Media Literacy Policy

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AGENCY FOR AUDIO AND AUDIOVISUAL MEDIA SERVICES

Reinforcing Judicial Expertise on Freedom of Expression and the Media in South-East Europe (JUFREX)

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MEDIA LITERACY POLICY

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For the period 2016-2018, the Agency for Audio and Audiovisual Media Services played an important role in promoting media literacy in the Republic of North Macedonia. Engaging both stakeholders and citizens alike, its activities have followed a specific Programme[1].

Introduction

The scope of this document is to illustrate the way forward. It acknowledges the results of the activities already carried out[2] and it is based on well-established concepts validated by the scientific international community and incorporated in European Union policies and Council of Europe standards and actions[3].

It is not necessary to recall here the strategic importance of media literacy skills both at individual and country level. A vast bibliography of studies and international policy papers is easily accessible online. In fact, recent technological and economic advances together with large scale international social and political events are assigning to media literacy an even more crucial role when it comes to the democracy of our societies.

Furthermore, whether people are considered in their capacity as citizens, voters, consumers, parents or children, the need to invest in people's media competences is rapidly increasing. As an example, we cite the disinformation phenomenon through social media which has decisively affected important international elections' results, the subtle new propaganda techniques that are increasingly difficult to spot, the habits of the population, including children, to spend many hours in front of a screen potentially resulting in addiction and the fact that to feed new business models, people and their personal data are constantly being tracked, thus affecting their privacy and safety.

It is to be noted that none of these issues will be dealt with in detail in this document as the aim is to present a concept broad enough to apply to all these subjects, including affirmative ones such as the opportunity to create and share content, connect with others and participate meaningfully to society.

The above-mentioned concepts and subjects are increasing in both number and relevance and are in a constant state of flux. In order to direct the Agency on future initiatives, adapting internationally recognised concepts to the country's own characteristics, we are focusing on the most recent approach developed by the media literacy community which is based on an innovative vision and solid research.

1 "Programme for Promoting Media Literacy in the Republic of Macedonia (2016-2018)", available in English at: http://mediumskapismenost.mk/media/2017/12/Programme_for_Promoting_Media_Literacy.pdf

2 "The Report about the Implementation of the Programme for Promoting Media Literacy in Republic of Macedonia (2016-2018)", available at: https://bit.ly/2H557wI.

3 Such as CoE Recommendation on media pluralism, transparency of media ownership and media literacy.

Media literacy is increasingly recognised as a set of competences that contribute to fighting phenomenon such as disinformation and propaganda, cyberbullying and surveillance and enable a better use of technology. This paper recognises and considers European policies and Council of Europe standards and initiatives and other international organisations' activities on the subject.

Background

Introduced in 2013, the Law on Audio and Audiovisual Media Services[4] is the defining policy in the Republic of North Macedonia that describes the responsibilities surrounding media literacy. As such the basis and motivation for producing this paper remain the same. It is the position of the Agency to promote and encourage a media literate society through a range of activities.

As part of its responsibilities, following a previous Programme as indicated, and in light of what has already been done[5], the Agency aims to make clear the position of media literacy and to lead the way for its tailored implementation.

Therefore, to reach the envisaged objectives and encourage the respective skills and attitudes, this paper will outline competencies that will guide the Agency's initiatives in promoting the skills and attitudes that will contribute to, and shape, the promotion of media literacy and present a broad outlook on that which defines media literacy.

4 Law on Audio and Audiovisual Media Services, 2013, "Official Gazette of the Republic of Macedonia" No.184/13, 13/14, 44/14, 101/14, 132/14, 142/16, 132/17, 168/18, 248/18 и 27/19, available at: http://avmu.mk/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/Law_on_Audio_and_Audiovisual_Media_Services_as_published_in_Official_Journal.pdf

5 See for example www.mediumskapismenost.mk; "The Report about the Implementation of the Programme for Promoting Media Literacy in Republic of Macedonia (2016-2018)", available at: https://bit.ly/2UnKkro; "Media Literacy in Macedonia: the Missing Link for Active Citizenry", available at http://www.medium.edu.mk/attach/Summary-of-MIL-research-in-Macedonia-ENG.pdf; "Media Literacy in Macedonia – Efforts for Implementation in the Elementary Education", available at: http://medium.edu.mk/attach/Mediumskata-pismenost-vo-Makedonija-obid-za-impelementacija-vo-osnovnoto-obrazovanie-ENG.pdf.

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The overall objective is to promote media literacy in Macedonian society having citizens in mind as the ultimate beneficiaries.

More specifically:

To empower people of different class age and segments (old people, adults, children, young women etc.) and acting in different capacities and contexts (consumers, voters, citizens and so on) to benefit from the media environment they live in.

Activities envisaged therefore embrace a vast range of possibilities, and could be either:

- directly targeting, such as information campaigns to raise awareness and other specific initiatives, or
- supporting activities to facilitate the above-mentioned processes in an indirect way, such as promoting research or rendering resources available to teachers.

In particular, the Agency should facilitate the following:

- To contribute to citizens' understanding of media literacy and increase its visibility and recognition *(raising awareness)*;
- To cooperate with international organisations, national ministries and other stakeholders by means of networking, consultations and reports *(cooperation and consultations)*;
- To improve the conditions for civic and democratic participation, including incorporating media literacy and its inspiring principles in national related policy and strategies, including media freedom and pluralism *(policy and trends)*.

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Media literacy applies transversally to the economic, social, cultural and educational fields. Therefore, within a well-thought-out approach, many different initiatives may be deployed carrying out actions in one or more of these fields. In concrete terms, initiatives may span the extensive range of possibilities to:

Key areas of application

- Encourage the production or distribution of educational resources and information material,
- Develop research, surveys and analysis,
- Organise training for different groups including media professionals,
- Identify and disseminate good practices,
- Develop networking between key stakeholders,
- Organise and participate to national and international events,
- Adapt school curricula,
- Promote quality journalism,
- Facilitate ML inclusion in both regulation and codes of conduct.

Each activity can have a national or local dimension.

Stakeholders

Relevant stakeholders and main actors are intended here to be any public or private organisation active in national or international policy or funding, in formal or informal education and in the media or civil society sectors.

Policy

As a reminder, media literacy is present in the Law on Audio and Audiovisual Media Services[6]. Within its role as a regulatory body, the Agency has a duty to organise and implement the activities on media literacy.

6 Law on Audio and Audiovisual Media Services, 2013, "Official Gazette of the Republic of Macedonia" No.184/13, 13/14, 44/14, 101/14, 132/14, 142/16, 132/17, 168/18, 248/18 и 27/19, available at: http://avmu.mk/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/Law_on_Audio_and_Audiovisual_Media_Services_as_published_in_Official_Journal.pdf.

Since the first study[7], carried out on behalf of the European Commission, media literacy was defined as a set of Individual Competences (Technical, Cognitive and Participative) and Environmental Factors (such as policy laws and media education) as contextual factors that impact the development of media literacy skills. Similar frameworks have followed, essentially recalling the same principles.

Media Literacy Competences

In 2015[8] the Agency followed these valid concepts. However, as the world changes, recent media trends and developments are clearly visible with the advances of new technologies affecting rapidly the way people interact and communicate with the media.

As an example, the social and political environments are affected by disinformation, the recognition of the 'attention economy' is illustrating how commercial companies are making huge profits out of 'free' services, social media bubbles enable political messages to be directed and targeted to like-minded people, and thus participation to debates and society becomes polarized.

In short, citizens are inhabiting a completely new media eco-system and they need to learn how to live in it in order to fully benefit from their media use. This is media literacy.

The same organisation that contributed to the current understanding of media literacy in Europe is now proposing an enhanced more comprehensive perspective. It aims to facilitate the understanding of what media literacy should necessarily focus on first. This document reflects on these concepts to face real everyday issues more inclusively.

It follows a vision of media literacy which is not just a set of skills to acquire, but also a number of deeper personal attitudes and approaches to be developed. It is structured in four different components:

1. Critical Consciousness;
2. Awareness of Emotions;
3. Digital Wellness;
4. Full Citizenship.

7 "Study on Assessment Criteria for Media Literacy Levels: A comprehensive view of the concept of media literacy and an understanding of how media literacy levels in Europe should be assessed", available at: https://eavi.eu/wp-content/uploads/2010/06/eavi_study_on_assessment_criteria_for_media_literacy_levels_in_europe.pdf

8 "Programme for Promoting Media Literacy in the Republic of Macedonia (2016-2018)", available in English at: http://mediumskapismenost.mk/media/2017/12/Programme_for_Promoting_Media_Literacy.pdf

The media literacy, as we know it, has critical thinking as its central property. It remains the pivotal concept, a cognitive, logical process to make sense of the information consumed. It is finally accepted that critical thinking, and not just technical skills, is the core of media literacy.

Still, many people are not acquiring the skills to be able to evaluate news, understand propaganda, spot advertising or react properly to hate speech content.

To fully understand a media message in fact, it is not sufficient to just be able to read an information critically, nor it is to build a flat rational capacity to analyse a media message.

1 Critical Consciousness

What is needed instead, to deeply understand media content and the context from which it originated, is to *apply quality thinking as a personal attitude and solid values as reading keys*.

Critical thinking skills therefore must rest on the capacity of developing good thoughts and fine values such as integrity, ethics, empathy and fairness.

In order to facilitate the above, users' media experiences should be surrounded by content and people valuable to develop useful reflections. For instance, people can be encouraged to eliminate content and contacts in their social media which are serving no purpose for them.

Writing a post or an article also force us to focus thoughts, much more than reading someone else's content. Researching online is also a good method to enrich experience, on the condition that people learn how and what to search, and are able to resist distractions online.

In essence, the critical consciousness property is composed of critical thinking skills and, as a preliminary condition, by personal attitudes and values. In turn a healthier media experience will feed and enrich personal media literacy competences and enable people to gain real knowledge.

The risk is otherwise to acquire, if anything, superficial knowledge and empty information. To have access to everything without having learned anything at all.

Media literacy is not simply about rational, logical thinking. Emotional intelligence, creativity, intuition and mindfulness about our own online behavior are qualities to be cultivated in order to use the media as a real personal resource.

2 Awareness of Emotions

The necessary first step to solve any problem is to be aware of it. Using the media, we must be aware that we are subject to propaganda or of the fact that we are consuming many hours online. Likewise, we should be aware that it is only an illusion to think that it is us who are truly choosing the next movie that we will watch on television this evening.

Developing awareness is an essential component in being media literate.

Being aware that online we are continually distracted for a purpose, for someone else's commercial or political interest, is of utmost importance. Social media corporates base their strategies on behavioral sciences to exploit people's weaknesses. Screen addiction and its health-related issues is another example about the need to change certain behavioral attitudes when interacting with the media.

In order to live better with the media, it is essential to become aware of what we are doing and how we are conducting ourselves online. Being capable to observe our own behavior is the first step in countering negative results. In this sense, learning to pay attention is the process towards awareness.

In other words, to become media literate, it is also necessary to develop the capacity of recognising feelings such as anger or pleasure, to understand why these emotions influence our choices, and thus to learn to develop better reflexes.

In order to use the media as a real personal resource, people should be capable of using well the respective products, services and technologies. In the digital online environment, acquiring adequate technical skills is, needlessly to say, essential.

3 Digital Wellness

Therefore, once people have evaluated the benefit and consequences of their media use, they need to *be able to use those technologies safely and confidently* either for their entertainment, for information or educational purposes.

To do so people need technical, digital skills. This could be anything from being able to switch on and off the respective devices, adjusting the settings of social media or refusing consent to third parties to use our personal information and data.

With the advent of the Internet of Things and Artificial Intelligence[9], which promise to bring many new gadgets to our lives, in our cars, our houses and on our clothes, people should possess the technical skills to be fully in control of these technologies and therefore to be able to decide what to do with them, how and when they want to use them.

As it is recognised that people may be unwilling or unable to acquire complex technical skills, markets and the respective policy dossiers which deal with the above, should make sure that products and services providers enable media users to be truly in control of their media.

Therefore people, also intended as consumers here, should be able to use the technology to enhance their well-being and to their own advantage.

Technology in this context should serve people's needs, not the other way around.

9 It is to be noted that the CoE is doing wide work on AI including with relation to human rights www.coe.int/en/web/artificial-intelligence.

Once people have matured their respective individual skills as described before, they should be encouraged to learn well how to contribute to a better communication welfare.

4 Full Citizenship

Firstly, users should individually learn how to properly connect and share content with others. For instance, when encountering hate speech or cyberbullying, users should have the skills and knowledge to recognise it as negative and harmful and decide the appropriate action to follow, if any.

Secondly, citizens should be able to participate to the societies that they are part of. Nowadays this participation is essentially through the media, it spans beyond national borders and it is therefore global. Citizens may decide for instance to participate in movements concerning climate change, global peace or human rights, as well as in the life of their national country. This is a participation, through the media, that positively adds to the development of global society.

It is acknowledged that to facilitate a meaningful participation, promoting media pluralism, media freedom and quality journalism play an important role here. Therefore, educational bodies, political istitutions, the media and civil society organizations, have each a role and responsibility to facilitate that process.

The above-mentioned concepts recall those of digital citizenship and digital democracy and are linked to recent widely debated issues such as internet interferences on election campaigns, information warfare and populism spreading through social media.

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TRIGGER
OUTPUT
LABORATORY COMPACT UNIT type PEL-1
function generator
multimeter

The Agency will plan, initiate, support and report, lead, execute, coordinate or enable specific activities with the aim to help Macedonian citizens reach the media literacy competences laid out in the previous pages.

The role of the Agency

Having in mind that this is a lifelong venture, it will direct its activities towards different groups of society, adapting to current realities[10] and opportunities, based on previous experience.

It will work alone or in cooperation with different stakeholders, both those that are members of the Media Literacy Network and those who are not. It will be active in international and national projects and events.

It will always be open to new media literacy developments and trends, both within and outside the country.

The Agency will work toward encouraging any direct or indirect action that will contribute to citizens' media literacy skills, their media well-being and participation to society through the media.

10 "Media literacy research among the adult population in Macedonia" (2016), available in English at: http://mediumskapismenost.mk/media/2018/11/Media-literacy-research-final-2018.pdf.

The Macedonian media regulatory body - the Agency for audio and audiovisual media services, draws its competence and obligation to encourage media literacy in the Republic of North Macedonia from the Law. This called for the creation of this comprehensive document, a Policy on media literacy. It was intended that the document gave a general overview of the ways forward in the work on media literacy while also stating the specificities for the media regulatory body's work in this field.

The policy document defines, in particular, the following:

- The main objectives that should be obtained in the field of media literacy in North Macedonia, by the Agency and other stakeholders;
- The key domains of primary interest, where efforts would mostly help to achieve those objectives;
- The media and information literacy competences to be developed in different groups of the society.

This document takes into account the wider framework of European media and information literacy policies while specifically drawing upon the activities/experiences of the Agency and other stakeholders in North Macedonia.

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