



December 8, 2024

Dear Mediapart editors,

I am writing to you to request corrections to your recent report about OCCRP.

This report contains several significant factual inaccuracies that professional journalistic standards and applicable legal requirements compel you to correct as soon as possible. I am setting forth each of these inaccuracies and providing you with the evidence of their inaccuracy, although your reporting should have ascertained this and in some cases certainly did. You are now, if you were not before, on notice of significant substantive factual errors in your report. I present here the most egregious and dangerous of these errors:

1. **Your report falsely asserts that OCCRP does not disclose the sources of our funding, stating that “the OCCRP appears uncomfortable about the scale of U.S. funding, as the amounts are not published on the NGO’s website.”**

This is incorrect. Detailed figures are indeed [published on our website](#) as part of our annual report (see the tab “full financial statements”). The annual report specifically breaks out U.S. grant funding down to the exact dollar.

This basic factual inaccuracy, that the extent of U.S. support for OCCRP is “hidden,” is fundamental to the misleading framing of your report, as well as its headline. It has formed the basis of the unjustified, alarming attacks on our journalists that we have seen in the days since publication.

2. **Your report fails to disclose material you received that undermines your preferred narrative.**

In your article, Mr. Philippin and Mr. Candea write:

The OCCRP repeats at length that US government funding poses no problem because there is no influence exerted upon its reports. “All OCCRP grants acknowledge donors have no right to interfere with the editorial policies,” insisted the OCCRP board in their written reply. But the board refused to provide us with copies of such grant agreements.



This is inaccurate. Your reporting colleague John Goetz, well before publication of your report, received written confirmation from the U.S. government of our independence.

On August 19, 2023, Mr. Goetz emailed Shannon Maguire of the U.S. Agency for International Development requesting information on USAID's support for OCCRP.

Ms. Maguire sent Mr. Goetz an email on August 25, 2023, quoting verbatim the editorial independence clause that is part of OCCRP's current grant with USAID. It states:

“(d) Editorial Rights

The Recipient (also referred to as OCCRP) retains sole control over the editorial processes during the performance of this agreement including, but not limited to, the stories and content selected, sources used, and the story angle used. The Recipient will take full responsibility for all legal, regulatory, and financial ramifications of its stories and will not hold USAID responsible for its editorial product. The Recipient will solely decide which stories it reports and publishes without consideration to USG recommendations.”

On August 27, 2023, Mr. Goetz replied, confirming receipt of the email and asking if he could quote it. On August 28, Ms. Maguire responded by affirming that he could.

Your story does not quote this clause, nor mention this email exchange.

3. Your report falsely asserts that the U.S. government has a veto over staffing at OCCRP.

Your report falsely claims that the U.S. government has a right to “veto appointments of ‘key personnel’ on every new funding contract. Elsewhere, it falsely claims that the U.S. government has the “right to veto its senior staff” and that it can “veto the nomination of ‘key personnel’ in the organization, including Drew Sullivan.”

Mediapart has also [falsely claimed](#) that the U.S. government has the power to “fire its boss if he doesn’t perform.” (“*Oui, Washington dispose d’un droit de veto sur les dirigeants de l’OCCRP et peut donc renvoyer son patron s’il ne donne pas satisfaction.*”).

As we explained to your reporters on many occasions over many months, OCCRP retains full control over all editorial staffing decisions. Hiring and firing of all staff is entirely independent of donors, without exception. This also applies to Drew Sullivan, who is appointed by the board of directors of OCCRP and answers only to the board of directors. Our board is made up of private, independent individuals with no government ties. **In no sense does any donor, including the different U.S. government agencies**



that have provided grants to OCCRP, have the right to fire Drew Sullivan or “veto” his employment at OCCRP.

As explained to you previously, the vast majority of grants that OCCRP receives from the U.S. government or any other public or private donor contain no clauses whatsoever concerning individual staffing. The statement that “every new funding contract” contains such a provision is factually false.

Only a very small minority contain provisions concerning “key personnel.”

Within this very small minority of grants (two out of 50 currently active grants), OCCRP must name a staff member or members to be responsible for meeting grant goals (for example, training a certain number of journalists in a geographical region). Under the terms of these two grants, if we replace this person during the grant period, we must find an equally qualified replacement, and the donor needs to agree that the replacement is qualified. This applies **only if we want to make a replacement**. Drew Sullivan was, in fact, publicly listed as the “chief of party” on the USAID grant you refer to in your report, meaning that he was responsible for the financial administration of the grant at the time it was given. Therefore, the replacement provision **could not possibly apply to him**.

At no point ever in our 17-year history has a donor raised an objection to any of our staff members, nor do they have the right to do so.

4. Your report fails to disclose Stefan Candea’s previous business relationship with OCCRP’s co-founder Paul Radu

Your story states that Stefan Candea never had a “business relationship” with Paul Radu. This is factually incorrect. Mr. Candea was a co-founder with Mr. Radu of the Romanian Center for Investigative Journalism. He was a paid contractor for OCCRP while Mr. Radu was a co-director. You must not ignore these facts, which establish a strong conflict of interest for Mr. Candea in reporting on OCCRP.

5. Your report falsely asserts that OCCRP avoids reporting on the US government and its interests.

OCCRP has pursued numerous investigations into wrongdoing by the U.S. government . This includes billions of dollars in CIA-coordinated [arms shipments](#) to Syria, the privatization of [U.S. drone strikes](#) in Kenya, and [corruption involving the U.S. military](#) in Afghanistan.



According to our own disclosures (and your reporting claiming to “reveal” them), roughly half of OCCRP’s funding comes from non-U.S. grants, both government and private. As we have previously explained, this means we have millions of dollars available every year that we can, and do, use to produce reports critical of the U.S. government. No U.S. donor has any power to object to this, and none has tried.

6. Your report falsely asserts that “US government financing is never mentioned in OCCRP-produced articles”

This is untrue. OCCRP discloses financing when it is directly relevant to the topic of a story we publish. For example, a 2023 [article](#) about China’s government paying media in Solomon Islands included a disclosure that OCCRP receives US-government grants to report on the Pacific Islands. A 2017 investigation into a campaign in the Balkans against financier George Soros [disclosed](#) that OCCRP had received grants from Soros’ Open Society Foundations.

7. Your report labels OCCRP a “criminal organization.”

[This label](#) is libelous and extremely dangerous to OCCRP journalists living under authoritarian regimes.

Our demand for corrections relates to much more than the professional standards for accuracy and fairness. We also are asking you to consider the ongoing harm your repeated inaccurate reporting is causing investigative journalists around the world, people you presumably would consider colleagues — or, at the very least, vulnerable human beings.

As we speak, journalists are at risk because of your deeply deficient reporting. We urge that you address the points above with great urgency through appropriate corrections and apologies.

We await your timely response,

Miranda Patrucic

Editor-in-Chief

The Organized Crime and Corruption Reporting Project