



Baltic Centre for
Media Excellence

Annual Report 2018

Fostering comprehensive media innovations

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Committed to creating resilient, inclusive and tech-savvy media, and knowledgeable and inquisitive audiences in the Baltics and beyond.

The Baltic Centre for Media Excellence (BCME) is an independent non-profit organisation, founded in November 2015. From its birth as a grassroots initiative of the Baltic journalistic community, BCME has grown into a powerful hub for smart journalism in the Baltics and beyond. It promotes professional growth, media intelligence and critical thinking, and strives for positive change in journalism and the communities it serves.

BCME focuses on the needs of independent media outlets in the region and provides them with tools essential for sustainable development: hands-on vocational training and mentorships in journalism and media management, quality media market research and audience analysis, as well as meaningful coordination of the donor community involved in media support across the region.

We advance tech-savvy professionalism, resilience and inclusiveness among media creators, but BCME is equally focused on educating and empowering media audiences. By promoting media literacy and critical thinking, especially among those groups most vulnerable to disinformation and propaganda messages, BCME contributes to establishing knowledgeable and inquisitive audiences and a demand for quality journalism.

This report covers the main activities of the BCME in all these core areas during 2018. The latest information about BCME projects is available on the centre's website — baltic.media

Foreword from the Executive Director



In its third year, BCME has continued its dynamic development, leveraging the experience and knowledge it has built up to undertake both new and broader activities. BCME has established itself as one of the largest non-governmental media organisations in the Baltic states, strengthening its expertise and competence in matters that are important to the media environment, and increasing its international recognition.

Our projects are becoming ever more diverse and orientated towards long-term media development, because only that way can our collaboration partners successfully adapt to the significant changes in audience behaviour. In seeking sources of funding, the various BCME projects are evaluated in a complex way so that they support one another and together serve our goals — to advance the skills of high-quality, independent media professionals and to develop new content formats and platforms that appeal to audiences.



In 2018, in collaboration with the international media organisation Internews, we began implementing a two-year project across all the Baltic states in which work is undertaken for both regional and public service media on the future development vision and operating model. This project, our largest to date, gives BCME a wonderful opportunity to strengthen the network in Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia for media development and mutual sharing of experience.

BCME is actively involved in the realisation of new and exciting ideas. In 2018, there was great interest in the competition organised in Daugavpils for the Russian-language media, the winners of which received funding to realise their start-up ideas.

The media literacy activities of our centre have also covered an even wider audience — both through implementing a popular secondary school media literacy competition in Latvia, and through conducting a survey and drawing conclusions about the influence of media content on voting decisions in Latvia's parliamentary election in October 2018.

The centre has expanded its activities in the Eastern Partnership states, which has been made possible thanks to increasing the capacity of the team and starting a new project. Work on co-ordinating collaboration with the media and with donors is an important contribution in a region where Baltic experience is very valuable.

In 2018, significant work has been done to increase the profile of the centre, both in the Baltics and beyond. BCME's management and its advisers have regularly participated as experts in high-profile events about the fight against the spread of disinformation, about ensuring the integrity of elections, and about the state of the media in the region. The centre has taken a proactive role in the organisation of various public events.

Openness, diversity and competence — these are the attributes that characterise BCME and enable it to plan ever broader support to smart journalism for the future.

Gunta Sloga, Executive Director
Jānis Siksnis, Acting Executive Director
Riga, 2018
Photo credit: Nadežda Kraukle



"Everything was great. From seeing all the examples in the presentations, one main point stuck in my mind – content needs to contain emotions! Seeing as my daily work is connected with social media, the knowledge gained will be useful in the most direct way."

A seminar participant's feedback following Zoya Charles's workshop on multimedia reporting



Zoya Charles, freelance media consultant and trainer, formerly head of the BBC World Service Global Video Unit leading a masterclass for journalists of Lithuanian Television. Vilnius
Photo credit: Vytenis Radžiunas

Kristian Strobech, media advisor, leading a masterclass for Estonian journalists.
Narva, 2018
Photo credit: Signe Valtina

In 2018, BCME has been developing its training modules and continuing to work with various partners. Providing vocational training, BCME focuses on media outlets and regions that have been most deprived of opportunities to develop, namely independent local media, public service media and Russian-language outlets. Working with trainers who are internationally acclaimed media professionals, we have continued with both short-term topic-based workshops and also in-depth mentoring sessions that have proved their consistent and lasting results in the longer term.

The areas covered in the training sessions have included various aspects of media production — storytelling, newspaper design, multimedia reporting, media literacy, social media monitoring, election coverage, media management, video production, investigative reporting, and many others. As in previous years in our media training sessions, we have focused on the real-world needs of media outlets to help them meet all kinds of industry challenges.

In strengthening public interest journalism in regions of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania, we have continued the project supported by the Nordic Council of Ministers (Norden) and addressed the training needs of both the public broadcasters and regional media.

A wide range of activities has been carried out to support development and strengthen production of independent Russian-language media outlets in all three Baltic states, especially in the areas with a high proportion of Russian speakers — Daugavpils (Latvia), Narva (Estonia) and Visaginas (Lithuania). The workshop on social media by the experienced trainer Kristian Strøbech from Denmark has been conducted in Narva for the newspaper "Vīru Prospekt", for Regional TV, and for Estonian national radio, and this was a new cooperation for BCME. The workshops will have an online follow-up in order to prepare the ground for a deeper digital strategy mentoring process.

Special efforts have been made to support the cooperation between national-language and Russian-language journalists in order to foster a united, diverse and professional media landscape in the Baltics. The strategy of bringing together journalists working in Latvian/Lithuanian and Russian languages has proved to be the best way to ensure that all nationalities and minority groups have access to the same level of professional journalism. One of the best examples was the joint training conducted at the public broadcasting companies, but there were also others.

Our trainers — multimedia newsroom editorial and management specialist, Zoya Charles, and freelance media consultant and former assistant editor of BBC News UK, Mark Georgiou — were welcomed with great respect and excitement in all three public broadcasters' newsrooms, where they provided mentoring on multimedia production as well as studio work and presentation techniques. We also took a closer look at culture journalism, which has not always been prioritised but has meaningful effects on various processes in society.

Extensive and detailed preparation and media selection has been carried out for the regional media development programme through the project "Strengthening Independent Media in the Baltics Action" (SIMBA). Nine

*"Many thanks for the time Zoya Charles spent with us and the really very useful information she shared. I really appreciate her visit to LRT."
Dr Tomas Rytel, Director of Administration and Business, LRT*

*"We rate our cooperation as very good. The mentor had prepared for the talk and gathered relevant information about Satori – both by looking at the portal and asking us to fill in a form. Claus was very open, positive, professional, raised lots of valuable questions and gave useful advice."
Ilmārs Šlāpins, Editor in Chief of the culture portal Satori following the culture journalism mentorship by Claus Vittus*

regional media outlets from all three Baltic countries have been selected in a competition to take part in the programme.

Each participant has their own motivation for introducing changes, whether that means new approaches to content creation or optimisation of sales models, but they all share the desire to ensure long-term development. In 2018, we attended project participants' editing sessions in order to familiarise ourselves in person with the specific situation and needs. In the coming years, this project, BCME's largest to date, will provide the opportunity to carry out activities in an even broader context, including not only regional media, but also the public broadcasters of all the Baltic states. As part of SIMBA, both training projects for media professionals and multimedia and media literacy content development projects will be implemented.

The Year in Numbers

217 journalists and editors were trained through mentoring programmes and topic-based workshops in the Baltic and Eastern Partnership states
38 mentoring sessions and workshops were delivered in the Baltic and Eastern Partnership states
16 media companies from the Baltics participated in the BCME training program
10 mentors and trainers were used

Pilna doma

Media literacy has continued to be one of the main priorities for BCME. Over the course of several years, “Pilna doma” (Full Thought) has become one of the most popular media literacy projects in Latvia. The tip of the Pilna Doma iceberg is a journalism contest for secondary school students from all regions of Latvia, yet beneath this visible part of the project lies diligent work with teachers, students and education officials. Pilna Doma is a wide-ranging media literacy project aimed at improving the media literacy skills of secondary school students. The project targets young audiences that are particularly vulnerable to misleading and false messages in the media.

Building on the successes and lessons learned from previous years, the 2018 edition of the project expanded the community of media literacy ambassadors — media professionals and students engaged in media literacy projects. The number of schools that applied to take part in the contest and media literacy workshops exceeded expectations. Around 300 students and their teachers from all regions of Latvia have improved their media literacy and critical thinking skills, particularly in distinguishing reliable content from fake news, by participating in the inspirational workshops led by prominent journalists and media experts — Nellija Ločmele, Olga Dragiļeva, Guntis Bojārs, Filips Lastovskis, Monta Jakovela, Ivonna Plaude and Solvita Denisa-Liepniece.

During the project, students deepened their skills in contemporary media production and were provided with tools to help them use media as a constructive means of achieving positive change. The Pilna Doma webpage serves as a media literacy hub with a wide range of educational materials for teachers and students and extra activities such as media literacy quizzes. By improving students’ critical thinking skills, the project is investing in creating an educated and motivated twenty-first century society.

During Pilna Doma, useful content is created which can be used in other media literacy projects, not only in Latvia. The Pilna Doma videos which provide young people with tips on how to check information on the web, which were initially created for Latvian Radio’s youth platform “Pieci.lv”, were translated at the end of 2018 and adapted for use on the Estonian public broadcaster’s (ERR) Russian-language youth radio station KISA FM and its Facebook account.

The Year in Numbers

“Pilna doma” 2018:
305 students and 50 teachers took part
25 well-known journalists and media academia professionals involved

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Media REstart

The “media REstart” programme aims to showcase new tech-savvy media initiatives, aimed at young media consumers in the Latgale region (Latvia). During the mini-incubator for media ideas, held in Daugavpils, several prototypes were created — new media concepts put forward by teams of journalists, designers and developers. The programme consisted of three stages — initial pitching of media ideas, development of the best ideas with the help of mentors, and competition between the most advanced ideas. Over two months, seven teams worked on prototypes which will serve as a basis for sustainable media initiatives, providing engaging and tech-savvy content.



During the programme, participants were able to receive one-to-one support from experienced mentors in defining and developing their ideas and in creating a business plan to help attract investors. Amongst the mentors were many recognised professionals and experts from the world of journalism and the media industry.



The programme’s winners received EUR 10 000 support to help them realise their ideas. The goal of the “DAMedia” team was to create a media source for independent, objective information about events in the country and in the Latgale region. For their part, “Письма” [Letters] team aimed to rejuvenate the art of letter-writing, one of the oldest forms of communication, adapting and transferring it to the virtual environment, and also to create a platform for aspiring writers.

Narva Media Hackathon

The hackathon “Why Hyperlocality Matters” in Narva (Estonia) was organised with the aim of finding new tech solutions for hyperlocal media organisations and platforms. Very often, local services and applications are very useful in a certain setting but are not universal or scalable enough for other local contexts. Programmers, designers, mobility experts, product visionaries and creative folks from Daugavpils, Visaginas and Narva came together for 72 hours of intensive teamwork to find ways of advancing hyperlocal media solutions — solutions serving local communities, designed to benefit local people and provide them with useful, reliable and appealing content. During the hackathon, coaches helped participants to develop their skills in creating quality content and specifically targeted communication. After three days of intensive work, the teams were a lot closer to finding solutions and went on to develop prototypes.

The Year in Numbers

Jorens Dobkevičs pitching his idea to the media incubator program “media reSTART”. Daugavpils, 2018
Photo credit: Makars Kirikovs

80 participants in the Narva media hackathon — journalists, media technology specialists, designers
7 teams, 2 winners in the Media ReStart start-up contest

The programme’s “media reSTART” winners. Daugavpils, 2018
Photo credit: Makars Kirikovs



In the second half of 2018, the BCME Eastern Partnership (EaP) programme began its main activities. The programme's long-term goal is to increase the impact of donor institutions by supporting independent mass media organisations in European Union Eastern Partnership states. To achieve this goal, the programme proposes to introduce activities that facilitate more intensive communication and coordination between public and private donors on one hand, and between mass media and media development organisations on the other hand.

In 2018, the EaP programme both began new activities and continued those which had already been started in support of the programme's long-term aims. BCME published its annual review of the independent media environment in EaP states, which highlights how the situation is developing for the independent media and provides recommendations for how to improve it. This research both allows the current development trends in the independent media to be followed and enables a better understanding of the short-term and long-term needs which require donor support.

The production and distribution of the monthly electronic newsletter "Funds4Media" has begun. The newsletter summarises funding opportunities for media organisations and journalists from EaP states. It provides media representatives and journalists with direct, easy-to-understand and up-to-date information about offers of support from donors.

The database of independent mass media in EaP states has been updated and prepared for publication. This electronic database provides an insight into which of the regional and national-scale media organisations can be regarded as independent. The database has been created based upon specific criteria for assessing the independence of mass media, which allow entries to be filtered and categorised.

BCME representatives participated in media donor coordination events, presenting the research performed as part of the EaP programme and the recommendations identified. Our representatives have also participated in several public events in Moldova, speaking about disinformation and media literacy.

To actively introduce the EaP programme, BCME representatives have undertaken introductory and networking trips to Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine. During the visits, our representatives met with members of the media donor community and of media development organisations to introduce the EaP programme and discuss opportunities for future cooperation.

Arif Aliyev, Head of the Journalists Union of Azerbaijan and Boris Navasardyan, President of Yerevan Press Club presenting a research "Gap-Asset Analysis of Russian Language Media Skill Set in the Eastern Partnership". Chisinau, 2017.
Photo Credit: Diāna Hoduļina



The public events organised by BCME are becoming ever more diverse, with the aim of creating an appreciation in society of the importance of quality journalism and media literacy.

Empowering Quality Russian-language Journalism in the Baltics

On 26-27 January 2018, together with Aktis Strategy, BCME organised the forum “Empowering Quality Russian-language Journalism in the Baltics”. Its aim — to identify the needs of the independent Russian-language media so as to enable high-quality journalism to successfully and sustainably reach minority community audiences in Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania. As a result of the forum, a document was produced which summarises the recommendations for how to support the Russian-language media in the Baltic states. Video interviews with leading Russian-language media journalists about the community’s needs and the possibilities for future development are available on the BCME website.



Protecting the integrity of elections

On 14 December 2018, BCME and the PROVIDUS Centre for Public Policy hosted the international conference “Protecting the integrity of elections — Experience of Latvia, USA, UK, Germany, Sweden and Ireland” to discuss the impact of media and political campaigns on the election process. A unique piece of research entitled “What determined Latvia’s vote on October 6?” was presented. The conference participants included policymakers and representatives of the media, NGOs and state institutions. Videos of the conference are available on BCME’s YouTube channel.



Conversation Festival LAMPA

At the increasingly popular Conversation Festival LAMPA, 29-30 June 2018, BCME participated with three projects. In the discussion “Cooperation between journalists and politicians. Threats and benefits.”, led by BCME executive director Gunta Sloga, the pre-election campaign of the parliamentary election was analysed, using examples from the Danish political TV series “Valdība” [“Government”]. Journalists and also well-known politicians participated in the discussion. In the discussion “Stolen elections: the voter in the power of the manipulator”, prominent experts from the USA, the UK, Ukraine and Latvia shared ideas about how to prevent the manipulation of voters’ data. Finally, together with Datu Skola [Data School] and Skeptiskā Biedrība [The Skeptical Society], BCME invited people to take part in the adventure game “Crime on the Net”.

Inga Sprinģe investigative journalist and co-founder of the non-profit Baltic investigative journalism center Re:Baltica taking part in the conference “Protecting the integrity of elections Experience of Latvia, USA, UK, Germany, Sweden and Ireland”. Riga, 2018.
Photo credit: Alfrēds Ulmanis

Individuals as the driving force for change

To mark International Human Rights Day, on 4 December 2018, BCME together with the Embassy of the Netherlands in Latvia showed the film “Joshua: Teenager vs. Superpower” at Kino Bize cinema and held the discussion “Individuals as the driving force for change”. Creators and leaders of well-known public initiatives in Latvia participated in the discussion.



Research into the media environment in the Baltic and Eastern Partnership states, changes in media consumption and the effect of content on society is an important area of activity for BCME, which we have continued to develop during 2018.

December saw the presentation of the results of the post-election survey conducted by BCME and the thinktank PROVIDUS regarding the influence of media content on the Latvian parliamentary election of October 2018. The survey data allowed conclusions to be drawn about the development of media content during the pre-election campaign, changes in audience behaviour, and the influence of the media on voting decisions in the election.

The results of the survey were presented at the conference “Protecting the integrity of elections”, which analysed the influence of the media environment on voters’ actions in Latvia, the USA, Sweden, Ireland, Germany and the UK. The conference was the closing event of BCME’s series of activities to facilitate high-quality journalism and strengthen the information space in Latvia in regards to the parliamentary election. In the summer of 2018, BCME organised a seminar, attended by leading mass media editors and representatives of state institutions involved in information space work, to discuss the situation prior to the election, including the threat of disinformation intended to influence voting decisions.

The latest study published on the independent media environment in EaP states confirmed BCME’s growing expertise in matters regarding the media environment in the region. Going forward, this will be supplemented by data from surveys of support-receiving media organisations on donor organisation performance in providing support to those who need it.

Nancy Bikoff Pettit, Ambassador of the United States of America to the Republic of Latvia, giving a welcome speech at the conference “Protecting the integrity of elections — Experience of Latvia, USA, UK, Germany, Sweden and Ireland”.
Riga, 2018



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Thanks to our generous donors, BCME has been able to carry out innovative and very well appreciated projects in journalist education, media literacy, research, and promotion of donor communication, as well as strengthening its organisational core to ensure the sustainability of its work.

Summary of the BCME budget for 2018

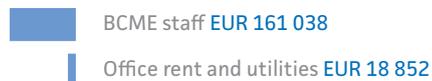
Income



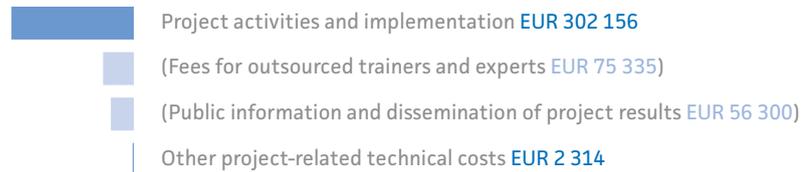
Grants EUR 401 091
Other income EUR 73 283

Expenses

Administrative expenses:



Implementation of projects:



Our donors

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Latvia
The Nordic Council of Ministers
The Danish Cultural Institute in Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania
Konrad Adenauer Stiftung
The Foreign and Commonwealth Office
The British Council
The European Endowment for Democracy
The United States Embassy in Latvia
The Ministry of Culture of Latvia
The EEA and Norway Grants
The Embassy of Denmark
The Embassy of the Federal Republic of Germany
The Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands
The Embassy of Canada

Idealist Quarterly discussion “Can progressive stories survive our post truth-era?”.
Brussels.
Photo credit: IQ



Main Objectives for 2019

2019 promises a lengthy and busy schedule for BCME with a large number of workshops, mentoring sessions and public events.

We will continue our comprehensive approach, focused on innovation and long-term development, working with the media to support the professional growth of journalists and to facilitate the production of high-quality content across the various media platforms.

We will particularly focus on the activities of the project “Strengthening Independent Media in the Baltics Action”, organising lots of topic-based workshops for participants, networking forums, and, in cooperation with Internews, an extended embedded mentorship programme — the first time this will have been done on such a large scale.

The project, which combines media training with support for new multimedia content production, will enable us to carry out our broadest and most varied media development activities yet, working with both public broadcasters and regional media in all three Baltic states.

Media literacy and the promotion of critical thinking is a primary area of activity for BCME, and we will invest even more effort in it and engage an even wider audience. In 2019, we will continue to expand our traditional secondary school media literacy project “Pilna doma”, emphasising that media literacy and critical thinking should become a permanent part of the school curriculum.

We are planning to implement several initiatives in the coming years, including a media literacy awareness campaign — a multimedia project consisting of informative jingles, a series of radio shows, and audiovisual content and cartoons.

It is equally as important to stress the importance of intelligent, trustworthy journalism to a broader audience, including to decision makers in state institutions and political circles. Therefore, in 2019, we are planning a string of public events where we will invite prominent experts to explain why it is necessary to strengthen public service media, support the work of independent local media, and take other steps to facilitate the distribution of independent, high-quality content in today’s highly changeable media environment.

On the EaP programme, we will broaden the impact of our current activities and also develop new initiatives. In 2019, we plan to publish a study of donor performance evaluations, based on a survey of media and media development organisations in EaP states. The results of the study should help improve donor-media cooperation, highlighting strong points and providing opportunities to resolve issues. We will continue to improve.

To continuously build our knowledge and skills so that we can help strengthen the quality media space in the Baltic and Eastern Partnership states — that is BCME’s main task in 2019 and in the coming years.

Estonian journalists during the presentation skills training leading by Mark Georgiou, Freelance media counsel, formerly Assistant Editor BBC News
Tallinn, 2018.
Photo credit: Signe Valtija

BCME administrative staff

Gunta Sloga
Executive Director

Jānis Siksnis
Acting Executive Director

Gunta Štēbele
Office Manager

BCME project teams

Signe Valtīņa
Training Project Manager

Mārtiņš Mūrnieks
Head of Eastern Partnership Programme

Diāna Hoduļina
Project Manager

Katrīna Tetere-Frolova
Eastern Partnership Programme Assistant

Evita Puriņa
Project Manager, “Pilna Doma”

BCME board

Jolanta Tarasavičiene
Chairperson of the Board, Head of international relations, the Lithuanian Public Broadcaster LRT (Lithuania)

Andres Joesaar
Vice-rector for creative activities and cooperation, Tallinn University, and head of media research at the Estonian Public Broadcaster ERR (Estonia)

Aiste Žilinskiene
Head of the Lithuanian Online Media Association (Lithuania)

Nika Aleksejeva
Data literacy trainer, chair of the board of the School of Data (Latvia)

Anna Peipiņa
Head of Study Programme, Journalism, Riga Stradiņš University (Latvia)

Riina Rõõmus
Board member of the Estonian Public Broadcaster ERR (Estonia)

Petra Raschkewitz
Regional coordinator for Europe and Central Asia, DW Akademie (Germany)

BCME advisers

Solvita Denisa-Liepniece
Principal adviser for media literacy projects

BCME partners

Institute for War and Peace Reporting
IREX Europe
IREX
Internews
Transitions Online
BBC Media Action
DW Akademie
The Norwegian Institute of Journalism
Nordic Journalist Centre
The Independent Journalism Center of Moldova
The Thompson Foundation

Contacts

The Baltic Centre for Media Excellence
5-1 Palasta St., Riga, LV1050
info@baltic.media

