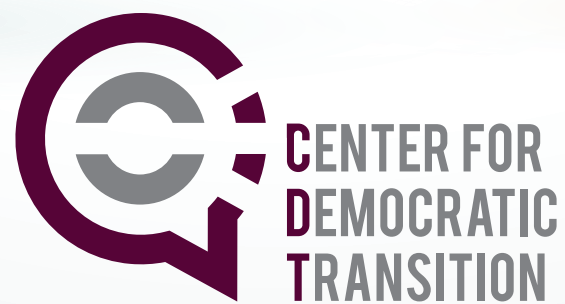


CENTER FOR DEMOCRATIC TRANSITION

WORK REPORT

2024



Introduction

Montenegro's journey over the past year unfolded as a study in contrasts, marked by a complex blend of formal advancement in the EU integration process and political stagnation. The country made a notable breakthrough on its European path, meeting interim benchmarks in key chapters and securing a positive Interim Benchmark Assessment Report (IBAR). Despite this, substantive reforms in areas such as the rule of law, electoral processes, and public administration remain largely stalled. This discrepancy between stated political ambitions and the practicalities of institutional reality created a paradox of sorts – while international assessments were offering a more favourable outlook, Montenegrin institutions continued to operate amidst a multitude of structural and political limitations that are still slowing down the reform momentum and impeding an effective delivery of concrete results.

In 2024, CDT continued to operate in an environment where the European agenda was often exploited for political marketing. Meanwhile, key processes – electoral reform, anti-corruption legislation, judicial reform, and media regulation – remained hostage to partisan manoeuvring amid a lack of political will. In this challenging setting, our mandate was dual: to maintain clarity and principled advocacy for reforms, while simultaneously countering attempts to replace substance with form, and values with mere rhetoric.

The landscape was notably complicated by the intensifying of malign foreign influences, the abuse of identity-related topics, and the spread of disinformation, which further undermined democratic culture and fragmented the public sphere. CDT responded by expanding its fact-checking capabilities, developing educational content, and initiating a regional dialogue on threats faced by modern democracies. Raskrinkavanje.me has yet again proven itself to be the first line of defence against manipulation, and our engagement both on the ground and within institutions showed that the push-back is indeed there – and it comes with knowledge, perseverance, and responsibility.

Throughout 2024, we maintained an active role in the electoral reform process, offering concrete initiatives, analyses, and recommendations. These efforts focused on professionalizing institutions, safeguarding election process integrity, and limiting foreign interference. Additionally, we closely monitored the work of the executive branch, consistently pointing to the discrepancy between political pledges and actual institutional conduct.

In the realm of culture of remembrance, we remained firm in standing against historical revisionism and mainstreaming of extremist narratives, and strongly advocating for values of anti-fascism, secularism, and social justice. By partnering with regional intellectuals and actors, we managed to re-establish a platform for discussing the progressive heritage of Yugoslavia's past, while also drawing clear links to present-day challenges.

We also considerably expanded our public outreach in 2024, making our content more accessible to citizens via podcasts, visual media, social networks, and direct engagement. CDT's voice resonated in the public discourse with distinct clarity, accuracy, and responsibility. Throughout 2024, and in the face of considerable challenges, CDT further solidified its position as one of the pivotal forces in democratic reforms, electoral integrity, countering disinformation, and advocating for European values. Our efforts garnered the support of multiple partners and donors, who clearly appreciated the importance of principled, expert, and publicly accountable action in turbulent times.

Driven by the same mission and values that have been guiding us for 25 years, we approach the coming period acutely aware of the challenges, yet resolute to continue our fight for a more just, free, and democratic society.

International and European politics and foreign influence

The past year saw the much-anticipated commencement of a new stage in Montenegro's European integration, yet, at the same time, underscored how vulnerable EU accession progress remains to internal political stalemates, institutional instability, and the growing influence of foreign actors promoting authoritarian and anti-European values.

Throughout 2024, CDT remained a strong advocate for a reform agenda underpinned by the principles of rule of law, transparency, and political accountability. We commended the meeting of interim benchmarks for Chapters 23 and 24, which paved the way for the positive IBAR. However, we also emphasized that the EU agenda should not be boiling down to mere bureaucratic compliance. We cautioned that the EU path gets stripped of its essential political substance when employed merely as a smokescreen for maintaining the status quo, safeguarding particular interests, and downplaying internal disputes.

As we closely monitored the activities of the government and parliament, we pointed to the paradox of having formal negotiation advancement occurring simultaneously with the stagnation of key reforms in the judiciary and electoral sphere. We insisted in our many public statements and appearances that EU accession transcends a mere foreign policy goal; it represents an internal transformation that calls for functional institutions, protection of rights, professionalization of public administration, and genuine political will for reforms. We specifically analysed threats to the democratic order stemming from disinformation, ethno-nationalism, and the weaponizing of identity-based issues. Within this framework, we also drew attention to the risks associated with malign foreign interference acting via media, political, and financial avenues that aim to destabilize Montenegro's pro-European direction. We reiterated our initiative for the establishment of a parliamentary committee to monitor foreign influences on democratic processes, viewing this as an institutional safeguard against trends that are progressively eroding the country's integration course.

As an organization that has been committed to fostering democratic institutions and a European Montenegro for over two decades, in 2024, CDT continued to monitor the dynamics of negotiations, encourage reform breakthroughs, and expose policies that, under the guise of a European narrative, instil authoritarian practices. We believe that only active citizens, a robust civil society, and free media can safeguard the true essence of the European project – a society of equality, tolerance, and rule of law.

Community resilience

In 2024, we continued to develop a comprehensive response to disinformation and propaganda, believing that access to accurate information is a prerequisite for a resilient and democratic society. Through the Raskrinkavanje.me platform, CDT published over 600 analytical pieces, debunking fake news, manipulations, and propaganda narratives from over a thousand national and regional sources.

We primarily targeted our efforts at areas where disinformation inflicts most societal harm: elections, reforms, human rights, climate change, and freedom of expression. We kept track of key political developments, scrutinized attempts to sway public opinion through false narratives, and empowered citizens to recognize and dismiss manipulation.

Our efforts particularly centred on strengthening media literacy – through educational content, manuals, and public campaigns targeting both citizens and media professionals. Working alongside domestic and regional partners, we additionally formulated and released guidelines for professional election coverage, probed into how historical narratives get exploited for political gain, and championed digital space regulation that does not curb the freedom of expression.

At the regional conference “Between Reality and Deception,” we initiated a dialogue on how disinformation erodes trust in institutions, exacerbates societal polarization, and undermines the bedrock of democratic order. We specifically drew attention to the dangers inherent in weaponizing identity-based issues – such as religion, language, and ethnicity – for purposes of political manipulation and exerting control.

As part of a broader struggle for resilience, we additionally drew attention to the adverse effects of efforts to constrict civil society’s scope of action. Through our analyses and public appearances, we denounced the proposed Law on Foreign Agents, as it goes against the grain of European values and practices, instead reflecting those of the authoritarian systems it was modelled after.

In recognizing the risks of radicalization and ethno-nationalist narratives, and as a member of the National Operational Team for Combating Violent Extremism, CDT also contributed to efforts aimed at safeguarding democratic culture and fostering more resilient communities.

Community resilience, as we see it, goes beyond mere technical fixes and legislative action; it resides in an engaged citizen that can discern, comprehend, and repel manipulation. Our work in 2024 was dedicated precisely to this goal: to provide communities with the know-how, tools, and support needed to stand firm against threats that are not always visible, but are often crucial for the future of democracy.

Projects implemented in this programme area are as follows:

- **Montenegro Resilience Project: Combating Radicalization and Disinformation, funded by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands**
- **Active Citizens Against Disinformation, funded by the Embassy of the United States of America in Podgorica**
- **Exposing Malign Influences through data-driven Watchdog Journalism, funded by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands**
- **Knowledge Exchange for Improved Reporting, funded by the German Society for International Cooperation (GIZ)**
- **SEEChek Network – Fighting Disinformation and Misinformation through a Network of Fact-checkers, financed by the European Commission, co-financed by the Ministry of Public Administration**
- **TruthShield Balkans: Raskrinkavanje.me and Fake News Tragač Combating Disinformation in Montenegro and Serbia, funded by the CFI French Media Development Agency**

Culture of memory

Throughout 2024, CDT further enhanced its efforts in the area of culture of remembrance, continuing to build resistance against historical revisionism, the normalization of war crimes, the stifling of secularism, and the weakening of the anti-fascist legacy. We are convinced that present-day challenges – the strengthening of ethno-nationalism, the rise of misogyny, and the erosion of workers' rights – are inextricably linked to how we comprehend and interpret the past.

Our initiative, “The Past for the Future: Against the Dark, Against the Force!”, served to foster discussion on what anti-fascism means today and why it is important. By reviving the memory of the Battles of Neretva and Sutjeska, and the Second Session of AVNOJ, we actively countered attempts that aim to deny the foundational values that modern, civic society rests on. Key to this ongoing struggle were a series of exhibitions, books, essays, and podcasts, where we examined the pivotal role of culture, art, and popular media in preserving the spirit of resistance and solidarity.

We also made a distinct contribution through the project “Echoes of the 1974 Constitution,” which initiated a vital debate on its political, social, and symbolic legacies. Issues of decentralization, workers' self-management, and women's rights were framed within the context of current challenges, serving as a powerful reminder that certain progressive strides of the past are now being largely overlooked or actively challenged. As part of this program, we initiated a public dialogue on the right to abortion and workers' rights, through content that resonated strongly with the public and highlighted the need for broader social mobilization in defence of the hard-won freedoms.

In this domain, we also continued to advocate for preserving the secular character of the state. We sought a constitutional review of the decision to proclaim the Orthodox patron saint's day as a municipal holiday in Niksic, contending that such decisions favour one religious community over others and undermine the principles of equality and non-discrimination.

Additionally, through our analysis “Neglected Heritage,” we drew attention to serious shortcomings in the management of state-owned cultural assets, insisting on prompt institutional reforms that would ensure a responsible preservation of artistic and historical heritage.

Our endeavours in the area of culture of remembrance throughout 2024 were neither nostalgic nor merely symbolic; they were profoundly political and engaged. Through concrete contents and open dialogues, we sought to revive memory as a means of resistance, and to link the past with present-day struggles for a more just society.

Projects implemented in this programme area are as follows:

- **“Action”**

Fair electoral process

Our paramount objective in 2024 was to substantially advance the implementation of a comprehensive electoral reform, a cornerstone of freer and fairer elections in Montenegro. As an organization with over two decades of experience in election observation, CDT was entrusted by the parliament to take part in this process – with our executive director, Dragan Koprivica, being appointed an associate member of the Committee for Comprehensive Electoral Reform, and acting as the representative of the NGO sector.

By actively engaging in Committee proceedings, we advocate for professionalizing and depoliticizing electoral administration, the cleaning up of voter register, stronger oversight of campaign and party financing, introducing open lists and posting individual candidacies, and establishing safeguards against foreign election interference. CDT developed a roadmap for the Committee with concrete recommendations for expanding its mandate. The ultimate adoption of these proposals resulted in the Committee's term being extended until the end of 2025 and a decision to reform the Law on the President of Montenegro.

In collaboration with different experts in 2024, we released eight publications wherein we examined the electoral system's core vulnerabilities and put forward concrete solutions, ranging from improving the electoral administration's efficiency and shielding the election process from foreign interference, to ensuring effective legal safeguards for electoral rights. As in previous years, we maintained our commitment to election monitoring, with our professional teams overseeing the Podgorica local elections in 2024. Our 215 accredited observers were deployed across all polling stations, complemented by mobile teams that kept track of other relevant developments.

Leading up to and on the actual polling day, our studio streamed a full-day election coverage with live updates. We kept citizens informed on voter turnout, reported irregularities and disinformation. After polling stations closed, we presented our election outcome projections, based on verified information provided by our network of observers. This allowed us to yet again ensure accuracy, prevent premature election victory claims, and protect the integrity of the electoral process.

Our program was broadcast by all Montenegrin media outlets, and tens of thousands of people followed us online. On the day of the Podgorica elections, our YouTube channel garnered 33,000 views, and our social media posts were viewed over 80,000 times.

Beyond the general public, our efforts also garnered support from a host of relevant experts. Our podcasts and election programs featured electoral administration officials, legal experts, journalists, activists, and analysts, all of whom offered knowledgeable and unbiased perspectives on the state of democracy and prospective avenues for reform.

Amidst political uncertainty and weak institutions, we demonstrated in 2024 that engaged citizens, the expert community, and a responsible civil sector can indeed be drivers of positive change.

We will continue down the same path, as we firmly believe that electoral reforms should arise from dialogue, expertise, and persistent effort.

Projects implemented in this programme area are as follows:

- **Electoral Reform in Focus: It's Time!, financed by the Delegation of the European Union to Montenegro and co-financed by the Ministry of Public Administration**
- **Contribution to the EU Integration Process, financed by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation of the Republic of Italy**
- **Strengthening the integrity of the electoral process, with the support of the National Endowment for Democracy**

Institutional openness and good governance

Following the constitution of Montenegro's 44th Government, CDT undertook to consistently monitor the work of the new executive branch and contribute to a better understanding of its policies and performance. Given the altered governmental composition, featuring for the first time political actors whose stances do not fully align with European integration values and Montenegro's constitutional principles, we deemed it vital to meticulously analyse the trajectory of state policy. Our methodology involved an objective and in-depth examination of the pivotal processes and decisions defining the new administration's term, commencing with an analysis of its performance during the first 100 days.

Our analysis, "First 100 Days: Between Expectations and (Un)kept Promises," concentrated on the fulfilment of the government's and prime minister's key pledges. While we acknowledged some progress – like the agreement on population census and progress made in EU integration – we also identified major shortcomings in transparency and coordination within the security sector. We then extended our scrutiny of the government's performance with two additional publications. The first, titled "Analysis of the Work of the 44th Government of Montenegro: European Progress vs. Domestic Political Intrigues," examined the period leading up to the government's reshuffle, highlighting institutional fragilities and political friction. The second analysis, released on the government's first anniversary, concluded that even with the favourable IBAR providing a window of opportunity, the political circumstances for substantive reforms were not capitalized on.

These publications attracted considerable public and media interest, laying the groundwork for a continued evolution of CDT's government oversight model, designed to enhance accountability and transparency.

As the representative of the NGO sector within the working group, CDT contributed substantially to the drafting of the first-ever Law on the Government, especially in provisions on greater transparency of government sessions. Our recommendation for publishing session agendas, materials, and minutes was incorporated into the draft, which was then submitted

to international partners for their feedback. Via media engagements, CDT urged for the law's swift enactment, underscoring that any postponing of its adoption perpetuates non-transparent practices of the executive branch.

We continued to advocate for open and transparent governance by implementing the Regional Openness Index, in collaboration with Partneri Srbija, Metamorphosis from North Macedonia, and Citizens' Association "Zašto ne?" ("Why not?") from Bosnia and Herzegovina. Within this project, we undertook two thematic analyses examining the transparency of parliaments and governments in Montenegro and the Western Balkans. We particularly drew attention to deficiencies in the implementation of freedom of information laws, the closed-off decision-making processes, and notable differences in the culture of institutional transparency among countries of the region. We discussed these findings, with a focus on institutional accountability and the authorities' level of adherence to openness standards, at a conference attended by representatives from state institutions, the NGO sector, and media from Montenegro and the region.

Activities in this programme area were implemented through the following projects:

- **The Use of New Media in Promoting Transparent Governance, National Endowment for Democracy**
- **Unlocking Budget Insights for Citizens: Openness and Transparency of Executive Power Institutions, with the support of the International Budget Partnership**
- **Inclusive dialogue for societal progress, with the support of the Delegation of the European Union in Montenegro and co-financing by the Ministry of Public Administration**

Economic and demographic policy

Throughout the past year, CDT actively monitored and examined the crucial stages of Montenegro's population census. In our publication, "Justified Concern or Unjustified Panic: Discrepancies between Preliminary Results and Official Information Disclosed During the Census – Explanations, Dilemmas, and Recommendations," we highlighted critical aspects of the census, particularly stressing the necessity for enhanced transparency and data accuracy. CDT insisted on the paramount importance of fostering public trust in census findings, striving for results that are as accurate and relevant for socio-economic analyses.

While every party claimed triumph following the publication of census results, we stressed that the data ought to be a source of profound concern – in a country facing an aging population, questions of ethnicity become entirely irrelevant. In our podcast, "Politics and/or Statistics: What Do the Census Results Tell Us?," we discussed our country's demographic challenges and emphasized the urgent need for action.

Through these activities, CDT continued to contribute to public discussion and advocate for strategically addressing Montenegro's demographic shifts.

Communication

Throughout the past year, we took on a strategic approach to public outreach and making a substantial impact within the media sphere. With as many as 1,866 appearances in various formats – including television, online platforms, print, and radio broadcasts – we actively helped shape public discourse by commenting on pivotal political and social issues. In parallel, we further developed our capabilities for two-way communication, particularly through our podcast, which emerged as a distinctive platform for tackling complex issues from a fresh perspective. CDT continued to centre its efforts on topics such as European integration, the fight against disinformation, electoral reform, census results, culture of memory, and the work of the Government of Montenegro. Our all-day election podcast during Podgorica 2024 Election Day, which garnered an audience of roughly 33,000, showcased our ability to inform citizens through an engaging and timely content.

Our social media presence saw a major community growth, evident not only in an increased follower numbers but also in a total reach of approximately 550,000 in 2024, as well as in the improved quality of our engagement with citizens. We released roughly 315 infographics across diverse formats, complemented by 82 videos that boosted our visibility and effectively conveyed complex subjects into easily digestible visual content. Our visual identity underwent a revamp: sharper colours, more focused messages, and a user-friendly design that facilitated clearer and more effective communication of complex topics. At the same time, Raskrinkavanje.me, our primary tool in the fight against disinformation, recorded 132,000 visits, reaffirming the demand for credible and verified content.

It was precisely out of the need to be closer to our target audience that we launched new digital channels – Threads and TikTok – in order to further engage with citizens. These platforms complement our existing network, where Facebook, Instagram, X (formerly Twitter), and YouTube remain key channels for continuously building ties with the community and managing day-to-day interactions. Our public communication was not a matter of chance but the result of a carefully crafted strategy, daily presence, and an eagerness to adapt to the needs and expectations of our audience.

Support

This area of our work entails coordination of regular administrative and financial functioning of our organization, such as drafting the annual budget, developing monthly plans and reports, donor financial reports, and organizing our events and activities.

We revised our in-house regulations, improving key provisions on anti-corruption measures, conflict of interest prevention, business travel guidelines, our ethical advocacy code, and policies on privacy and confidentiality. The updated regulations are now consistent with the latest professional standards and donor requirements, which has reinforced the principles of transparency and accountability in all our endeavours.

CDT has introduced an annual health check-up for all staff. In doing so, CDT actively demonstrates its responsibility and commitment to preserving the health of its team members, acknowledging the critical need to balance professional duties with individual welfare.

CDT engaged an IT expert who developed and delivered training programs for employees on the practical uses of AI tools in administrative and organizational tasks. During these sessions, staff explored different ways AI can be used to automate operational tasks and analyse data. The training covered recommended techniques and procedures for working with AI, best practices for increasing tool precision and efficiency, and essential security measures and limitations to consider when utilizing AI technology.

CDT employs 8 full-time staff members. A financial audit is conducted to ensure that CDT's financial statements and operations comply with legal and international standards. All audit reports are available on our website.

Project	Duration	Value	Donor
Montenegro Resilience Project: Combating Radicalization and Disinformation	01/08/2024 – 31/07/2025	87,835.00 €	Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands
Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands	01/10/2023 – 30/09/2024	69,970.00 \$	Embassy of the United States of America Podgorica
Strengthening the Integrity of Electoral Processes	01/02/2023 – 31/01/2025	183,000.00 \$	National Endowment for Democracy
The Use of New Media in Promoting Transparent Governance	01/10/2022 – 30/09/2024	133,000,00 \$	National Endowment for Democracy
Institutional Support	18/01/2023 – 18/01/2025	100,000.00 \$	The Rockefeller Brothers Fund
Institutional Support	01/01/2023 – 31/12/2024	510,000.00 NOK	Center for Civil Society Promotion
Unlocking Budget Insights for Citizens: Openness and Transparency of Executive Power Institutions	01/01/2024 - 31/10/2026	14,579.60 \$	International Budget Partnership
Contribution to the EU Integration Process	01/12/2023 – 30/11/2024	27,000.00 €	Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation of the Republic of Italy
Elections 24 Check	15/12/2023- 31/07/2024	20,700.00 €	European Fact-Checking Standards Network (EFCSN)
Exposing Malign Influences through data-driven Watchdog Journalism	01/12/2021- 31/05/2025	189,250.00 €	Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands

Project	Duration	Value	Donor
Knowledge Exchange for Improved Reporting	01/02/2024 – 01/02/2025	24,708.50 €	German Society for International Cooperation (GIZ)
SEEChek network – fighting Disinformation and Misinformation through a Network of Factcheckers	01/01/2023 – 30/06/2026	172,885.12 €	European Commission
		19,423.13 €	Ministry of Public Administration (cofinanced)
Inclusive Dialogue for the Progress of Society	09/01/2023 – 09/01/2025	67,899.21 €	Delegation of the European Union to Montenegro
		7,544.36 €	Ministry of Public Administration (cofinanced)
Electoral Reform in Focus: It's Time!	03/01/2024 – 03/01/2026	129,913.78 €	Delegation of the European Union to Montenegro
		6,837.56 €	Ministry of Public Administration (cofinanced)
TruthShield Balkans: Raskrinkavanje.me and Fake News Tragač Combating Disinformation in Montenegro and Serbia	01/10/2023 – 30/04/2024	34,968.00 €	CFI French Media Development Agency
Checking misinformation on Facebook	01/01/2024 – 31/12/2024	200,000.00 €	Praxis Montenegro (Meta Platforms Ireland Limited)

CDT NGO 2024 EXPENSES	AMOUNT	%
Net Salaries	151,342.50	26.21%
Expenses for taxes on salaries and compensations	17,598.52	3.05%
Expenses for social security contributions on salaries and compensations	37,920.89	6.57%
Net expenses for service contracts	103,735.79	17.97%
Expenses for taxes and contributions on service-contract payments	15,528.69	2.69%
Projects implemented with Partner Organizations	54,201.67	9.39%
Office and Other Supplies	4,572.33	0.79%
Utilities and Fuel	4,558.09	0.79%
Per Diems for Business Travel	2,550.07	0.44%
Expenses for postal, telephone, and internet services	5,103.10	0.88%
Travel Services	2,964.65	0.51%
Airfare Expenses	6,091.17	1.05%
Expenses for digital marketing and online promotion	22,048.49	3.82%
Depreciation expenses of fixed assets	11,005.43	1.91%
Conference and Seminar Organization	23,867.17	4.13%
Other Indirect Services	71,946.79	12.46%
Representational Expenses	15,978.62	2.77%
Hotel Services	6,007.76	1.04%
Payment Transactions	3,348.79	0.58%
Intangible expenses – equipment procurement and retail purchase costs	16,644.37	2.88%
Other Expenses	414.70	0.07%
TOTAL EXPENSES	577,429.59	100.00%

CDT NGO 2024 INCOME	AMOUNT	%
Donation income – domestic partners and Bosnia and Herzegovina partner	287,185.35	49.74%
Donations - Foreign Partners	279,134.73	48.34%
Reimbursement from State Budget	2,862.25	0.50%
Interest	15.42	0.00%
Other Financial Income	8,216.84	1.42%
TOTAL INCOME	577,414.59	100.00%



**CENTER FOR
DEMOCRATIC
TRANSITION**