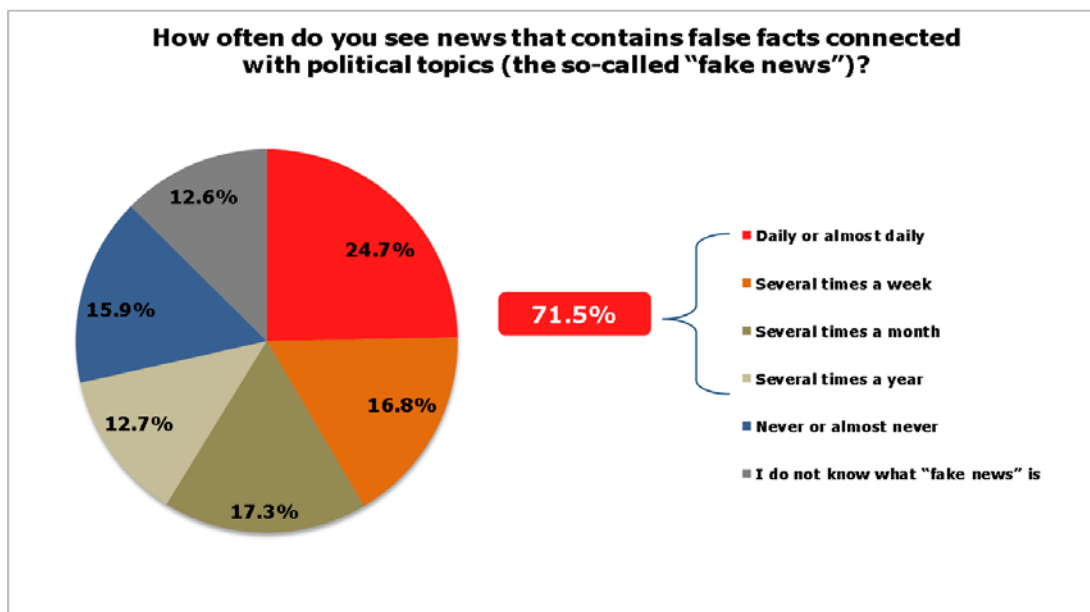# Large majority of Bulgarians deplore fake news

72 percent of Bulgarians notice fake news in the national media, according to a representative survey commissioned by the Media Program South East Europe of the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung (KAS). Only 13 percent of the citizens don't know what fake news are. In general Bulgarians get their information on politics through TV (91 percent). Online and print media follow with a big gap. National security was another topic of the survey: Bulgarians place trust in the EU in this matter, followed by NATO. In general people trust the EU more than Russia.

The survey was presented at a KAS conference on "Fake news, propaganda and geopolitics" in Sofia on 27th June 2017. The institute "Alpha Research" conducted the opinion poll. The sample of 1,024 interviewees is nationally representative.

Every fourth Bulgarian (25 percent) sees false news in the media on a daily basis, every sixth (17 percent) several times per week and equally 17 percent several times per month. "These percentages show that the public already has a high awareness for the phenomenon," commented Boriana Dimitrova, Managing Partner at "Alpha Research". "Fake news is identified most commonly by the middle generation with university education and from bigger cities. These citizens perceive information more critically. People from smaller towns and villages with lower education as well as young people identify fake news more rarely. This makes them a potential target for such attacks."

How often do you see news that contains false facts connected with political topics (the so-called "fake news")?

- 24.7% Daily or almost daily
- 16.8% Several times a week
- 17.3% Several times a month
- 12.7% Several times a year
- 15.9% Never or almost never
- 12.6% I do not know what "fake news" is

71.5%

Prevailing source of information on politics are TV channels. 91 percent of Bulgarians receive political news from TV; followed by online news portals (24 percent), social networks (23 percent) and print media (18 percent). Radio is used by 17 percent as a source of political news. Only few Bulgarians look for political information on websites of public institutions (government, EU, NATO) or NGOs – both categories of websites are visited by less than six percent of the citizens each.

"The majority of Bulgarians are active on the internet every day, however for editorial news TV has still a predominant position," emphasises Christian Spahr, Head of the KAS Media Program South East Europe. "Concerning the political discourse, social media already have the same significance as professional online media. Journalists are not the only news providers anymore. All the more they have to convince the citizens with quality content. Especially print media and radio stations have to prove themselves to be a relevant political news source." Political institutions have to make their online platforms more attractive and need to spread their content on social media more actively, according to Spahr.

"The results show clearly that the large majority of Bulgarians comprehensively follow TV news," commented Orlin Spassov, Executive Director of the Foundation Media Democracy. "However, for more and more citizens TV is not enough and they are looking for other sources of political news. Despite of this positive tendency the dominance of TV is indisputable."

Another aspect of the survey was the trust of Bulgarians in other countries and international organisations. Thereby 38 percent of the respondents have high or very high trust in the European Union; further 38 percent indicate an "average" trust in the EU. Only 24 percent show low or very low trust towards the EU. Not quite as many citizens lean towards Russia: 33 percent have high or very high trust and 44 percent "average" trust in Russia. Germany enjoys the trust of Bulgarians as well (31 percent high/very high, 43 percent "average"). The USA receives lower scores with 15 and 37 percent. NATO enjoys high or very high trust among 27 percent of the respondents, "average" trust among 38 percent.

In matters of national security, 29 percent of Bulgarians trust their own security forces. Likewise 29 percent trust the EU, 20 percent NATO and 18 percent see Russia as a warrantor of their security. Multiple answers were possible for this question.

"There is an increasingly clear connection between the global information space and security issues," says Yordan Bozhilov, President of the Sofia Security Forum. "We see how radical organisations use the internet and social networks in order to recruit new supporters. They are also used by individual countries to spread propaganda and fake news. The most endangered are democratic states. NATO and EU have taken practical measures to minimise this risk. Nevertheless, it is important for member states to define clear political positions."

"Anti-European fake news are already being comprehensively analysed by the EU commission and other institutions," says Christian Spahr. "Now it is not only necessary to publically expose propaganda mechanisms. The EU has to

find simple and clear messages for social networks and needs to emphasise the values and advantages of its political model in a better way. Thereby the EU should not only communicate facts, but also evoke more positive emotions."

The conference on 'fake news' of the KAS Media Program South East Europe was organised in cooperation with the Sofia Security Forum and the Foundation Media Democracy (FMD), equally based in Sofia. Media and communication experts from Bulgaria, Germany, Ukraine, Russia, Romania, Montenegro and NATO participated at the panel discussions on disinformation and security policy; amongst others the organisation "Reporters without Borders" was present. Journalists, diplomats, policy advisers, academics and interested citizens were following the debate.

For more information visit: http://www.kas.de/medien-europa/en