

Editorial Guidelines for the use of Digital Automation Technologies (DATs)

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1. Introduction

Purpose of the guidelines

This document aims to define the principles, workflows, tools, and responsibilities related to the use of automation systems based on digital technologies, or Digital Automation Technologies (DATs) – generally known as Artificial Intelligence (AI) - within the journalistic newsroom of Osservatorio Balcani Caucaso Transeuropa (OBCT). The document seeks to ensure that the integration of such systems takes place ethically, transparently, responsibly, and in full compliance with the professional and ethical standards that guide OBC Transeuropa.

Who do they apply to?

These guidelines apply to all individuals involved in the production, review, publication, and distribution of OBCT Transeuropa's journalistic content, whether members of the permanent staff, or regular and occasional external collaborators.

Definition of “Digital Automation Technologies”

With DATs, we refer to any algorithm or system of algorithms deployed by OBCT that, automatically or semi-automatically, influence or contribute to our editorial processes. OBC Transeuropa does not use the term “Artificial Intelligence”, as we do not consider these systems to represent genuine intelligence, but rather to reflect marketing-driven terminology that can be misleading regarding the true nature of such technologies.

2. Ethical Principles

OBC Transeuropa is committed to upholding the following journalistic principles, in accordance with Article 19 of the Code of Ethics of the Italian Order of Journalists.

- **Transparency**

Any content resulting from the use of DATs will be the results of the application of these guidelines.

- **Human Responsibility**
Despite the adoption of automated tools, the final responsibility for published content remains with a human journalist or editor. Editorial accountability is not transferable.
 - **Reliability and Accuracy**
DATs are employed as a support to certain journalistic processes, as identified in this document, and never fully replaces editorial verification. Information generated or processed through DATs is always subject to editorial review and oversight.
 - **Impartiality and Inclusiveness**
The use of DATs must respect pluralism, diversity, and the rights of minorities. OBCT commits to mitigating algorithmic bias that may lead to discrimination, stereotyping, or exclusion through careful selection of tools and thorough verification of any content generated or transformed by them.
 - **Protection of the Public**
The newsroom commits to mitigate the risk of DATs generating or amplifying manipulative, misleading, or misinformative content.
 - **Responsible Innovation**
The introduction of DATs will be accompanied by staff training and periodic reviews of tools and practices.
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3. Workflows with integrated DATs

Editorial workflows encompass the entire editorial production process, from content creation to publication and distribution. OBCT utilizes DATs in a limited number of carefully monitored stages. We have implemented a "traffic light system" that designates which DATs are permissible, along with the level of human supervision required for each stage.

Green	DATs require limited human supervision
Yellow	DATs require careful human supervision
Red	No DATs implemented in editorial workflow due to excessive risks

No DATs will be employed without oversight, ensuring editorial responsibility and accountability across all our operations.

4. Identification of DAT usage stages:

- **Translation**
OBCT publishes in 3 languages: Italian, English and Serbian Croatian. Moreover, OBCT's regional focus covers 27 different countries or regions, meaning that our editorial staff deals with a high number of different languages and idioms. OBCT identified DAT tools that make our daily work more fluent, without compromising on quality, personalisation, and respect of the original message.

Example: the translation of an article from Serbian Croatian to English and Italian.

- **Transcription**

The transcription of recorded interviews or other speech-to-text processes can be fastened by DATs. All the transcribed text content is reviewed by the authors and the editors to guarantee the quality of the editorial output. Particularly sensitive content will be transcribed through offline DATs, to prevent that sensitive information is inadvertently shared outside the newsroom, and to guarantee the highest safety standards.

Example: A recorded audio interview is transformed into a text file for further editing and verification.

- **Text-to-Speech**

OBCT is set to begin testing the use of DATs to allow readers to listen to editorial content produced by the editorial team. The results generated by TAD will be periodically reviewed on a sample basis by a human staff member to verify the quality of the automated work. The pronunciation of proper nouns may not correspond to the optimal in the original language.

Example: A press release from one of our projects is converted into an audio file accessible to our audiences.

- **Social Media Management**

OBCT content published on our website is disseminated through our social media channels. DATs will assist the staff in transforming our publications into tailored content for our social media channels. Moreover, OBCT produces content that is native for SM platforms and that does not show on our website. This original content is created by our authors.

Example: A written article is converted into a series of brief excerpts, some of which include audio elements, for its dissemination on our social media channels.

- **Research & Information Gathering**

DAT can be used to retrieve information, summarise the content of a report, or fact check information. A human reviewer will ensure that the integrity and the accuracy of the information is fully preserved.

Example: a summary of a report collected by our research teams is published on the OBCT website.

5. Workflows with no DAT technologies implementation

- **Lead or story idea generation**
DAT-driven lead generation can surface biased or skewed topics, narrowing the diversity of stories a newsroom pursues. Journalism that truly respects its ethical principles ensures that staff is committed and connected to pursuing public interest without the opaque mediation of DATs.
 - **Content creation and multimedia**
Content and multimedia content generated by DATs can easily blur the line between real and fictional events, increasing the spread of misinformation, undermining public trust, and damaging the image of artists and content creators. We believe that journalism should be based on multimedia content produced by humans, with DATs serving as a tool for optimization rather than a substitute for human intellectual work.
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6. DATs selection criteria - risks and mitigation

DATs used in our editorial work are carefully selected to eliminate or mitigate the risks associated with:

- Security
Risks: unwanted sharing of personal or sensitive information, risks of hacking or other digital threats, promotion of cultures of abusive surveillance and extractivism.
Mitigation: Reputational assessment, technical and security analysis.
- Accuracy
Risks: introduction of factual errors, data misinterpretation, inaccuracies of crucial context, oversimplified narratives due to the opacity of DATs decision-making.
Mitigation: Work with DATs that maximize direct user control and minimize the risks associated with the black box nature of these technologies.
- Sustainability
Risks: environmental sustainability concerns due to high energy use, strain on financial resources that are diverted from core tasks, job displacement, erosion of dignity and value of journalistic work.
Mitigation: DATs are only implemented when they replace human labour in routine activities of low intellectual value.
- Supplier transparency
Risks: limited insight into how DATs are trained, exposure to legal or reputational harm, business models incompatible with human rights standards and OBCT's ethical code.
Mitigation: evaluation of the policies and reputational assessment of the supplier, preference to open source and community-driven DATs.

6. List of DATs approved by the OBCT editorial newsroom

List and description of authorized DATs software and tools.

- **Translation**
DeepL PRO
Proton Lumo AI
- **Transcription**
Amberscript
Ollama (cloud or local)
- **Text-to-speech**
No DAT currently in use
- **Social media management**
“WP to Buffer” plugin
- **Research & Information Gathering**
Proton Lumo AI

7. Contacts

Our editorial staff has a dedicated internal channel for discussion of DATs implementation in our work. We constantly discuss insights and ideas on how to improve our work. For any query, the staff responsible for the use and the monitoring of DATs can be contacted at redazione@balcanicaucaso.org. Feel free to reach out to us!