ideas Exchange in Prague, in June 2022, The Fighting Misinformation Online Summit in Brussels in November 2022, and the last event in the series, "What Finland has uncovered," which took place in February 2023 in Helsinki.

### Web Summit

In November 2022 Lisbon, Portugal, hosted the Web Summit, the largest digital conference in Europe. The EMIF had a booth at the event. Additionally, Paolo Cesarini, a member of EMIF's management committee, spoke on the Future Societies stage, addressing the challenges facing our communities.

### Annual Event

EMIF held its first Annual Conference, "Funding the Fight against Disinformation," on 2 December 2022 in Lisbon, Portugal with 107 participants representing 68 organisations in 23 countries. At this conference the EMIF presented its first Annual Report and offered the opportunity for knowledge and expertise sharing, as grantees showcased their projects and networked. European Commission's Vice-President Vera Jourova contributed to the event with an opening speech.

### Online Information Session

On 24 February 2023 the EMIF hosted its 2<sup>nd</sup> Information Session on its calls for proposals. 82 participants from various organisations and institutions across Europe participated at this online session.

- **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 48 organisations have registered themselves in the Directory with a link to their website, the name and email address of a contact person.

### Evaluation:

- The **internal communications** of the EMIF programme meet the standards set by the founding organizations. There is no information about insufficient communication within the organization.
- The **external communications** meet the standards set by the founding organisations. This includes the Management Committee showing 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 all selected projects, their objectives and the related funding volume on the website.
- The **website** <https://gulbenkian.pt/emifund/> is very accessible by its design and functionalities and provides all relevant information about the calls for proposal, the projects funded and the activities of the EMIF. The usage statistics confirm that the website is the key entry point for stakeholders to engage with the EMIF.

- 14 issues of the **newsletter** have been sent throughout the year and the subscriptions increased to 1005 subscribers throughout the evaluation period. The newsletter successfully drives traffic to the website and is therefore an important engagement tool for the EMIF.
- The **social media** activities of the EMIF as well as the online advertising campaign in Spring 2023 have increased the traffic to the website and helped extending the reach beyond the existing network of the EMIF programme partners.
- The EMIF organized its first **Annual conference** in December 2022. This event brought together 107 participants representing 68 organisations and helped successfully to share knowledge and build the community. Furthermore the EMIF successfully positioned itself in the European disinformation ecosystem as a funder and convener that facilitates progress in fighting disinformation.
- The EMIF made a particular effort to support building the community by introducing a **Partnership Search Directory** on its website. This tool allows interested parties across the disinformation community to connect with each other. There are no details available about the quantity and quality of the connection and collaborations originating from this match-making platform.

#### D. Robustness of the programme

This assessment report looks at the “robustness of the programme” through a variety of lenses that are considered as relevant for the sustainable impact of the programme on fighting disinformation.

- **Driving change**

The EMIF is entrusted with an objective of public interest as it aims to bring to an end the erosion of trust in reliable information sources and strengthens the democratic process. Its funding areas ultimately help citizens to differentiate fact from fiction and make well-informed choices.

To safeguard our democratic societies, it is crucial to raise awareness about disinformation, promote media literacy, and foster an environment where accurate and verified information can thrive.

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 throughout the evaluation period in the four funding areas, the EMIF was able to select 40 projects across 23 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 project, all selected projects are innovative and have a multiplier effect, in line with the criteria mentioned in Art 2 in the EMIF Implementation Framework.

The organisations funded by the EMIF are driving change as the funding allows them to address issues that they would not have addressed in this scope and at this scale without the EMIF funding. Also the cross-border and cross-sector approach of many of the funded projects is a strong stimulus for the ecosystem of organisations fighting disinformation.

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

The EMIF's approach recognizes the complexity and scale of the challenge that disinformation poses on our democratic society.

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 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.

In the light of this background it is good to see that the solutions funded by the EMIF are cutting edge when it comes to inclusiveness, following co-design approaches, offering potential to be scaled across Europe, and addressing and/or working with the young generation.

Some of these projects are working closely with local communities, take new technological developments - such as AI – into consideration and apply innovative formats such as online games and escape rooms.

- **Learning capacity**

The EMIF in its second year went through a learning process when for the first time the applications sent in response to the Calls for Proposals in the three funding areas "Multidisciplinary Investigations on Disinformation", "Research – Studies & Sandboxes", and "Actions in Support of Media Literacy" were processed.

The learnings from this process have led to strategic modifications in the 4 funding areas in time for the launch of the calls to proposal in Spring 2023. These modifications include (a) to ensure gender balance in the projects, (b) shortening the duration of the "investigations on disinformation" funding area and instead creating a special track for follow-on research or media literacy proposals, (c) broaden the scope of the call for funding area 2 "investigations into disinformation" and better align the objectives between funding areas 2 and 3, while creating a clearer link with public policy goals, and (d) broadening the objectives of the media literacy call.

Also the Management Committee's decision to shift some funds from one funding area to another in order to respond to the higher demand of high quality media literacy

projects was an important step for the governance of the organization, showing it cares and react instantly to the needs of the market.

- **Building trust with stakeholders involved**

Trust is essential for the EMIF in order to be considered as a relevant partner and funder for organisations fighting disinformation. This relates to the institutional set-up of the EMIF as a programme carried by the EUI and the managed by the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation, the professionalism of people involved in the governance, the evaluation of projects as well as the management of the programme, the selection processes in place ensuring the necessary competence and excluding conflicts of interest and also the transparency about the Calls for Proposals, the projects selected as well as the easy access to this information through the EMIF website.

The first Annual Conference on 2 December 2022 with a physical meeting of the project representatives was another very important trust building element. This safe space for learning, getting to know each other and connecting active people in the area of fighting disinformation is a very much needed format and a very good role for the EMIF to play. Regular conferences of this kind will contribute to the trust level with stakeholders.

During the assessment of the EMIF it was confirmed that the trust level of the programme is generally high.

**Evaluation:**

- The EMIF is a **well-respected programme** in the area of fighting disinformation in Europe thanks to the high quality of projects funded, the professional running of the EMIF and the increased visibility of the EMIF as a trusted partner in its area of activities and beyond.
- The selection process of projects funded is based on **EDMO's framework**. This framework has enabled the EMIF to select a range of relevant projects of good quality throughout the evaluation period.
- The **capacity to learn** has allowed the EMIF to adjust its programme and the funding dedicated to the 4 different funding areas in a way that it responds to the needs of the market.
- The **trust level of the programme** is high due to its professional setup, the legacy of its two constituting organisations, EUI and CGF, its successful communications approach including providing the opportunity for project representatives to meet in person to learn, get to know each other and connect.

## 5. Conclusions

The EMIF started its activities on 25 March 2021 and has been established by the European University Institute and the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation. The fund has received an inaugural contribution from Google of 25.000.000 EUR for a period of 5 years. The European Digital Media Observatory (EDMO) agreed to provide scientific advice to the Fund, on the condition that it would be allowed to perform its role in complete independence from the Fund and its donors.

In the light of the disinformation challenge our democratic societies are facing across Europe, the objective of the EMIF is to support collaborative efforts to debunk disinformation, amplify independent fact-checking and enable targeted research and innovation tools designed to strengthen resilience, and the ecosystems response to disinformation.

Therefore this assessment report is looking on how the EMIF managed to live up to its objective during its second year, starting on 25 March 2022 and ending on 24 March 2023. The evaluator had access to all relevant information related to the 2022/2023 year of operations. This second year assessment report is building on the findings of the 1<sup>st</sup> assessment report that has been presented at the EMIF's first Annual Conference on 2 December 2022 in Lisbon.

During the evaluation period the EMIF has received 102 application across all four funding areas and has selected 40 projects engaging partners across 23 countries within the geographical scope of the programme:

- 24 in the 1<sup>st</sup> funding area "Fact Checking",
- 4 in the 2<sup>nd</sup> funding area "Investigations on Disinformation"
- 4 in the 3<sup>rd</sup> funding area "Research into media, disinformation and information literacy"
- 8 in the 4<sup>th</sup> funding area "Media and information literacy".

For these 40 projects a total budget of 6.145.346,35 EUR has been assigned during the evaluation period.

From the overall assessment this report draws the following conclusions:

### 1. Conclusion: The EMIF attracts relevant projects

The EMIF attracted 102 applications during the evaluation period out of which 40 projects involving organisations from 23 countries have been awarded. These 40 projects are in a clear "winning range" with an average score of 8 on a range from 1-10 across all four 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 solutions funded by the EMIF are cutting edge when it comes to inclusiveness, following co-design approaches, offering potential to be scaled across Europe, and addressing and/or working with the young generation.

Some of these projects are working closely with local communities, take new technological developments - such as AI – into consideration and apply innovative formats such as online games and escape rooms.

## **2. Conclusion: The EMIF extends successfully its geographical reach**

In the reporting year 2022/2023 the EMIF approved grants for projects actively engaging organisations based in 23 countries across the EU, EFTA and UK. These countries are:

Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Czech Republic, Finland, France, Germany, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Ukraine, United Kingdom.

The target of the EMIF is to reach at least 12 countries within its geographical scope of 32 countries. The successful outreach to 23 countries in the first 2 years of its existence is an indication for the EMIF's ability to effectively engage across Europe and stimulate cross-border collaboration.

## **3. Conclusion: The EMIF lives up to its high governance standards**

The EMIF governance has shaped up during the evaluation period: with the third member joining the Management Committee in May 2022 the setup of the Management Committee has been completed. In addition the Internal Rules of the Management Committee have been adopted also in May 2022.

During the evaluation period the Management Committee has followed up on the 2<sup>nd</sup> Recommendation of the 1<sup>st</sup> assessment report and is now in the process of setting up a Steering Committee as foreseen in Article 4.2 of the agreement establishing the European Media and Information Fund, signed by the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation and the European University Institute.

The Management Committee throughout its meetings during the evaluation period showed high responsibility to the cause of the EMIF and its potential grantees, indicated by the deep and engaged discussions during the Management Committee meetings about the outcome of the expert evaluators' decisions on the selected projects.

In line with the Internal Rules of the Management Committee, the members of the Management Committee at their meeting in August 2022 decided to allow the reallocation of funding from one funding area to another funding area, since the demand for funding was uneven across the four EMIF intervention areas, with a stronger stakeholders' participation to the call in the media literacy area.

## **4. Conclusion: The EMIF applied learnings to the second round of Calls for Proposals**

The EMIF in its second year went through a learning process when for the first time the applications sent in response to the Calls for Proposals in the three funding areas "Multidisciplinary Investigations on Disinformation", "Research – Studies & Sandboxes", and "Actions in Support of Media Literacy" were processed.

In response to discussions held by members of the Management Committee (MC) over several Management Committee meetings, the members of the Management Committee approved at their meeting on 26 January 2023 the following adjustments to the Calls:

- (1) insertion of gender balance criteria to the criteria subject to evaluation
- (2) need to start the project within 3 months from the approval notification and

- (3) obligation to hold a final closure meeting to the projects where a representative of the EMIF is invited to attend.

The insertion of the gender balance criteria to the criteria subject to evaluation is in line with the 4<sup>th</sup> Recommendation of the 1<sup>st</sup> assessment report.

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

**1. Recommendation: Continue the community building for enhanced collaboration**

The EMIF has the opportunity to unlock the full potential of collaboration across its community of funded projects and their partner organisations. Driving cross-border and cross-sector collaboration is at the core of the EMIF. The EMIF should build its Annual Conference and other networking moments around the objective of connecting organisations, people and ideas for enhanced collaboration. It should be explored if and how the Partnership Search Directory could be used to facilitate connections.

**2. Recommendation: Increase the diversity of donors**

In line with the ambition of the European Media and Information Fund (EMIF) to become a multi-donor fund, the EMIF should continue to invite potential funders to support its mission by complementing the existing inaugural contribution of Google. The diversification of funding for the EMIF will increase its resilience, ensure that more funding is available for high-quality projects in the different funding areas of the programme and help applying a long-term strategy beyond the 5 years' funding currently secured until March 2026.

**3. Recommendation: Develop and apply an impact framework for the EMIF**

With EMIF operating in its 3<sup>rd</sup> year it is recommended to start developing and applying an impact framework for the programme that provides a good understanding of how the EMIF successfully minimizes disinformation across Europe and its effectiveness in building societies that are resilient in the face of disinformation.

Brussels, 26 June 2023



Max von Abendroth



## ANNEX:

### The documents consulted for this assessment include:

- EMIF 2022 – 2023 draft 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