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Partners for Democratic Change Serbia
Annual Report for 2023

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Abbreviations:

- PS - Partners for Democratic Change Serbia (Partners Serbia)
- ADR - Alternative Dispute Resolution
- CSO(s) - Civil society organization(s)
- PDP Law - Law on Personal Data Protection
- PDP Strategy - Strategy for Personal Data Protection
- CSF - Civil Society Facility
- USAID - United States Agency for International Development
- ABA ROLI - American Bar Association Rule of Law Initiative
- DEU - Delegation of the European Union to Serbia
- BTM - Balkan Trust for Democracy
- FOSS - Open Society Foundation Serbia
- Commissioner - Commissioner for Information of Public Importance and Personal Data Protection
- MOI - Ministry of Interior
- ROL - Rule of Law
- ECNL - European Center for Not-for-Profit Law
- ICEDA - Increasing Civic Engagement in the Digital Agenda
- ECNL - European Center for Not-for-Profit Law
- UNCAC - United Nations Convention Against Corruption
- NED - National Endowment for Democracy
- CSRA - Civil Society Resilience Strengthening Activity
- OSCE - Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe
- MATRA- Netherlands fund for Regional Partnership
- YUCOM- Lawyers' Committee for Human Rights
- BCHR - Belgrade Centre for Human Rights

2023 – a year of reflections and changes

In 2023, the global political climate continued to change at an accelerated pace, with new conflicts and crisis emerging, which has affected our region and the work of civil society, as well. In addition, political and social events in the region and in Serbia, from inter-ethnic tensions to mass shootings, affect the overall stability of the region and citizens' trust in institutions and their integrity.

Due to the unpredictability of further developments, and to better understand the context we operate and live in, we found it crucial to analyse and comprehend various social aspects and its impact on our work.

First, to determine the needs for further organizational development, during May and June 2023, we conducted a self-assessment process according to the ROCCS (Resilient Organizations in Changing Civic Space) methodology. All employees participated in the process, with the facilitation of Partners Serbia's associate Oriana La Villa, and organizational development priorities for 2024 were set based on the results. With the support of the same facilitator, during June and July 2023, we carried out a risk analysis process for the organization's work, according to the PESTEL methodology, which predicted potential political, economic, social, technological, environmental and legal risks and changes that could affect our work. We also organized two rounds of consultations with our external associates, including partners and colleagues, to share their perceptions and perspectives on our work. At the end of the year, we performed a survey where participants shared their impressions and experiences with cooperation with our organization.

Finally, from September to December 2023, with the support of our external associate and colleague from Romania, Olivia Baciu, we developed a new organizational Strategic Framework. This Framework should better reflect our work and enable us to better adjust to upcoming changes. Some of the greatest problems it addresses include the rule of law crisis and citizens' lack of trust in the European integration process and its fundamental values. It also recognizes the importance and challenges of digital transformation and its impact on human rights. Lastly, it reflects the overall lack of dialogue and culture of tolerance in our society. The structure of this Strategic Framework is presented in this Report and will be further incorporated in our programmatic documents and plans in 2024.

Throughout 2023, Partners Serbia continued to develop and implement several projects and initiatives, through different capacity building, research and advocacy activities, in the areas of rule of law (ROL), good governance, human rights and democratization. Partners Serbia also continued providing free legal support and advice to Serbian citizens, activists and CSOs, primarily in area of access to information of public importance and personal data protection. Since 2023 was also the election year, a great portion of our work in the second part of the year

was dedicated to detecting the institutional flaws in the election processes, mostly around misuse of citizens' data and public records containing them.

All activities have been implemented thanks to donor support or from Partners Serbia's existing resources.

Since the Covid-19 pandemic the hybrid way of working continued throughout 2023. This method has allowed Partners Serbia to organize some meetings online, which proved to be effective in implementing some project activities.

At the end of 2022, Partners Serbia changed the location of their office. The new office is located at Svetozara Markovica 60 in Belgrade. This change allowed us to have more space for meetings and organize small-scale events such as roundtables and trainings.

About us

In 2008, the idea of establishing Partners for Democratic Changes Serbia (Partners Serbia) was born. It seemed that the biggest challenge was how to develop an organization that, in terms of program areas and work methodology, would manage to stand out among a number of civil society organizations that have been active and recognizable in Serbia and the region for years. According to the understanding of many, the key moment for the creation of civil sector organizations in Serbia passed immediately after the democratic changes, so the establishment of a completely new organization, without a recognized identity and history in Serbia, seemed like an impossible mission. Unlike others, we considered that the moment was right, because we considered many of the topics that our organization wanted to open up and devote themselves to be important for the further democratic development of the country, the improvement of the protection of human rights, and above all, for the establishment of a legal state and the rule of law.

Partners Serbia was founded within the project "Partners for Sustainable Leadership" supported by the "General Electric" Foundation and with the help of the organization Partners for Democratic Change (today Partners Global) based in Washington DC (USA). The goal of our work is to improve civil society and institutional development in Serbia and the region, strengthen local capacities, utilize the knowledge of domestic experts, and gain insight from the experiences of comparative practices.

During fifteen years of our work, we have progressed our expertise in the field of rule of law, democracy and human rights development, civil society advancement, peaceful conflict resolution and change management. We have continued to offer solutions and programs tailored to local institutions and communities. We are especially proud that some of the social topics gained importance thanks to our contribution. Thus, we are among the first organizations that are active in the field of peaceful dispute resolution, with special emphasis on the need for a wider use of mediation as a mechanism suitable for not only solving the current dispute or conflict, but also building wider social cohesion and a culture of dialogue important for post-conflict societies like ours. Also, our pioneering work in the field of privacy protection has been recognized by numerous institutions, commercial entities and citizens, who see us as a natural partner in this area.

We implemented 45 projects that have involved over 12,000 participants. We created and distributed numerous publications and analyses, developed unique methodologies for creating sustainable online learning programs () and organized numerous conferences, debates, forums, workshops, and trainings. We initiated and helped establish the first Centre for peaceful settlement of disputes in the local community in Serbia and the region, the office of the Free Legal Aid Service in the Municipality of Bujanovac, as well as the Bar Academy of the Bar Association of Serbia. In cooperation with the Commissioner for Information of Public Importance and Protection of Personal Data, in 2010 we initiated the beginning of marking the International Day of Personal Data Protection in Serbia. Aware of the importance of the existence of professional and stable organizations for the development of civil society in the country, we supported the establishment and improvement of the internal capacities of other citizens' associations, such as the National Association of Mediators of Serbia, the Association of Local

Ombudspersons of Serbia, the Network of Inspectors of Serbia, and in the course of our work we achieved cooperation or partnerships with over 70 organizations from all over the country and region.

We are the first organization in Serbia accredited by the Ministry of Justice for conducting basic and specialized training for mediators. We also have accreditation from the Ministry of State Administration and Local Self-Government for conducting training for employees and representatives of local governments.

Today, the Partners Serbia team consists of 11 members, ready to respond to all upcoming challenges, who are determined and capable of completing all future tasks and plans. Representatives of Partners Serbia participate in the work of expert bodies of professional associations, as well as in the Government of Serbia's working groups for drafting and amending legal regulations in the areas we work in. We also have an established network of international consultants with whom we regularly cooperate, with experience in the field of rule of law, judicial reform, democracy, good governance, alternative dispute resolution, freedom of information and data protection. Our activities are also aimed at strengthening the capacities of other organizations and institutions for the expertise that we have developed over the years. Through partnerships, networks and joint initiatives, we achieve successful cooperation with a number of civil society organizations in Serbia and the region.

Values and Work

The work of the organization is based on the values shared by all team members.

Values:

- Ethics/Integrity - we adhere to high ethical standards in our work and respect our established system of moral values (both as individuals and as an organization)
- Innovation - we find new ways and content to get closer to target groups and contribute to the development of democracy in our society
- Responsibility - we take responsibility for the activities we carry out and for spreading the adopted moral values in society
- Respect for diversity - we are able to hear and appreciate different views and to accept those who think differently, as well as to understand the needs and views of other groups
- Solidarity - we understand other people's needs and problems and are ready to step out of our comfort zone to help others
- Principledness - we do not deviate from our positions even when obstacles appear

Way we work:

- Professionalism - we believe that to achieve excellence in the work we strive for, constant work on strengthening the individual and team competencies of employees is important. Partners' work is based on the principles of ethics that we incorporated into the Code of Ethics and other internal acts of the organization.

- Openness - we are open to cooperation with other organizations/bodies and individuals whose goal is the permanent development of democratic relations in society, respect for individual and collective rights.
- Transparency - everything we do is available to the public.
- Democracy - we give all employees opportunities to participate in decisions concerning our organization.
- Equality (+tolerance) - we treat employees and associates equally, taking into account the differences that exist among all of us.
- Participation and giving opportunities - we are ready to participate in the projects and activities of other organizations, as well as to include them in ours; our initiatives and projects always involve an invitation for the active participation of all interested parties.
- Teamwork - the project way of working implies that we are all involved from idea to realization in accordance with our affinities and abilities.
- Innovation and creativity - we encourage the development and application of new methodologies in our work and follow trends.

New Strategic Framework

IF-THEN (Theory of Change)

If Serbian institutions are able to protect citizens' fundamental rights and citizens take part in processes pertinent for their rights and interests, *and*

If Serbian society is able to anticipate, prepare and adapt to promises and perils of the rapid technological enhancement, *and*

If citizens and social groups in Serbia address their differences through dialogue and peaceful resolution of conflicts,

Then Serbia will be a more fair/just, peaceful and resilient society, able to contribute to the stability of the region as a member of the European Union.

PATHWAYS

Pathway 1: Serbia in EU: fundamentals first (70%)

- Rule of law
- Fundamental rights
- Resilient civil society
- Democratic institutions, good governance, separation of powers

Pathway 2: Digitalized World: the future is now

- Digital safety and security

- Digital transparency and accountability
- Democracy and citizens' participation in the digital environment
- Human rights in the digital environment

Pathway 3: Peaceful Societies/ Communities

- Dialogue in society and culture of tolerance
- ADR
- Peaceful conflict management

Projects

The projects that have been implemented during the course of 2023:

- **Constituencies for Judicial Reform**, supported by USAID, as part of a consortium of 12 civil society organizations
- **Using New Media to Promote Government Transparency 2**, supported by National Endowment for Democracy, in consortium with 3 civil society organizations from the region: Metamorphosis Foundation from North Macedonia, Center for Democratic Transition from Montenegro and Citizens Association Why not? from Bosnia and Herzegovina.
- **Civil Society Resilience Strengthening Activity**, supported by USAID, in consortium with the following organizations: Partners Global, DT Institute, European Center for Not-for-Profit Law (ECNL) and Civic Initiatives.
- **Data Protection in the World of Cyber Challenges**, supported by Smart Balkans Civil Society for Shared Society in the Western Balkans.
- **Data Protection in the Digital Era**, supported by ABA ROLI.
- **Personal Data Protection in the Security Sector – Addressing the gaps of the Law on Personal Data Protection**, supported by Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), through Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency – SIDA.
- **Greater Internet Freedom**, supported through Internews.
- **Price of privacy - Untying the Knot Between Institutions and Tabloid Media**, supported by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Kingdom of Netherlands, through the MATRA programme.
- **Back To Basics: Parliament as a Backbone for the Rule of Law**, supported by the Delegation of the European Union to the Republic of Serbia (DEU), Civil Society Facility (CSF)
- **Information is Power**, supported by Open Society Foundation Serbia (FOSS)
- **Increasing Civic Engagement in the Digital Agenda – ICEDA**, supported by the European Union, as part of a consortium of the following organizations: Metamorphosis Foundation (North Macedonia), Open Data Kosovo (Kosovo), e-Governance Academy (Estonia), NGO 35mm (Montenegro) and Levizja Mjaft! (Albania).

Within the aforementioned projects, Partners Serbia team completed several activities, presented below:

- Organized third annual Privacy, Week, a multi-stakeholder event which lasted for 4 days, to mark Data Protection Day. The event centered around discussions on privacy and data protection issues with experts from the civil, private, and public sectors
- Organized the annual conference to mark International Access to Information Day (28 September), titled “Transparency on the Agenda: Access to Information, the Fight Against Corruption, and the Openness of the Judiciary“. The conference consisted of two panels dedicated to the policy of openness and transparency of public authorities in Serbia and the region, and gathered more than 50 participants from the judiciary, public institutions, media, civil society organizations and professional associations.
- Developed a number of advocacy tools, such as 8 blog posts for the Constituencies for Judicial Reform Project’s website in Serbia.
- Organized 4 thematic open-door court meetings throughout Serbia, to establish better communication of courts with citizens about important topics related to the work of the judiciary in Serbia and answer the most frequent questions with regards to the work of courts.
- Conducted the analysis on proactive and reactive transparency of 31 basic and higher courts in Serbia and presented the findings at a conference in Belgrade.
- Produced an analysis on privacy violations in the media, by analyzing court cases in this area and developing recommendations for courts.
- Conducted research on the openness of the judiciary in Serbia and published a report.
- Produced 2 policy documents in the process of adoption of new judicial bylaws.
- Published 3 analyses on accordance of three Serbian Laws with the CoE and EU standards: Law on Personal Data Protection, Law on Electronic Media, Law on Electronic Communications.
- Produced a total of 3 policy proposals for the National Assembly’s boards on how to implement security enhancing prerogatives to enhance scrutiny in the domain of protection of digital privacy rights, and two policy proposals for the judiciary and the independent institutions, to improve the privacy of Serbian citizens and to adequately respond to the growing trend of developing AI in Serbia, using non-transparent algorithms.
- Produced the DPIA methodology for legislative processes, with the aim of carrying out a feasibility analysis of the application of the methodology that will ensure that data protection obligations are considered when drafting new regulations.
- Partners Serbia participated in Rights Con in Costa Rica, an annual multi-stakeholder conference on human rights in the digital era.
- Held a training for CSOs on data protection and responsible use of artificial intelligence, with 18 participants.
- Held a tailored training on AI for the representatives of the Commissioner for the Protection of Equality.
- Organized 10 online House in Order trainings for civil society representatives to ensure compliance of CSOs with the existing legal framework in various domains, and to further strengthen their resilience (for over 300 participants)

- Organized 6 workshops for 25 Nodes (45 participants in total, divided to the groups: environmental, feminists, human and minority rights, local community work organizations), held by 6 local and one international coach. The aim of this workshops was to discuss possible scenarios for Serbia in 2033. This period provides for the nodes to consider changes in the external environment beyond typical strategic planning or election of project cycle and provide for the organizations to timely prepare for any of the scenarios.
- Organized 2 peer exchange meetings with 45 participants from 27 organizations. Meetings gathered directors and professionals in the sector to discuss pertinent issues and concerns affecting the work of CSOs. Topics were Cost Effectiveness and Donor and procurement tender procedures and Financial Management and Reporting.
- Participated in the consultative process for the adoption of different laws and by-laws. PS provided their written contributions for the improvement of the text of the laws, based on their previous findings in analyzing the state of transparency and personal data protection in Serbia.
- Conducted the analysis of transparency, accessibility, integrity and efficiency of 69 institutions of executive and legislative power, firstly by conducting extensive monitoring of their websites, analyzing freedom of information requests and the questionnaires that have been sent out to the institutions. After that, PS developed the two analyses: „Openness of the executive power in Serbia and the region and “Openness of parliaments in Serbia and the region”. Monitoring results were presented during the “Transparency on the Agenda: Access to Information, the Fight Against Corruption, and the Openness of the Judiciary” Conference held in Belgrade and at the regional Conference “Transparency of public institutions”, held in Montenegro.
- Participated as members in the Working Group in Charge of Developing the PDP Strategy, providing their comments and suggestions. This resulted in the adoption of the PDP Strategy, in August 2023.
- Participate as members of the Working Group for the Development of Fifth Action Plan for the Open Government Partnership (OGP) Partners Serbia developed 4 proposals of commitments. 3 proposals were accepted.
- Provided written suggestions for the development of several important laws and regulations including the Ethical Guidelines for the use of AI, Draft Law on Internal Affairs, PDP Strategy etc.
- Produced a total of 12 analyses on processes of adopting regulation in Serbia, such as the PDP Strategy, judicial laws, Laws on Internal Affairs etc. as well as 1 brief about all the processes.
- Organized their second annual Privacy School for 25 students.
- Developed a comprehensive analysis on cybercrime and information security.
- Developed 2 blog posts on internet freedom topics.
- Developed 4 blog posts about the improvement of transparency and openness of the judiciary.
- Organized 4 panels within the internet freedom summit.
- Conducted one strategic litigation for Srdjan Sveljo, to test the right to be forgotten mechanism in Serbia.

- Developed the Analysis of the PDP Law and the level of its alignment with the EU legal framework and practices with recommendations for improvement of legal framework, as well as policy proposals based on the findings of the analysis.
- Presented the Analysis of the PDP Law at the roundtable in Belgrade.
- Provided support to students of journalism to create investigative stories and articles. In total 12 journalistic articles produced.
- Developed an analysis on hate crime in graffiti, as well as policy proposals for preventing the spreading of hate in public spaces.

During 2023, Partners Serbia:

- held 18 workshops, trainings and conferences, with around 600 participants in total.
- produced 12 journalistic articles
- developed 24 publications
- produced 6 policy documents
- written 14 blog posts.

Cooperation and Networking

During 2023, Partners Serbia continued their cooperation with a variety of subjects from civil society, private sector and public institutions, primarily in Serbia but in the Western Balkan and the rest of Europe as well.

Partners Serbia also participated in [Rights Con](#), a multi-stakeholder conference which was held in San Jose, Costa Rica, from 5 to 8 June 2023, to discuss the challenges faced in the digital world, primarily with regards to data protection and responsible use of AI.



Rights Con, June 2023 – San Jose, Costa Rica

Partners Serbia also participated in regular meetings with Partners Network.

As a part of the ACTION SEE regional network, Partners Serbia, together with the organizations “Zasto ne?”, “Center for Democratic Transition” and “Metamorphosis Foundations” conducted a series of activities, including annual regional monitoring of the openness of public institutions (the Regional Openness Index), advocacy activities for the improvement of openness of public institutions in the region, and several public events, including Conference “Transparency of public institutions”, held in Montenegro.



Source: CDT Portal

After the Law on Internal Affairs was revoked from procedure for the second time, the consultative process with representatives of civil society organizations continued from January 2023 through a series of consultative meetings. This was the second time in two years that this Law on Internal Affairs was revoked from procedure after the pressure from both civil society organizations, citizens and the media. This demonstrated the importance of these organizations and ways in which harmful legislation can be stopped when coordinated correctly. Because of that, Partners Serbia also worked jointly with other civil society organizations on consultative meetings with the Ministry of Interior (MOI). From January to April 2023, Partners Serbia participated in a total of 6 consultative meetings with the MOI.

As a part of the National Convention on the European Union for chapter 23 (NKEU), a subgroup for the judiciary, we continued with our advocacy related to the improvement of the

transparency standards in new bylaws by the High Prosecutorial Council and the High Court Council and created two policy documents with colleagues from the NKEU.

As a member of SEE Digital Rights Network, Partners Serbia participated in the regional Conference "BIRN Open House" focused on issues such as media freedom, justice, accountability, and digital rights. The second day of the Conference was dedicated to closed sessions on the shaping of the future of the Network.

As part of the Coalition for Free Access to Information of Public Importance, Partners Serbia with help of the Coalition members organized its annual conference to mark International Access to Information Day (28 September). The Conference called "Transparency on the Agenda: Access to Information, the Fight Against Corruption, and the Openness of the Judiciary", was held on 27 September 2023 in Belgrade, with more than 50 participants from the judiciary, public institutions, media, civil society organizations and professional associations present.



Author: Svetislav Brcanski

Partners Serbia also cooperated with several civil society organizations through the participation in other consultative processes and advocacy activities.

During 2023, Partners Serbia also participated in the initiative "Free the Streets, Free the People", together with colleagues from Krokodil, YUCOM, YIHR Serbia and BCHR. As part of the initiative, Partners Serbia developed a short analysis on the legal background when it comes to graffiti which spread hate, as well as policy proposals on how to tackle this issue.

Partners Serbia representatives participated in two regional conferences on information integrity – DISICON – held in Pristina in May and December 2023, and continued their participation in the regional Information Integrity Forum.

In October 2023, Partners Serbia representative, Ana Toskic Cvetinovic, participated in Civil Society Forum held in Tirana, Albania, within the Berlin Process. At the Forum, Ms Toskic Cvetinovic participated in discussions with representatives of EU institutions, independent institutions of the Western Balkan countries, civil society and media on future of Western Balkan within the EU digital market.

In September 2023, Partners Serbia also participated in the multisector UNCAC workshop in Becici, with the goal of establishing a dialogue between CSOs, private sector and public institutions. After the conference, Partners Serbia also formally submitted their request to be included as a member organization in the UNCAC network and are awaiting approval from the board expected in 2024.



UNCAC Workshop in Becici, September 2023.

Representatives of partners Serbia also participated at the annual regional Conference “Point” in Sarajevo in Jun 2023.

Since 2023, in cooperation with the Faculty of Law, University of Belgrade, Partners Serbia is organizing a Mediation Legal Clinic. The Clinic lasts for two semesters, from October 2023 to June 2024, and is attended by 20 final-year law students.

Partners Serbia actively supported the work of different CSOs through participation in lecturers at their trainings and workshops, participation in different conferences, provision of know-how in the field of access to information of public importance and personal data protection etc. In November, Partners Serbia also supported the organization of The Blockchain Forensics Forum, the first event in Southeast Europe specifically focused on addressing and combating illicit activities within blockchain and decentralized systems, and the organization of Annual Conference of the Compliance Association, a forum for compliance professionals and leading national and regional experts in this field. Both events were organized in Belgrade.

Media Visibility

During 2023, Partners Serbia were present in different forms of media, both in daily newspaper, and in different TV programmes to reach as many people as possible and discuss privacy related issues and promote important project activities and research findings. They were also in contact with a PR agency to maximize the reach of their publications, TV and radio guest appearances.

During the year, Partners Serbia had a total of 58 TV and radio appearances. A total combined reach of all our appearances in 2023 was 96.057.545.

Partners Serbia were especially active during their Privacy Week event, during which an entire media campaign was implemented.

Services

In 2023, PS continued to offer services to businesses and the civil sector, including trainings on mediation in dispute resolution. Specifically, PS conducted 2 basic mediation trainings with a total of 20 participants. These trainings were conducted in cooperation with the Union University School of Law in Belgrade.

Furthermore, PS provided mediation services in the field of dispute resolution, with a total of 2 initiated or completed mediation procedures.

Employees

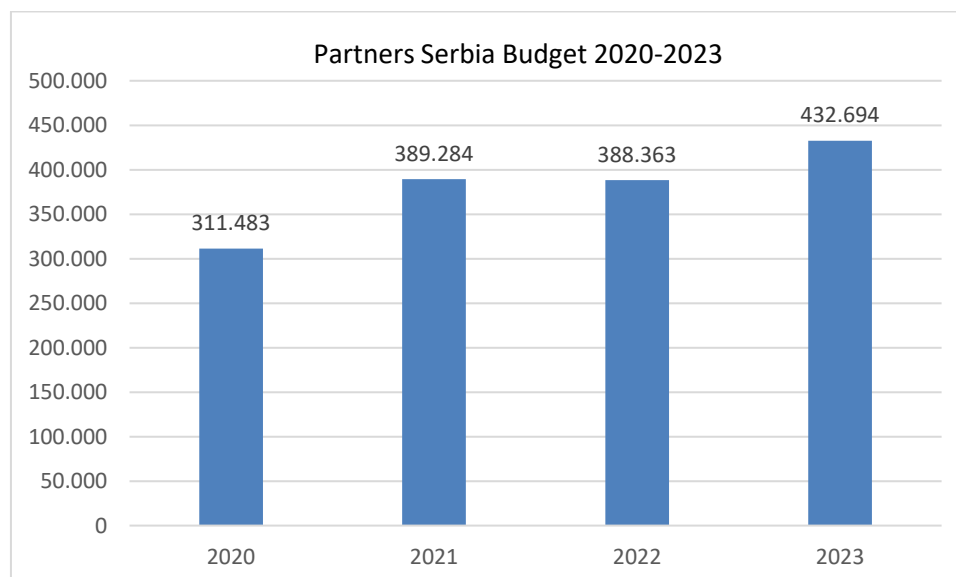
Partners Serbia team is made up of 11 full-time members. Their team consisted of Ana Toskic Cvetinovic (Executive Director), Blazo Nedic (President of the Managing Board), Uros Misljenovic (Program Officer), Ana Desic (Financial and Compliance Officer), Nastasija Stojanovic (Projects and Communications Coordinator), Kristina Kalajdzic (Researcher and Project Coordinator), Damjan Mileusnic (Researcher and Project Coordinator), Milica Andric (Training and Capacity Building Coordinator), Milica Tosic (Attorney-at-Law - Legal Advisor), Oriana LaVilla (Associate) and Lena Nedeljkovic (Administrative Assistant).

During 2023, Partners Serbia also welcomed a new member to the team - Lena Nedeljkovic, graduated journalist, who has been working as an administrative assistant for the organization since September 2023. Lena is providing technical support to the entire team and is also in charge of managing Partners Serbia's social media channels. She is also included in implementation of some project activities.

Finances

All financial reports from Partners Serbia have been submitted in accordance with the Serbian laws.

Over past few years, Partners Serbia finances have been sound and stable and the budget for 2023 was in the total amount of EUR 388.363.



The main sources of funding in 2023 were:

The European Union

USAID

Fond for the Open Society

American Bar Association Rule of Law Initiative

SMART Balkans

The Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE)

Netherlands' Fund for Regional Partnership (MATRA)

Internews Network

National Democratic Institute (NDI)