

Media education and fact checking: remedies against fake news

THE ARTICLE 10 ECHR TASK FORCE DISCUSSES FAKE NEWS, MEDIA LITERACY AND APPROACHES TO MEDIA LEGISLATION AND SELF-REGULATION

Named after Article 10 of the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR), the international working group deals with media freedom and law in South East Europe. At invitation by the KAS Media Program, experts from ten countries met to discuss the spread of fake news and how to address it. The workshop took place in Skopje from 13th until 15th September 2017.

Christian Spahr, Head of the KAS Media Program South East Europe, opened the seminar. He mentioned cyberattacks in France and Germany as well as disinformation campaigns in Bulgaria and other countries as examples for the influence of digital threats for the public discourse. **Prof. Johannes Weberling**, founder of the working group and professor for media law at Viadrina European University, underlined that the EU could play an important role to combat fake news in South East Europe.

The first part of the workshop was focused on the impact of fake news on media and possible countermeasures. It was led by **Christian Mihr**, Director of the German section of "Reporters Without Borders". He explained that in general the term described the distribution of manipulated and false contents. Yet, there is not enough knowledge about the actual influence of fake news. According to a study by the German digital association Bitkom from February 2017, 68 percent of responders perceived fake news in conventional or social media in the preceding year. A KAS

poll shows a similar result for Bulgaria, 72 percent have been recognizing fake news. Therefore, Prof. Weberling added, that it was important to provide more information on fake news and its impact on the citizens.

The flaws of a new German law to enforce the rule of law in social networks showed that measures against fake news needed to be internationalised, said Mihr. Furthermore, the decision on the legality of contents should not be made by private companies. In conclusion Mihr warned that such laws might also be misused to suppress media freedom.

Fake news entrepreneurs in Macedonia, information warfare in Ukraine

After these introductions different case studies were presented to show the broad impact of fake news. **Dragan Sekulovski**, Director of the Association of Journalists of Macedonia (AJM), reported on Veles, a former industrial town where a group of youngsters earned their living in the production of fake news. They filled over 150 online portals with content, mainly supporting the Trump campaign in the USA.

Galyna Schimansky-Geier, Editor of the German desk of StopFake.org in Ukraine, presented another perspective on the topic. In Ukraine, Russian stations would not use fake news to spread specific contents, but primarily to undermine the credibility of established media platforms. Thereby the impression is created that everybody lies.

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The second day of the workshop started with further examples from Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Hungary, Macedonia, Rumania and Serbia. The impact of fake news is noticeable in the public discourse of each single country. Commonly, it lacks effective mechanisms for self-regulation and fact-checking as well as educational programs for journalists and media users.

Two expert groups discuss strategies against fake news

Afterwards the participants got together in two groups to discuss strategies for legal frameworks and self-regulatory measures. Journalists should be further educated and media self-regulation should be strengthened. Independent fact-checking platforms needed to be established in addition. Furthermore public institutions should distribute fact-checked information offensively so that the public awareness for correct and false news is encouraged. In doing so, officials and independent media need to cooperate.

A public panel discussion on the topic took place on 14th September. Prof. Weberling, Christian Mihr, Galyna Schimansky-Geier, Dragan Sekulovski and **Dr. Marina Tuneva**, Executive Director of the Council of Media Ethics of Macedonia, discussed the contents of the workshop. After the opening remarks by moderator Christian Spahr, Prof. Weberling and **Davor Pasoski**, Project Manager at KAS country office in Macedonia, Christian Mihr described the essence of fake news and propaganda. Galyna Schimansky-Geier said that combatting fake news and propaganda in Ukraine is like the fight between David and Goliath, concerning the operational and financial resources of Russia.

Accordingly, the participants in the discussion were asked what kinds of approaches are reasonable to combat fake news. With the working groups' outcomes in mind, the panel emphasised the importance of media literacy, a functional self-regulation and more intensive fact-checks that are publicly accessible.