Section 1 – Our Consortium's Capacity, Experience and Expertise

Zinc Network has brought together a consortium with three leading media development organisations: Thomson Reuters Foundation, the British Council and the Baltic Centre for Media Excellence (BCME) who have extensive understanding of the media landscape in all three Baltic States; and a proven track record of delivering successful, impactful and sustainable projects in the region. Each consortium member has distinct and complementary strengths that will deliver a comprehensive and innovative range of activities and add value to other relevant projects.

Zinc Network designs and delivers a range of ground-breaking interventions to build a more balanced and pluralistic media across Europe. We currently deliver the Open Information Partnership operating across 13 European countries, including Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania, uniquely placing us to ensure that BiM complements rather than duplicates existing OIP activity. We also help deliver a pioneering media development programme for USAID, supporting Russian language media outlets across Eastern Europe by developing audience growth strategies. Zinc has an in-house team of Russian speaking producers, digital researchers and digital growth strategists, as well as a growing team of Latvian and Estonian digital specialists. Zinc will be the single Operating Manager for the FCO and will take full responsibility for the contract. However, we will establish an integrated project team with the partners, ensuring they take a substantial role in its delivery.

Successful project delivery: Between 2016-2018, Zinc co-delivered an FCO project to help independent media in the Baltics connect with their Russophone communities, and counter hostile Russian messaging, including:
(1) Hyper-local: We brought together 67 participants from local Russian speaking communities (Daugavpils in Latvia; Narva in Estonia; and Visaginas in Lithuania) to brainstorm new, innovative media solutions. Our panel of Baltic media experts selected 7 prize winners to receive incubation and accelerator support to grow their business including full product development for 'ShortWalk', a local travel app.
(2) Digital: We designed and launched a multi-platform social media brand, *ZAG Baltic*, to distribute content produced by local online influencers to Russophone communities. ZAG has become a recognised online platform for Baltic Russian speakers with: 17,000+ subscribers; 2m views of 36 YouTube videos co-produced with 10 influencers; and an Instagram page that received 1,300 followers and 160,000 video views in its first two months.
(3) Media Accelerator: We provided three media outlets with 4-months' business growth incubation. As a result, Radio 4 (Estonia) secured funding for their new KISA FM radio format; HelloSolyanka (Latvia) increased its revenue by 202% by implementing a new business plan for online and offline products; and Nanook (Lithuania) received grants from the Lithuanian Ministry of Culture for an innovative model to reach local Russophone minorities.

Thomson Reuters Foundation (TRF) is the philanthropic arm of Thomson Reuters. TRF leverages the know-how, reach and reputation of its parent company to run projects to promote best practice in journalism across the globe. TRF has 35 years' experience of international media development, toolkit production, journalism, media training and mentoring. TRF employs 150 dedicated multilingual trainers; and has access to over 45,000 Thomson Reuters technical and operational staff based around the world, including 20+ in the Baltics. TRF can rapidly identify relevant in-house expertise, via their *Thomson Reuters Hub* allowing swift matching of the right people to projects.

Successful project delivery: TRF has wide-ranging experience of delivering successful projects in similar political and media environments that will inform proposals for this project in the Baltics, including:

(1) Capacity-building training: Each year, TRF runs 200+ training workshops, drawing on the expertise of 16,000 Thomson Reuters alumni journalists from 170 countries to run workshops led by experts in text, picture or video reporting across multiple thematics, including international affairs, climate change, LGBT rights and gender equality.

(2) Information exchange: TRF has delivered 10 bespoke study tours on behalf of the FCO for journalists from Russia and provided newsroom consultancies for media outlets across Eastern Europe. TRF also runs immersive five-week tours for senior editors; and funds the Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism at Oxford University to facilitate research into digital trends and use this to support editors to make evidence-based strategic decisions.

(3) Consultancy: TRF delivered an FCO-funded project to provide consultancy services to a Belarussian TV station, *Belsat*. TRF rapidly mobilised a team of 15 staff to deliver the project, drawing on in-house personnel, Thomson Reuters alumni and pre-vetted consultants. The team of consultants, interpreters, project managers and finance staff provided 150 days of support to Belsat, 97 of which were delivered face-to-face in-country.

(4) Toolkits: TRF produces handbooks and toolkits for journalists to embed high journalistic standards at all levels. Funders include UKAID, UN Development Programme, Westminster Foundation for Democracy, and Reporters Without Borders. Topics range from 'Media and Social Cohesion' to technical areas such as Oil/Gas reporting.

British Council specialises in providing educational opportunities and supporting positive cultural relations in communities across the world. British Council has an established presence in all three Baltic States, with offices and projects running in Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania and across the Baltic region as a whole.

Successful project delivery: The British Council (BC) are currently delivering the '*People to People Cultural Engagement*' project on behalf of the FCO. This project aims to ensure that Russian speaking communities in the Baltics are socially cohesive, have a strong affinity for each other's, the UK's and European values and culture, and are resilient to destabilising influences and narratives. Due to the success of the original two-year project, the FCO

has extended the contract for a further two years. By bringing the BC into our consortium, we are well-placed to avoid duplication of effort, and co-design activities that add value to the impact of both projects.

The Baltic Centre for Media Excellence (BMCE) is an independent, non-profit organisation committed to creating resilient, inclusive and tech-savvy media, and; knowledgeable, inquisitive audiences across Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania. BCME underpins their approach by bringing together journalists working in national and Russian languages (including by hosting public events) into a shared information space of uniform journalistic standards, a key objective for this FCO project. The project is capitalising on BCME's 'Media Training Needs Mapping' study to inform our training activities.

Successful project delivery: BCME builds the capacity of media organisations and platforms in three key ways:

(1) Media training: BCME delivers the '*Strengthening Independent Media in the Baltics Action*' (SIMBA) project to invite regional media outlets to apply for grant-funding**; (2) Media literacy:** BCME delivers wide-ranging media literacy projects in Latvia, including *Pilna Doma* ('Full Thought') and *Tīri fakti* ('Pure Facts'). In 2018, their Media Literacy Ambassadors including well-known journalists such as Nellija Ločmele (24,000 Twitter followers) delivered inspirational media literacy workshops for 300 students and 50 teachers**; (3) Media innovation:** The *Media REstart* project is a mini-incubator to help entrepreneurial, tech-savvy individuals and outlets to: pitch new media concepts, develop their initiative via expert one-to-one mentoring; and compete to receive grant funding. BCME helped seven teams work-up their digital media concepts. Two teams secured grants of €10,000 to support their start-up ambitions: *DAmedia* – a media source for independent information about local events in Latgale; and *Письма* ('Letters') – a platform to rejuvenate the art of letter-writing in a virtual environment.

Section 2 – Our understanding of the media landscape: fragmented, complex, and nuanced

Three countries and four primary language markets make pan-regional generalisations difficult. However, across them all, internet penetration is high with significant use of social media. Television remains the most influential medium and is consumed by all demographic groups. Printed newspapers are in decline. Online news sites receive significant traffic; many popular outlets are exclusively online. Across all platforms, entertainment programming reaches the largest audience. Radio is generally weak for national audiences but does play a role for Russian speakers[1].

Only a limited number of Russian speakers consume Russian language media exclusively[2]. Even where they do, Russian-language outlets based in the Baltics, particularly Delphi, remain some of the most trusted and searched-for sources of news[3]. The vast majority of Russian speakers[4], in line with trends in global media consumption habits, consume different types of content, sometimes in different languages, from different brands depending on their specific subjects of interest.

Two primary vehicles of pro-Kremlin disinformation are the multilingual news agencies Sputnik and Baltnews, both Russian State-owned, pan-Baltic Russian language news sites. The most popular Russian language television stations in the Baltic States – PBK, NTV Mir and NTV Mir Latvia – are all owned by the Baltic Media Alliance (BMA), a broadcaster with opaque ownership. BMA channels broadcast Russian Federation entertainment and news programming, often influenced by the Kremlin's information agenda.

Estonia[5] provides us with a snapshot of media consumption patterns, and some data on attitudes inferred from them:

Audience Identify as	ETV Estonian-language Public Broadcasting TV channel	ETV+ Russian- language Public Broadcasting TV channel	PBK Russian-language, Russian-state influenced Baltic channel	Russia-based TV channels	TV of other countries (UK, US, Germany, Poland)
Russian	17%	40%	63%	67%	28%
Estonian	78%	16%	9%	12%	22%

Language does matter in shaping attitudes towards Euro Atlantic integration, but audiences preferred brand appears to be more diagnostic. Suggesting that Russian speakers form a diverse audience set, with divergent view points and identities. A March 2019 survey of attitudes towards NATO amongst Estonians who identity as Russian, found:

■ Certainly/rather in favour   ■ Certainly/rather against it

ETV, ETV2 (Estonian language) — 65 | 23
ETV+ (Russian language but an Estonian channel) — 45 | 34
PKB (Russian language, Estonia-based but Russian State backed) — 33 | 47
Russian TV (Russian language, from Russia) — 34 | 46

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[1] For example, Radio 4 in Estonia
[2] CURRENT EVENTS AND DIFFERENT SOURCES OF INFORMATION, September 2014, Open Estonia Foundation
https://oef.org.ee/fileadmin/user_upload/Current_events_and_different_sources_of_information_CORRECT.pdf
[3] Ibid
[4] Ibid
[5] http://www.kmin.ee/sites/default/files/elfinder/article_files/public_opinion_and_national_defence_2019_march_0.pdf

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Growth of many media outlets has been stifled by an overall fragmentation of the local media markets, financial constraints since the 2008 global recession, and a shortage of entrepreneurial and business skills. Effective editorial control is also lacking, allowing the dissemination of disinformation and propaganda. Comment sections of even larger news sites often lack robust moderation and are used to spread hate and disinformation. In addition, the media sector as a profession is not well-paid or viewed as a desirable, high-status career, limiting the calibre of young people entering the profession.

Estonia: About one-third of Estonia's population of 1.3m are Russian speakers. The majority live either in the capital, Tallinn, or in the eastern city of Narva (95% Russian speaking) and surrounding Ida-Viru County. Of this 1.3m, 15% have not learned sufficient Estonian to qualify for citizenship. The public sector broadcaster, ERR, has established a Russian language channel, ETV+, but despite international funding, is currently less popular than TV from Russia itself, which benefits from higher production values and a deeper cultural resonance.

Latvia: About one-third of Latvia's population of 2m people are Russian speakers. The majority live either in the capital, Riga, or in Daugavpils (63% Russian speaking). Over 200,000 are non-citizens, unable to vote, hold public office or work in government offices. News websites generally have both Latvian and Russian language versions, but the Latvian government promotes the use of Latvian and has occasionally placed restrictions on Russian radio and news websites, citing concerns about propaganda.

Lithuania: The Russian speaking population of 2.9m people is far smaller than in the other two Baltic States, at around 5%, or 140,000 people. They represent Lithuania's 3rd minority after Polish-Lithuanians, and 4th language after English (30%) and Polish (14%). The majority live in the capital, Vilnius, the western coastal city of Klaipeda and a few other urban centres. There is significantly less provision for Russian language content than in Lithuania and Latvia.

Section 3 – Key Audiences

For the purpose of this project, based on our own primary research and a survey of leading studies[6], we believe the media landscape environment generates two distinct audiences predominantly centred around age, media consumption patterns and cultural identity (and will be further segmented using the TAA)

1. Our **'settler'** audience, comprising c.30% of Baltic Russians, tends to be older, have a stronger sense of Russian cultural identity, tend to be monolingual, more likely not to have full citizenship rights, and live in regional towns or rural areas. In terms of media, they consume only Russian language content, orientate towards Russia-based media brands, particularly for TV, and to a greater or lesser extent Baltic based Russian language brands such as Delphi. There is some evidence of a move to digital platforms for social interaction, initially just OK but increasingly Facebook too. The key to unlocking this target audience is to build hyper-local brands which can tap into this communities' strong social relationships and online sharing behaviours in order 'de-couple' where they get entertainment content from (Russian TV) and where they get trusted news.

2. Our other audience are media **'Hunter Gatherers'.** Comprising c.70% of Baltics Russians, they tend to be younger, multilingual (often speaking English, Russian as well as a national languages), identify as Baltic Russians, live in capital cities. Although on many social issues they tend to be more liberal, when it comes to politics and particularly geopolitics there are few observable trends, apart from being cynical about the motivations of both Russia and the US and EU. In line with global media consumption trends, this audience segment largely consumes media online or through On Demand services. Rather than maintaining an affinity for any particular outlet, they use different brands across a range of platforms for different areas of interests. They use social media sites or even individual journalists or influencers as a way of triaging and recommending content in order to navigate the cornucopia of media.

Section 4 – Theory of Change

If we: Support credible outlets, both hyperlocal and national, to develop adaptable business models, based around innovation and technology and develop brand and content strategies that adapt to changing media consumption patterns; and;

- **Build** the profile of individual Russian language journalists and commentators, including women and LGBTQ champions, across all language groups and place them on a diverse range of outlets;
- **Nurture** the supply chains that online outlets need to produce quality content at low cost and create networks and collaborations to develop economies of scale and cross-pollinate audiences;
- **Invest** in leadership of organisations to encourage innovation, agility and resilience; and
- **Encourage** public dialogue and improve critical thinking skills through a cross-network, digital and offline campaign

Then quality independent outlets will be able to make content at a decreasing marginal cost, that content will be delivered in the right format, from the right brand, on the right platform to increase audience engagement and audiences from across social divides will form communities of interest around platforms and brands

Thereby creating a more sustainable and resilient independent media sector in the Baltics and increasing audience engagement with a diverse range of quality media and evidence-based reporting and journalism

Contributing to increased resilience to disinformation amongst vulnerable audiences and Baltic society.

We will maximise **sustainability** through: **A focus on building resilient supply chains which enable outlets to be cost-effective and adapt their content and channels to evolving audience and changing market conditions**;

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Emphasising the importance of revenue generation and commercial viability to embed a focus on sustainability from the outset and avoid the trap of donor dependence; **Building** the brands of individual professional journalists and young influencers to support their career progression; creating champions to raise the profile of journalism as a profession irrespective of the fate of specific outlets; **Strengthening** the ability of established media to build networks with other organisations, improving their adaptability, innovation, and operational capability across a multilingual, multiplatform environment

Section 5 – Complementing and co-operating with other relevant projects

Through our presence and relationships in the region, we have extensive knowledge of other complementary initiatives, including those funded by the UK (Open Information Partnership or OIP; People to People Cultural Engagement (P2P)), the US (Media Literacy Acceleration, Media Literacy in the Balkans, Supporting Independent Media in the Baltics Action), and locally (SSE Centre for Media Studies; Nordic Council of Ministers support for minority language media production). As implementers for other CDMD projects, we are uniquely positioned to foster collaboration to boost effect and deliver VfM. Proposals include:

- **Drawing** on expertise and best practice developed through OIP and P2P to enhance our capacity building offer and critical thinking campaigns
- **Connecting**, where permitted, BIM project beneficiaries to OIP members to create an integrated network of disinformation activists, sharing content, tactics and providing peer to peer support.
- **Fostering** links between P2P and BIM project partners and beneficiaries, ensuring that successful examples of social cohesion generated by P2P reach Russian speaking audiences.
- **Leveraging** the British Council's Future New Worldswide Programme to connect BIM beneficiaries with leading media organisations as part of the BIM staff exchange programme.

The Account Manager will have responsibility for donor coordination, including identifying relevant initiatives, fostering opportunities for collaboration and de-conflicting where necessary. In consultation with the FCO, we propose to tack onto the annual lessons learned report, a de-briefing session with selected donors where we will share key findings and invite feedback from others.

Section 6 – Incorporating Gender Sensitivity

Gender considerations are integrated into programme design and delivery. Our approach includes: 1) Integrating gender into our context analysis and ensuring formative and ongoing research, such as target audience analysis and media consumption, focusing on gender difference and inequalities. 2) Ensuring our Theory of Change and project strategy has specific objectives, outcomes and outputs relating to promoting gender equality. 3) Identifying specific risks relating to gender insensitivity and tracking and managing these through our risk register and risk management framework. 4) Developing results framework and indicators which go beyond gender disaggregation to include specific gender components. 5) Implementing gender-inclusive methodologies, e.g. by consulting with gender experts and female beneficiaries during research or conducting robust due diligence of project partners for gender inclusivity.

Research shows that disinformation is used to perpetuate sexism and misogyny, deepen social cleavages, e.g. over gay rights, and suppress the voices of vulnerable groups through harassment, trolling and doxing.[1] Zinc will challenge these tactics head on, building on the more socially liberal views of younger Russian speakers in the Baltics by:

- Identifying and supporting female and LGBT journalists, media personalities and influencers through our Champions programme;
- Actively recruiting female and LGBT individuals for our public sector broadcaster and media organisation leadership training programmes, thus raising their profile within the sector;
- Including gender sensitivity as a core component of our training programmes, so that all programme beneficiaries are aware of gender issues such as the need to avoid propagating negative stereotypes, whilst simultaneously supporting the development of content which promotes gender equality;
- Putting in place measures to mitigate risks to women and sexual minorities from participating in the project such as the provision of cyber-security training and tailored/female-led counselling;
- Individuals supported to manage their profile or are able to withdraw from project activities at any time if they feel continued involvement poses a threat to their personal security, without losing access to support mechanisms.

Section 7 – Incorporating Conflict Sensitivity

1. **Being aware**: We will conduct a context and conflict analysis at project outset, identifying conflict sensitivity risks, opportunities and trade-offs, and review this at least quarterly. This analysis will feed into programme strategy and design, risk management (conflict insensitivity identified as a key risk and tracked through our risk register, with appropriate mitigations in place), results frameworks and reporting (including specific indicators on conflict sensitivity).
2. **Being adaptive**: [Weekly] project team meetings and [Quarterly/monthly] project reviews will include conflict sensitivity as a standing item and consider if/how project activities should adapt to changes in the context or conflict risks.
3. **Being accountable**: Do No Harm Principles are integrated into our Company Code of Conduct and Staff Manual. Accountability for conflict sensitivity at project level sits with the Project Director.

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