

Antidotes against fake news: education and quality journalism

EXPERTS FROM SOUTH EAST EUROPE, GERMANY, RUSSIA AND UKRAINE
DISCUSS FAKE NEWS, DISINFORMATION AND SECURITY IN SOFIA

Upon the invitation of the KAS Media Program South East Europe journalists, diplomats, political advisers, scientists and media experts gathered to discuss fake news in the media as well as security issues. The event took place on 27th June 2017 in Sofia and was organised in cooperation with Sofia Security Forum and Foundation Media Democracy (FMD).

The conference was opened by **Christian Spahr**, Head of the KAS Media Program South East Europe. In his speech he emphasised that fake news damage the trust of people in our political model and in democracy. "Fake news can be an integral part of a wider propaganda strategy, uniting narratives of political institutions, controlled mainstream media, civil society organisations, domestic and foreign audiences," commented Spahr. The President of the Sofia Security Forum, **Yordan Bozhilov**, asked for a broader public discussion about the risks of fake news towards national security. FMD Executive Director **Orlin Spassov** added that falsified news is an inherent part of the Bulgarian media landscape.

Fake news – a well-known phenomenon in Bulgaria

Boriana Dimitrova, Managing Partner of the Bulgarian research institute "Alpha Research", introduced the results of a representative survey on fake news and national security in Bulgaria. The opinion poll was commissioned by the Media Program South East Europe of Konrad-

Adenauer-Stiftung (KAS). Dimitrova noted that younger people and those with lower education are particularly vulnerable to fake news. All results are available on the [homepage of the KAS Media Program South East Europe](#).

Fact-checking and self-regulation as measures against fake news

The survey was the starting point for the following public panel discussions. A first panel focused on the influence of fake news on the media landscape. The debate was led by **Kristina Baxanova**, news anchor at the Bulgarian TV channel bTV. Speakers were **David Crawford**, journalist at the German investigative newsroom Correctiv, **Daniel Mossbrucker**, expert from the NGO "Reporters without Borders", and **Galyna Schimansky-Geier**, editor at StopFake.org in Kiev. FMD Executive Director Orlin Spassov and **Dimitar Vatsov**, President of the Human and Social Studies Foundation (Sofia), were also part of the discussion. Mossbrucker commented that fake news is used for undermining trust in journalism. Subsequently Dimitar Vatsov quoted his [own study](#) on fake news in Bulgaria, and gave concrete examples of propaganda messages. Galyna Schimansky-Geier presented the activities of her organisation and explained how StopFake identify false facts.

Orlin Spassov criticised that young journalists work for media which publish fake news. He explained that graduates of his faculty often do not have any other

Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung

**MEDIA PROGRAM
SOUTH EAST EUROPE**

MANUELA ZLATEVA

June 2017

www.kas.de/medien-europa/en



Imprint

Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung
Media Program
South East Europe

19, bul. Yanko Sakazov
1st floor, apt. 2
1504 Sofia
Bulgaria

Telephone
+359 2 942 49-71
Telefax
+359 2 942 49-79

E-Mail
media.europe@kas.de

Web
www.kas.de/medien-europa

choice because of the difficult labour market. In this context he expressed that self-regulation within the media sector plays a crucial role.

During the discussion further measures against fake news were mentioned. Daniel Mossbrucker explained that deleting wrong news seems at first a good solution. However there is the risk of undermining the freedom of opinion by wide-ranging deletions. He reported about actions taken by the German government to identify fake news and changes in legislation in Germany. Orlin Spassov emphasised that good journalism needs fact-checking and in-depth analysis. "Professional journalism is the best measure against fake news."

Psychological effects of propaganda

Influence of false information on societal stability and national security were discussed at a second panel discussion which was moderated by **Dobrina Cheshmedzhieva** from the Bulgarian National Television. Yordan Bozhilov said that propaganda and disinformation are not new phenomena. "What changed because of the internet and social networks is the nature of these kinds of activities." **Iulian Chifu**, President of the Romanian Center for Conflict Prevention and Early Warning in Bucharest, pointed out that psychological effects of propaganda are more important than false information as such. **Saulius Guzevičius**, Military Liaison Officer in the NATO StratCom team in Brussels, expressed that disinformation is the new battlefield. What kind of messages are sent and to which target group has to be analysed thoroughly. According to him, NATO and EU should not only react to propaganda, but also actively communicate their own narratives. **Tatiana Parkhalina** from the Russian Academy of Sciences stressed that the risks of fake news can be minimised by political education. **Momčilo Radulović**, President of the NGO "European Movement Montenegro" gave examples of disinformation in his country and explained that the problem is recognised in Montenegro, but insufficiently debated in public.

Christian Spahr, Head of the KAS Media Program South East Europe, underlined at the end of the conference that more political education is necessary to neutralise fake news. This includes proportionate legal measures against fake news, but especially stronger self-regulation. "Media and journalists have to deal more with fake news to save the credibility of their industry," according to the expert. A coordinated approach by media representatives, politicians and civil society is crucial in order to reach a consensus.

"Anti-European fake news are analysed thoroughly by the EU Commission and others," said Spahr. "Now it is not only necessary to expose propaganda mechanisms. The EU has to find simple and clear messages for social networks to highlight its values and the advantages of its political model. Thereby the EU should not only communicate facts, but also evoke more positive emotions."

Collaboration: Darija Fabijanić