



The *MELIA Observatory* Project

Media Literacy Observatory for Active Citizenship and Sustainable Democracy

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Handbook on media literacy and active citizenship in the Danube Region

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Introduction and Structure

This handbook offers insight into the state of media education in MELIA countries - Bulgaria, Croatia, Czech Republic, Hungary, Germany, Montenegro, Romania, Serbia and Slovenia. The main objective of the project is to improve democratic transnational governance by developing transnational media literacy observatory, based on cooperation between different relevant stakeholders. In many countries of the Danube region the development of competences of media literacy and active citizenship are far behind more developed parts of Europe. This observatory will serve as a mechanism for increasing media literacy and thus strengthening citizens' competences what will contribute to development of sustainable democracy.

The main target groups are the youth and the people who work with them. The observatory provides tools centered on developing media literacy for both young people as well as their educators. The project establishes an observatory for media literacy that provides instruments for scrutinizing media contents, training tools and policy recommendations for upgrading media literacy in relation with other civic skills. The Handbook on media literacy is one major output of the MELIA project and it offers a detailed account on the state of media education and media literacy in several countries, from a plethora of perspectives, including legislative and institutional settings, to success stories and styles of media messaging.

The structure of the handbook aims to familiarize the interested reader with the landscape of media education and media literacy in MELIA countries. Throughout the handbook, media education and media literacy are considered as intimately tied to active citizenship and democratic values. Consequently, information is provided regarding existing operationalization and definitions of these two concepts in every country and a review of existing legal and institutional regimes governing media education and literacy is conducted. Moreover, an analysis of media education school curricula follows examples of best practices in the field of media education and media literacy. Finally, the handbook also includes an

analysis of media messaging, identifying most common yet complicated issues regarding the spread of fake news and hate speech.

The Handbook of media literacy is most useful for practitioners in the field of media literacy and media education that want to find out more about the regional perspective in the Danube region. Educators and civil society activists will find this publication important for their own knowledge database and for finding out relevant information regarding networks of stakeholders, thus enabling them to identify potential new partners. Policy makers will also find the information included in the handbook useful, especially in the sense of being able to pinpoint to different success stories in the Danube region, and in the sense of being able to compare legislation and institutional settings specific to each country.

1. Definitions and operationalization of media education and media literacy in MELIA countries.

1.1. Media literacy and active citizenship – theoretical considerations

In 2016, the European Audiovisual Observatory (EAO), which is part of the Council of Europe in Strasbourg, published the report “Mapping of media literacy practices and actions in EU-28”. The production of the report was initiated by the European Commission which deemed the “systematic mapping of [extracurricular] media literacy practices and actions across the EU” necessary in order to collect and analyze good practices and foster the transfer of knowledge between the member states.¹

In the report, media literacy is understood as a wide concept that “includes all technical, cognitive, social, civic and creative capacities that allow a citizen to access, have a critical understanding of the media and interact with it”.²

The link between media education and active citizenship is the subject of an abundance of normative policy recommendations and conceptual research, yet few scholars have examined it from an empirical perspective. Those who have (such as Mihailidis³), have sometimes reached disheartening conclusions which indicate media education in itself, as practiced today, may not always achieve the desired outcome of contributing to active citizenship. Research developed by Herzig and Martin (2017) in Germany asserts close inter-connection between media literacy and civic education.⁴ They stress the structural

¹ <https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/0a387a0a-3e5f-11ea-ba6e-01aa75ed71a1>

² This definition was established by the EU Media Literacy Expert Group (MLEG), which meets regularly to “identify, document and extend good practices in the field of media literacy, facilitate networking between different stakeholders, with the aim of cross-fertilisation, explore synergies between different EU policies and support programmes and media literacy initiatives.” (<https://digital-strategy.ec.europa.eu/en/policies/media-literacy>)

³ Mihailidis, P. (2009). Beyond cynicism: Media education and civic learning outcomes in the university. *International Journal of Media and Learning*, 1(3), 1–13.

⁴ Herzig, B. and A. Martin. (2017): Erfassung und Messbarkeit von Medienkompetenz als wichtige Voraussetzung für politische Bildung. In: Harald Gapski et al. (eds.): *Medienkompetenz. Herausforderung für Politik, politische*

similarities between the two concepts (e.g., the fact that neither media literacy nor civic education is a separate school subject in Germany). Because politics is mainly transmitted via media, which is a growing trend in an increasingly digital society, civic education is strongly connected with media education. Both, media education and civic education are furthermore ultimately targeted towards promoting social participation, which cannot be implemented in a digital world without basic media literacy skills. Herzig and Martin therefore reach the conclusion that civic education ultimately constitutes media education and vice versa.

Overall, the scholarly treatment of the link between media education and active citizenship needs an infusion of empirical or policy impact research in order to arrive at models of implementing media literacy into education systems in a way conducive to civic education and active, prosocial, civic behavior.

A widely accepted definition of media education is that of a pedagogical activity meant to develop critical thinking about media messaging.⁵ The goals of introducing media literacy in school curricula were understood by early theorists and adopters of media education to be those of equipping students and citizens to be able to understand the social, political, and economic effects of media use and media messages.^{6,7,8} Since the conception of media literacy as an educational need, however, the rampant technological development of media of communication afforded by widespread adoption of the internet have significantly complicated both conceptualization and implementation of media education in schools.

Bildung und Medienbildung, Bonn, p. 126-135. (Available at: <https://www.bpb.de/lernen/digitale-bildung/medienpaedagogik/medienkompetenz-schriftenreihe/258092/impressum>). Accessed: 23 September 2021.

⁵ Fornasari, A. (2020). Education in the web 4.0 age. How media education can contribute to active citizenship. *MeTis - Mondi Educativi. Temi Indagini Suggestioni*, 10(1), 179–196.

⁶ Aufderheide, P. (1997). Media Literacy: From a Report of the National Leadership Conference on Media Literacy. In *MEDIA LITERACY in the INFORMATION AGE*. Routledge.

⁷ Koltay, T. (2011). The media and the literacies: Media literacy, information literacy, digital literacy. *Media, Culture & Society*, 33(2), 211–221. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0163443710393382>

⁸ Stoddard, J. (2014). The Need for Media Education in Democratic Education. *Democracy and Education*, 22(1). <https://democracyeducationjournal.org/home/vol22/iss1/4>

The concept of media literacy emerged as a way to operationalize aspects of literacy brought on by rapid technological developments of the media of communication, which could not be handled by the simple concept of textual literacy alone. The field of education policy research operates with a plethora of sibling concepts: information literacy, digital literacy/literacies, new literacies, media literacy, critical literacy/literacies, new media literacy, technology literacy, visual literacy, ICT literacy, multimodal literacy/literacies, multiple literacies, online literacy, web-based literacy etc.⁹ Within this fine-grained terminological proliferation, internet enabled new media may be understood as falling under the purview of media literacy or they may be included in digital or ICT literacy as separate from media education. Some ^{10,11,12} have tried to create syntheses from these related concepts, joining them around a common purpose, that of serving towards building an education for practices of active citizenship or civic education.

Based on the concept of media and information literacy as described by UNESCO, Vaičiūnienė and Mažeikienė¹³ argue that the academic fields dealing with media literacy should simplify their working terminology and use the construct of “information and media literacy” to denote knowledge, skills and attitudes required to interact with media as an active citizen.¹⁴ While the two types of literacy have different academic roots, they have similar patterns of developments under technological acceleration. They are both essential to civic education, and they have the same objectives, namely to teach critical thinking in interacting with information regardless of its mediatic channel, ethical use of information, building citizenship, fostering democratic behavior and lifelong learning in knowledge economies.¹⁵

For school curricula, there are benefits to working with the concept of media education as an umbrella term, which includes all the types of literacies mentioned above, including

⁹ Vaičiūnienė, V., & Mažeikienė, V. (2016). Media Literacy and information literacy: Conceptual convergence into a composite notion of MIL. *Socialinių Mokslų Studijos*, 8(1), 78–94.

¹⁰ Choi, M. (2016). A Concept Analysis of Digital Citizenship for Democratic Citizenship Education in the Internet Age. *Theory & Research in Social Education*, 44(4), 565–607. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00933104.2016.1210549>

¹¹ Koltay, The media and the literacies <https://doi.org/10.1177/0163443710393382>

¹² Vaičiūnienė and Mažeikienė, Media literacy and information

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid.

information literacy, rather than delegating some to technology-only domains. One of the strongest arguments in favor of such an integrative curriculum comes from the recognition of new forms of democratic participation enabled by the internet, such as political engagement through social networks. Students need to learn not just how to interact with new internet-enabled technologies, but how to use them responsibly. In the conception of media education as a vehicle for civic education, including digital/ ICT/ new media literacies under programs teaching media literacy is vital.¹⁶

Some authors point out that younger generations grow up socialized into internet-enabled new technologies and become what Prensky¹⁷ influentially defined as “digital natives”. This can have important consequences for how new technologies are used to teach media literacy, but it does not exclude the need to teach responsible interaction with new technologies at the same time. Access to digital technologies is still an issue for children and young people coming from lower socio-economic backgrounds on the one hand.¹⁸ On the other hand, simply having the social and cognitive abilities to interact socially online and to consume and produce digital content, does not safeguard against falling prey to misinformation or antisocial politically radicalizing content, especially in a context in which internet regulation is a complex and disputed issue.¹⁹ In consequence, some researchers stress that the inclusion of digital/ ICT/ new media literacies under media education is necessary to safeguard young students against sources of danger on the internet.²⁰

Another avenue through which scholars justify joining digital and media literacies under media education is due to practices of digital democracy, be they officially sanctioned by state institutions (for instance, online voting) or informal (online communities forming new practices of democratic participation, alternative to traditional political participation, citizen journalism).

¹⁶ Fornasari, Education in the web

¹⁷ Prensky, M. (2001). Digital Natives, Digital Immigrants Part 2: Do They Really Think Differently? *On the Horizon*, 9(6), 1–6. <https://doi.org/10.1108/10748120110424843>

¹⁸ Hargittai, E. (2010). Digital Na(t)ives? Variation in Internet Skills and Uses among Members of the “Net Generation”*. *Sociological Inquiry*, 80(1), 92–113. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1475-682X.2009.00317.x>

¹⁹ Fornasari, Education in the web

²⁰ Ibid.

Consequently, Monika Oberle discusses the changing needs and requirements of media education as a traditional goal of civic education in a digital age.²¹ She drafts five general competences of media literacy as a traditional goal of civic education:

- comprehension of media as the fourth branch of government in a modern democracy;
- ability to critically analyze the relationship between media and politics in the media democracy;
- ability to use media for the acquisition of information and the formation of a political opinion;
- ability to use media for individual active political participation;
- ability to politically influence the regulation of media as well as the interaction between politics and media, which requires all other competences but also goes further beyond these competences and requires wide-ranging political knowledge as well as the competences to politically judge and act (187-188).

Oberle furthermore points out that the five competences of media literacy mentioned above are still valid in the digital age but have to be further differentiated. Because of the rise of the internet, the traditional media lost its gatekeeper function, which is why citizens need a much more distinct ability to navigate through unfiltered information. This increased demand for navigation skills requires knowledge about the conditions of the production and provision of information, which includes for example knowledge about algorithms, echo chambers and filter bubbles as well as fake news and social bots. In addition, citizens need a more profound basic knowledge of politics in order to be able to classify new information. Oberle moreover emphasizes that the digital age not only changed the requirements of political information acquisition but also the possibilities of individual political participation. In order to enable net-based participation, citizens need special instrumental skills, for

²¹ Oberle, M. (2017). Medienkompetenz als Herausforderung für die politische Bildung. In: Harald Gapski et al. (eds.): Medienkompetenz. Herausforderung für Politik, politische Bildung und Medienbildung, Bonn, p. 187-196. (Available at: <https://www.bpb.de/lernen/digitale-bildung/medienpaedagogik/medienkompetenz-schriftenreihe/258092/impressum>). Accessed: 27 September 2021.

example to generate a high outreach with social media posts or to create and maintain groups on social media. The author stresses the importance of a further interconnection of curricular and extra-curricular media education as well as the absolute necessity to embed media education as an integral part in teacher training. Oberle concludes that civic education and media education have several inter-sections and interconnect in many ways, which is why the author calls for a greater professional exchange between political didactics and media education.

Citizen journalism is a pervasive phenomenon that includes a multitude of forms of internet-enabled media produced by people without training in journalism.²² These may include reports from the scene of an event in the form of social media posts, videos and photographs taken with mobile devices, tweets, as well as podcasting, blogging, Twitter campaigns, YouTube shows, live video streaming, and others.²³ Scholars of media education have come to view these citizen contributions to the media sphere as ways of increasing political activism and supporting social cohesion.²⁴ This runs counter to a more established yet outdated view of citizens as exclusive receivers of media rather than producers or collaborators of media content.²⁵ Moreover, some scholars believe that even more informal ways of engaging with digital media may contribute to political engagement, such as by participating in online fandom communities. Based on work on fandom communities by Jenkin²⁶, Thevenin and Mihailidis²⁷ argue that regardless of the piece of popular culture that forms the catalyst for such a community, its members engage in public discourse and may organize activist efforts.²⁸ This conclusion is strengthened by studies cited by Kahne et al.²⁹

²² Veldhuis, R. (2005). Opportunities for education and learning for active citizenship. *Z Vseživljenjskim Učenjem Do Aktivnega Državljanstva [With Lifelong Learning to Active Citizenship]*. Ljubljana: Andragoški Center Slovenije, 24.

²³ Wall, M. (2015). Citizen Journalism. *Digital Journalism*, 3(6), 797–813. <https://doi.org/10.1080/21670811.2014.1002513>

²⁴ Veldhuis, Opportunities for education

²⁵ Livingstone, S. (2004). Media Literacy and the Challenge of New Information and Communication Technologies. *The Communication Review*, 7(1), 3–14. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10714420490280152>

²⁶ Jenkins, H. (2006). *Fans, bloggers, and gamers: Exploring participatory culture*. nyu Press.

²⁷ Thevenin, B., & Mihailidis, P. (2013). The Re-Politicization of Media Literacy Education. *Journal of Media Literacy Education*, 4(1). <https://digitalcommons.uri.edu/jmle/vol4/iss1/6>

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Kahne, J., Lee, N.-J., & Feezell, J. T. (2012). Digital media literacy education and online civic and political participation. *International Journal of Communication*, 6, 24.

showing that online political engagement can increase offline political engagement such as raising money for charity, volunteering, working on a campaign, attending a political speech, or voting.

When it comes to using media education in schools as a way to contribute to an education of active citizenship, there is a second integration of concepts and educational practices needed, beyond integrating media literacy with digital/ ICT/ new media literacies. That is, the integration of media education with civic education.

Active citizenship is widely understood to mean participation in civil society.³⁰ One distinction relevant to the pedagogy of citizenship is the understanding that citizenship can be taught as a passive practice, through an education about the knowledge and behaviors of citizenship, or it can be thought as an active practice, by teaching the ability to criticize, evaluate, debate and propose alternatives to current practices of democracy.³¹

Traditionally, civic education in schools been focused on teaching the passive model of citizenship: covering how the governments work, how a bill becomes law, how to vote, etc. Some scholars see in media education, the potential to teach active citizenship.^{32,33} Stoddard (2014) shows that programs of civic education in the Global North in general and specifically United States and the United Kingdom, do not include teaching critical and evaluative skills, which are usually dominant in media education. On the other side, media education programs do not include teaching the functional roles of media within democracies, and are instead only focused on teaching how to evaluate media.^{34,35} Stoddard³⁶ proposed three ways in which media education could be part of democratic education. First, by teaching how

³⁰ Mascherini, M., Manca, A. R., & Hoskins, B. (2009). The characterization of active citizenship in Europe. European Commission EUR JRC47543 EN.

³¹ Selwyn, N. (2002). Literature review in citizenship, technology and learning.

³² Stoddard, The need for media education

³³ Veldhuis, Opportunities for education and learning

³⁴ Mihailidis, P. (2009). Beyond cynicism: Media education and civic learning outcomes in the university. *International Journal of Media and Learning*, 1(3), 1–13.

³⁵ Thevenin, B., & Mihailidis, P. (2013). The Re-Politicization of Media Literacy Education. *Journal of Media Literacy Education*, 4(1). <https://digitalcommons.uri.edu/jmle/vol4/iss1/6>

³⁶ Stoddard, J. (2014). The Need for Media Education in Democratic Education. *Democracy and Education*, 22(1). <https://democracyeducationjournal.org/home/vol22/iss1/4>

media interact with public opinion through persuasion, evoking emotion and reinforcing social constructs. Second, by using digital media such as videogames to simulate democratic practices, which would make students, participate in say, the process of passing a bill, rather than passively learning about it. And third, by teaching evaluative and critical skills in accessing, understanding and using information through media.

1.2. Media education and democratic values

An additional debate within the scholarship of media education is relevant for the objective of active citizenship and deepens the understanding of the impact of media education programs on democratic participation.

Some scholars contend that the exclusive focus of media education programs on critical thinking about media messaging has been detrimental to trust in democratic processes. The theoretical justification for this assertion comes from the idea that simply being able to understand media effects does not lead to an objective understanding of the role of the media in a democracy. On the contrary, such an education may lead to an attitude of mistrust of all media.³⁷ This contention is sustained by one of the few empirical explorations of the effects of media education programs applied on a sample of over 200 university students in the US.³⁸ The study employed a field experiment to measure the impact of participating in a media education course in postsecondary education on media literacy and attitudes about the media. The results show that students who participated in the media education course were better at understanding, evaluating, and analyzing media messages than those in the control group, but they also had more negative attitudes towards the media in general. They expressed mistrust in media companies and journalists, and cynicism about the roles of media in a democracy.

These results, along with their theoretical explanation, indicate that instead of this exclusive focus on media effects and critical evaluation of media messaging, media education should

³⁷ Buckingham, D. (2005). Will media education ever escape the effects debate? *Telemedium*, 52(3), 17–22. In Mihailidis, Beyond cynicism: Media education

³⁸ Mihailidis, Beyond cynicism: Media education

complement these with teaching how to engage with the media and how to enjoy consumption of media content.³⁹ Mihailidis⁴⁰ makes some important recommendations about how teaching engagement and enjoyment of media content could be added to teaching critical thinking about media effects. Among these recommendations is the idea that evaluative skills should be accompanied by critical understanding. Whatever media effects are being studied, they should only be unpacked after gaining an understanding of the fundamental relationship between media, democracy and citizenship. Likewise, every negative example of media effects such as political attack ads or ideological framing effects should be counteracted with a positive use of the same strategy in order to offer a full picture of the power and role of media in forming public opinion.

These theoretical contributions demonstrate that once active citizenship becomes an objective for media education in current societies, it is no longer sufficient to continue practicing civic education, media education and digital education as separate disciplines. On their own, each achieves limited objectives. Civic education can teach passive citizenship. Media education can teach critical evaluation of media without also teaching the relevance of media to democratic processes. Digital/ ICT education can teach digital abilities, how to access information and even how to technically produce media content, without also teaching the responsible use of these media in a democratic society. Integrated, however, these three disciplines have the potential to achieve an education for active citizenship.

As this report points out, media education and media literacy do not always make a clear connection with democratic values, principles and behaviors. At times, media literacy is stripped of its political/democratic layer and is reduced to digital literacy. As important as digital literacy is, it is insufficient to teach how to select sources and how to filter and verify information without continuing the argument stating that media illiteracy can be a threat to democracy, especially in those countries where democracy is still somewhat of a new and, at times, unstable construction. Making a clear connection between media literacy and civic and political views is necessary, especially when the emphasis is on young people and their

³⁹ Koltay, The media and the literacies

⁴⁰ Thevenin, B., & Mihailidis, P. (2013). The Re-Politicization of Media Literacy Education. *Journal of Media Literacy Education*, 4(1). <https://digitalcommons.uri.edu/jmle/vol4/iss1/6>

formation in society as the future democratic citizens. Active citizenship in a democracy requires not only being properly informed, but also holding values that are compatible to democratic development, eventually leading to the sought-after democratic consolidation. Even in strong and old democracies, centripetal forces are pulling at the citizenry especially from the sides of illiberalism, strong conservatism, populism or manipulation of fear for ideological gain. In the MELIA countries, the situation is even direr. The dangers of nationalism, for example, loom large in many of the MELIA countries, given rather recent experiences with national construction, historically deficient integration of minorities, and cleavages created by progressive policy making in many countries of Western Europe.

1.3. Media education and media literacy in MELIA countries – national perspectives

Based on expert filled questionnaires in every country included in the project, below there is a short country by country description of what media literacy is understood, by reflecting upon most often cited hot topics associated with it.

In **Bulgaria**, one expert considered that media literacy is a collection of skills that require students to think critically about information from newspapers, websites, blogs, and social networks in order to determine its validity. In recent years, there has been increasing talk of media literacy at both national and European levels. The main problem in this direction is fragmentation: there are many initiatives, which are the result of many interesting projects, but they are neither particularly visible, nor integrated in a broader multi-stakeholder frame. Greater coordination is needed between the institutions, such as the Ministry of Culture, the Ministry of Education, libraries, museums, and non-governmental organizations. Moreover, media actors themselves should play an extremely important role in defining media literacy. Hot topics in the field of media literacy include the rise of fake news, especially in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic, content creation skills, the connection between media literacy and civic education, critical thinking skills, protection of personal information, and an overall lack of awareness about the need to increase levels of media literacy in all strata of society. Media

literacy awareness is particularly important in the case of young people, where formal education has an important role to play. Although awareness of media literacy, especially among media professionals or scholars involved in the subject is high, the rest of the population is rather unaware, and directly related to the success of disinformation campaigns, especially among vulnerable communities.

Several NGOs do implement media literacy campaigns and projects but these are generally limited to narrow audiences and are too dependent of funding. There lacks a systematic approach by the state institutions and they do not collaborate effectively with civil society, media professionals, and educators to increase the media literacy of students and teachers. Since the 2019-2020 school year, the theme of media literacy been introduced for the first time in the curricula of secondary schools. Generally, teachers do not have guidance and resources on how to integrate this subject in their classes. There is also a lack of proper methodology of how to assess students' progress in media literacy – specifically when it comes to knowledge and skills acquired.

In **Croatia**, media literacy is at an early stage of development. However, experts consider developing critical media literacy, a skill that enables someone to navigate in an environment of countless information and misinformation, and safe and responsible use of media and communication platforms. The most important problem is there is no national policy or strategy that identifies social needs related to media literacy. A national policy or strategy is necessary in order for all stakeholders to agree on the definition of media literacy goals and priorities. In addition, in order to implement and coordinate a coherent policy on media literacy, it is necessary to create and support institutions in charge of this.

As such, the projects implemented by the Electronic Media Agency in cooperation with UNICEF are the only far-reaching media literacy projects in Croatia, given their regularity, consistency and involvement of a wider circle of social stakeholders. The jointly launched Media Literacy Days project, which has involved a significant number of children and young people, as well as preschool, elementary and high school educators is one of the most effective media literacy projects. Some smaller media literacy projects are also important, but they have much smaller outreach and impact.

The hot topics in media literacy include fake news, social networking, and lack of critical thinking (generally but especially critical judgement of media content), privacy, cyberbullying, and digital footprint. Moreover, one controversial topic is representing by commenting on articles on social networks and the hate speech resulting from it. Prevalence of such unacceptable behavior by citizens and the absence of personal responsibility for insulting, humiliating and spreading intolerance and hatred is concerning.

In the **Czech Republic**, experts see media literacy essentially as a set of skills, which individuals should master in order not to fall prey to disinformation campaigns. This is especially critical in the case of young people. Such skills include those necessary for the selection and evaluation of information available on the internet, and also those more sophisticated that help people use media as a creative tool of self-expression. Acquiring these skills however related to rules of safe usage of social media, which need to be in place and enforced. Because of identifying the needs, in a strategic document pertaining to educational policy called “Strategy 2030+”, media education is a competence necessary for active civic, professional and personal life. In 2001, the “*White Book*” – *The National Program of the Education Development in the Czech Republic (Bílá kniha – Národní program rozvoje vzdělávání v České republice)* was published by MŠMT ČR. Media literacy is described in the document as one of the nod points and as an important tool for strengthening the democratic state and civil society. Media literacy helps citizens retain knowledge of the surrounding environment through media, to deal with the world itself, and to respond to events taking place not only in the national, but also in local and global contexts. In the *White Book*, media education is characterized as one of the main tools in building up the awareness of citizenship and the relationship between the state/government, citizens, and the surrounding world (pro-active framework). Media education should help to form a critical approach to the distribution of information (more protectionist framework) and to reflecting the different points of view, thus leading to the establishment of the mutual consent. (Mass) Media are described as channels through which the information and imagination of society about itself are presented and constructed. **Germany** is one country where media literacy is probably most visible in terms of both policy priorities and citizens’ concerns, out of all the countries included in this project. Consequently, concerns related to media literacy reflect

this more developed field, in which awareness of media literacy needs and issues is perhaps higher than in the other countries. This is confirmed by a set of media literacy hot topics which are more precise and which can be addressed by specific policies. These hot topics include cyber bullying, cyber grooming, online contact risks, security settings of online communications, and the spread of hate speech or fake news. Moreover, data privacy is constant concern in Germany. Finally, in Germany, there is also a clear relationship drawn between media literacy and democratic political culture; according to one expert, media literacy skills are fundamental in order to form an informed opinion, to defend democratic values and to be aware of instances of media manipulation.

In **Hungary**, media literacy is considered less important issues, and there is no official definition for media literacy available in Hungary. The reason for this may be that official documents follow a different approach, and media literacy skills are handled as a part of digitalization. Textbooks for primary or high school children run under titles using the phrase digital skills/competences. The Digital Education Strategy of Hungary uses the term digital literacy, and justifies its lack of definition by explaining that existing concepts on digital competence and digital literacy are not tailored to Hungarian circumstances; thus, the key concepts are digitalization and digital transformation. Consequently, categories of the public, media literacy is not considered a priority. Awareness of media literacy problems is especially high among young people and within well-to-do families, where parents educate their children in the spirit of critical thinking. The situation in Hungary is further complicated by the media policy of the political regime, where media pluralism and non-partisan media are increasingly harder to come about. Experts offered a very broad list of hot topics surrounding the concept of media literacy and in general depicting media issues in Hungary and these include fake news, incitement to hatred, non-independent censorship, deception, child protection, digital literacy, cyber bullying, internet fraud, online scams and privacy threats. One expert considered that politics are the primary source of media problems in Hungary, while another saw racism as a feature of many media outlets in the country.

In **Montenegro**, according to the results of a survey on the impact of the media literacy UNICEF led campaign “Let’s Choose What We Watch”, people seem to be increasingly aware

of and know about media literacy. For example, 55% of parents limit the time their children spend watching TV or surfing the Internet. These numbers are the double of those recorded in 2018 when campaign started. Experts consider that social media literacy is a hot topic in Montenegro, especially when referring to young people, and taking into consideration the context created by the Covid-19 pandemic, which makes children and young people targets for manipulation and disinformation. Education is one field in which media education can become a priority, although attempts to do so have not been particularly successful. Even though an initiative to improve media literacy of high school students was launched back in 2007, positive results are rare. One expert considers that the initiative was largely ineffective because several mistakes made, such as: media literacy was introduced as an optional subject in certain grammar schools and students do not choose the subject because they do not receive a grade for it. Like in most other countries included in this study, media literacy is a popular topic in the NGO sector, but organizing occasional workshops on the topic does not yield best results because there is no integrated and continuous perspective reflecting a multi-stakeholder media literacy prioritization strategy.

The first initiatives regarding raising the issue of media literacy in **Romania** were taken by civil society. ActiveWatch Media Monitoring Agency a human rights organization that militates free communication for public interest in partnership with the Ministry of Education started the first projects on media education in 1996. As a follow-up of those initiatives and projects, in 2004, ActiveWatch elaborated and developed the optional subject or course for 'Mass-Media Competency', which was introduced as part of the school-based curriculum. Following the development of the optional course for media literacy, a textbook 'Competency in Mass Media: student textbook' was approved and published. The 'Competency in Mass Media: Teacher Guideline' accompanied the textbook. In Romania, one expert considers that the large number of messages of all kinds that we are subjected to because of the expansion of social networks or online news, needs a clear strategy aiming to train people to evaluate their credibility. Since this strategy is still absent, there is an increasing number of subjects who are susceptible to manipulation and in danger to becoming certain victims of false news and conspiracy. Consequently, developing critical thinking allowing people to fight fake news and conspiracy theories should be a top priority.

Moreover, post-truth disinformation should be taken into account, and education strategies should, correlatively, be formulated and implemented.

According to experts, in **Serbia**, the lack of media literacy among the population leads to an extremely high degree of manipulation by leading political parties, a situation which is further complicated by the unavailability of an independent media. Furthermore, there is lack of awareness of the need for independent regulatory bodies in the media field, a lack of transparency of media ownership and unsatisfactory media pluralism. Improving the position of journalists as important factors in the process of production and creation of media content should also be a priority. There are also insufficiently effective protection mechanisms against incomplete, inaccurate, untimely information, or false information. Limited access to different sources of information and insufficient commitment to the introduction of media literacy in the education system makes the media literacy landscape rather complicated in Serbia. One expert considers that introducing mandatory media literacy courses at least in high schools, if not in all education institutions, would be part of the solution to disinformation and help address issues revolving around internet security and proper understanding of media content.

In **Slovenia**, one expert noted that there is an ever-growing problem of less consumption of news, either in print or radio or television format. This is coupled with the existence of deeply rooted connections between mainstream media and the political sphere, leading to mistrust in news outlets. Experts also mentioned that although there is societal awareness of the importance of media literacy, a lack of coordination and funding for such projects negatively affects their effectiveness. Like in Germany, one expert saw a clear connection between media literacy and the level of democracy, which makes introducing mandatory media literacy courses in school curriculum all the more important. Several hot topics connected to media literacy in Slovenia, and they are indeed quite diverse, ranging from lack of media literacy skills, knowledge and critical thinking counteracting disinformation and manipulation, to journalists' ethics standards, styles of communication and internet privacy.

2. Institutional contexts of media literacy and education

Each country in this project has an institutional and legal setup focused on media literacy and media education. Nevertheless, the amount of diversity characterizing it is quite marked. The set of countries includes both EU and non-EU member states, and some of the diversity is due to this aspect, since the EU as a supranational actor is engaged in many activities focusing on media literacy and media education.⁴¹ Moreover, being part of the EU also means that fundamental rights and freedoms are or should be respected. Freedom of press or the existence of a pluralist media landscape are also directly connected to how media literacy and media education are understood and acted upon in every country. By the same token, the vast majority of the countries in the project are post-communist – a label that may not be particularly apt since more than thirty years have passed since the collapse of communism – but the communist legacy is important in every country, especially from the point of view of regulations of the media landscape and media activity. In other words, the post-communist countries had to create a legal and institutional context regulating media activities during the last 3 decades, while a country like Germany (the only non-post-communist country in the project) benefitted from a much longer time for institutionalizing and regulating media. Given this diversity, descriptions of media related institutions and legislation are treated on a cases by case basis; media experts in all countries of the project have elaborated reports identifying the most important laws and institutions either focused or touching on media literacy and education, and these reports are presented here for the reader

Media education and literacy can only be analyzed and evaluated against a broader background configuring the social, political and cultural landscape of a country. Furthermore, especially in the case of EU member states, the influence of the supranational organization should also be taken into account.

Media education and literacy related to the broader milieu of freedom of expression, freedom of thought, politicization / instrumentalization of news, and also the laws and practices governing the regime of media ownership. For the countries included in the MELIA project, media indicators vary considerably. For example, the 2021 World Press Freedom Index,

⁴¹ <https://digital-strategy.ec.europa.eu/en/policies/media-literacy>

created by Reporters without Borders, depicts a rather bleak story.⁴² The index offers a glimpse into the status of journalism in 180 countries (especially focusing on ease of access to information, reporting freedom, state control of reporters, and even chasing and threatening of reporters), a ranking that has been headed by Scandinavian countries (Norway, Finland). In this context, the countries in this project rank as follows (out of 180 countries): Germany 13, Slovenia 36, Czech Republic 40, Romania 48, Croatia 56, Hungary 92, Serbia 93, Montenegro 104 and Bulgaria 112. Bulgaria and Hungary are two of the countries that have the most pressing issues with freedom of reporting, which is extremely worrying, given that they are both EU member states. The situation is not all negative, considering that Slovenia and the Czech Republic are in the first quarter, and they are both post-communist countries, while Germany is the leader of the set. This brief analysis suggests that while communism may have affected the media landscape in some countries, the effect is not the same everywhere. Some of the countries in the project have also been included in surveys exploring people's relationship with mass media. For example, the 2021 Digital News Report (Reuters, University of Oxford) shows that the percentage of people trusting the news varies in different countries: Hungary 28%, Czech Republic 33%, Romania 35%, Bulgaria and Croatia 40%, and Germany 47% (the examples offer information about only some of the MELIA countries, since no comprehensive data is available).⁴³ The poor status of Hungary in terms of media pluralism and increasing control of Viktor Orban's government on the media sector is reflected in people's trust of the media: in Hungary, there is the smallest percentage of people trusting the news, out of all the countries in the set. Once again, Germany is the undisputed leader when it comes to trusting the news.

⁴² <https://rsf.org/en/2021-world-press-freedom-index-journalism-vaccine-against-disinformation-blocked-more-130-countries>

⁴³ <https://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/digital-news-report/2021>

2.1. Institutions regulating media in MELIA countries

In every country, institutions focusing on media literacy and education involve either a ministry, a public agency, a dedicated institution or a combination of public institutions. In this respect, there is a tremendous amount of diversity in the dataset. In Bulgaria for example, all media related the Ministry of Culture and the Electronic Media Council handle issues, while the Constitution is responsible for the provision of fundamental rights and freedoms. In Croatia, the Ministry of Science and Education is an important actor for media education, although it does not have a dedicated department focusing on this topic; the Croatian Ministry of Culture and Media, the Agency for Electronic Media and the Agency for Education are also involved, but there is insufficient engagement with media literacy, according to the MELIA experts. The Agency for Electronic Media seems to be the most active, having created in 2016, a media literacy web portal. In the Czech Republic, the Ministry of Education, Youth and Physical Education and the National Institute for Education work on different competences required of young people, but there is very little emphasis on media literacy. There is also the Czech Council for Radio and Television Broadcasting that is an important factor in the media landscape. Currently, there are efforts to make state institutions work together in order to create a unified conception of media education and media literacy.

Germany has, by far, the most elaborate institutional setup focusing on media education and literacy. Partially because of its federal structure, and partially because of the government's pro-active stance on creating and maintaining a pluralistic media sector, engaging with media education at different levels, and protecting the youth and minorities against potential issues caused by hate speech or inadequate representation of minorities. Since the MELIA partner from Germany is located in Bavaria, the case study on Germany reflects a dense network of public institutions sharing the responsibility for media education and media literacy, from the Bavarian State Ministry for Education and Culture, to the Bavarian State Center for Political Education or the Academy for Teachers Training and Personnel Management. Since 2020, even the Bavarian State Ministry of Justice entered the stage by instating 22 public prosecutors handling cases of online hate speech. There are of course also

federal institutions involved in media education, such as the Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs.

In Hungary, since 2010, there is a specialized institution focusing on media, namely the National Media and Info-communication Authority, which includes the Media Council. In Montenegro, media literacy and media education are a prerogative of the Agency of Electronic Media. In Romania, the National Audio-Visual Council and the Ministry of Education through its General Directorate of Pre-university Education are the main institution with influence on media education. In Serbia, the Electronic Media Regulating Authority has competence on different media related fields, and since not required by law to promote media literacy, it has only engaged with it sporadically, often through a partnership with UNICEF. Finally, in Slovenia, there are several institutions focusing on media education and literacy (the Ministry of Culture through its Media Directorate, the Committee on Culture in the national legislative forum, Radio and Television Slovenia, the Slovenian Press Agency, the Agency for Communication Networks and Services). Moreover, the Ministry of Education, Science and Sport handle the more specialized issues regarding media education and school curriculum for it, and the Pedagogical Institute and the Slovenian Institute for Adult Education are involved.

The brief comparative analysis of institutions regulating media in the MELIA country set shows that diversity is the key word. While all countries have institutions governing media, a focused emphasis on media literacy and media education is insufficiently developed in every single one. Even in Germany, the country that has the most sophisticated institutional setup and a very dense network of overlapping state and federal level institutions, MELIA experts found that media literacy and education policies are treated mostly in “technical” fashion, without producing substantive results within the population.

In the following section, information about the institutional framework governing media education and literacy is succinctly presented for every MELIA country.

2.2. Country cases

2.2.1. Bulgaria

The most important state institutions that are responsible for the preparation of a national policy for media literacy are the Ministry of Education and Science and the Ministry of Culture. Additionally, the Electronic Media Council also plays an important role. According to the Radio and Television Act, these institutions are responsible for policy development, periodic reviews and updating.

Recent developments in the Bulgarian National Radio (BNR) can well exemplify the complicated situation in the state-owned Bulgarian TV and BNR. Both institutions are expected to be efficient competitors for the numerous private TV and radio stations. This is the official expectation and requirement and for good reasons. However, at the same time, the state-owned electronic media chronically underfunded in decades, and, throughout time, this became more acute.

The issue is rather complex. First, the state-owned mass media are being financially squeezed. The market favors private broadcasters. However, they are losing the ability to function as critical and independent voices. Both political and economic pressures have an impact on the work and market share of public service media. The state of the public mass media has been influenced by the current liberal media legislation. It does little to restrict the concentration of media ownership or cross-media ownership. This has allowed the bTV media group to expand its radio business and the Nova media group to become involved in the online media market, resulting in a concentration of media ownership that represents a threat to the pluralism of opinion.

2.2.2. Croatia

The most important state institutions creating and monitoring policies on media literacy in Croatia are the Croatian Ministry of Science and Education, the Croatian Ministry of Culture

and Media, the Agency for Electronic Media in Croatia, and the Agency for Education in Croatia.

The Ministry of Science and Education (MSE) performs administrative and other tasks related to preschool education, elementary and secondary education in the country and abroad. Among other tasks, it develops the national curriculum, approves textbooks and introduces regulations and standards as well as other requirements regarding educational work. MSE fosters the development of the school system; works on improving the student standard, conducts inspections, establishes educational institutions and supervises the legal aspects of their activities, provides funding and facilities for educational work, enables children, young adults and adults to acquire technical skills and competences and supports organizations invested in education. The Ministry of Science and Education in Croatia also creates the framework for educational institutions' activities. Consequently, MSE has the opportunity to include media literacy issues in every subject's curriculum. MSE also approves textbooks, which gives the opportunity to the institution to control the ways in which media and media literacy are presented in textbooks, but also to intervene if a particular textbook does not adequately present media literacy issues or it does not improve students' media literacy techniques. In the process of evaluation of higher education institutions and its programs, MSE also nurtures the culture of improving media literacy. Being in charge for developing a school system in general, MSE is the highest national institution that takes care of appropriate implementation of educational programs – including parts of programs aiming towards improvement of media literacy. The Ministry cooperates with other public, private and civil society organizations regarding education and educational programs, but there is no official media literacy conceptualization – media literacy issues and projects are being integrated in education without a strong, unified and constant initiative.

The Ministry of Culture and Media (MCM) performs administrative and other tasks in the field of culture. Although the Croatian Ministry of Culture and Media is a national unit whose main activities focused on culture, cultural heritage and media, it lacks strong and continuous initiatives creating and conducting a reform of media landscape. The Ministry

cooperates with other public, private and civil society organizations regarding culture and media, and is achieving numerous progresses, but media literacy and its improvement is not enough prioritized. The result is the lack of support for improvement of media literacy in Croatian media landscape.

The Agency for Electronic Media (AEM) is an independent regulatory body that promotes public interest and media pluralism, justifies public trust through professional and transparent activities, encourages media literacy, creates conditions for the production of quality Croatian audio-visual content and ensures equal conditions for media development and media freedom. The Agency established in accordance with the provisions of the Electronic Media Act. The Agency has maintained constant strategic cooperation with UNICEF, which is very important for the projects' success and reach.

The Agency has implemented numerous projects, like a web portal for media literacy (www.medijskapismenost.hr) and established the project Media Literacy Days. AEM and UNICEF Office for Croatia and partners launched web portal for media literacy in June 2016. Main goals of the web portal are raising awareness about importance of media literacy and empowering parents and teachers in teaching children and youth how to critically consume media content as well as how to analyze, evaluate and critically reflect on media messages. By doing this, the AEM is trying to encourage conversations about the media and the safe use of technology. The main goal of the Media Literacy Days is to enable learning on media literacy to as many children and adults as possible in Croatia and it represents a platform for various activities and events aimed at promoting media literacy organized by various stakeholders. This project supports educators and teachers by developing educational materials for media education. Furthermore, the AEM pays particular attention to respect for human dignity, the protection of minors and the prevention of incitement and/or promotion of programs, which spread hatred or discrimination based on race, sex, religion or nationality.

The Agency for Education aims to create a new culture of education by continuously supporting quality improvement of the educational activities by continuous participation in

the implementation of education reform, applying the best Croatian, European and world educational practice. The main problems that Agency strives to overcome are various challenges in the education system; for example, the Agency organizes and conducts numerous educational courses for children and youth but also provides possibilities for lifelong learning. These lifelong learning programs are destined for all citizens, but it is particularly important that, by conducting these activities, the Agency allow teachers, trainers and educators to improve their competences. Teachers, trainers and educators can attend different courses, but there are not sufficient courses thematically close to media literacy allowing teachers to learn how to improve students' media literacy. However, there is no separate department, which handles media literacy in the Agency for Education.

2.2.3. Czech Republic

Officially, the central Czech authorities such as the Czech government, the Ministry of Education, Youth and Physical Education or the National Institute for Education, ensure media literacy. All these institutions continually stress the importance of media literacy for people of all ages, but, above all, it focuses on the youth and the seniors (within the framework of long-life learning programs). A focus on media literacy might also be found also in the newest strategic document presented by the Ministry of Education, namely the "Education Strategy Policy of the Czech Republic till the year 2030+". Nevertheless, this relatively long document (120 pages) mentions media literacy only three times:

1. in the section "Digital technologies", where the term is included into the longer enumeration of issue related with the general term: "The education will include the information and data literacy, communication and cooperation; media literacy; creation of the digital content; security in the online environment, but also the problem solution and critical thinking"
2. in the section "Civic education"
3. in the section "Education for the sustainable development".

Surprisingly, the strategic document does not include any notion about media education.

Next to the mentioned central institutions formulating the strategies and priorities in education policy, there is also The Council for Radio and Television Broadcasting that emphasizes the principles of the Czech Republic's policy related to broadcasting and development, as well as to the strengthening of media literacy standards. Throughout its activities, the Council cooperates with the Czech Telecommunication Office. However, the council does not assume a media education role; its role focused on monitoring.

Generally, the Council was relatively active in promoting the issue of media literacy, but its efforts did not create enthusiasm among the most important stakeholders, the central government and the Ministry of Education. In June 2015, the Council's President Ivan Krejčí released a press statement on media education. The title of the release ("Media Literacy" – the Czech Republic is missing the boat") stressed the worrying situation of media literacy in Czech Republic, namely the low-level of media literacy in Czechia compared with other EU countries. He also stressed the dispersed competences and duties of different institutions and deplored the absence of one department fully responsible for media literacy. Krejčí asked for the creation of an interdepartmental group. It brought together representatives of several state authorities (Ministry of Culture, Ministry of Education, Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, Ministry of Interior, and The Council for Radio and Television Broadcasting), experts on media education and selected organizations. These groups would work on creating a single conception for the strengthening of media literacy of the entire Czech population. Nevertheless, the Council's declarations did not cause any important changes. Consequently, the Council abandoned the media literacy issue.

2.2.4. Germany

In the German federal system, culture and education are attributed to the 16 states. There is also no central public authority in Germany solely charged with media literacy policy making, and so all public stakeholders involved in media literacy policy making are located

in departments of the public authorities that deal with policymaking regarding media in general. Thus, the whole school sector as well as most aspects of media regulation are organized on a regional level. As a rule, each state has a ministry for education that is responsible for schools; in most cases, there is another ministry for social affairs and/or for families and young people that deal with children and youth related issues, except general education. For example, the Bavarian State Ministry for Education and Culture gives a broad definition of media literacy on its website:

“Being media-competent means far more than being able to operate digital devices. Without sound media literacy, for example, it will be difficult to deal with social media and the information offered by the World Wide Web in a self-determined way. Children and young people should have the values, skills and knowledge as well as the necessary critical understanding to address the challenges of digital technologies and the Internet and to benefit from a wide range of opportunities.”⁴⁴

The responsibility for broadcasting media is located at the regional level, too; each state – some-times together with a neighboring state – has its own legal basis for broadcasting. Consequently, public broadcasting as well as the regulatory authorities for commercial broadcasting are organized on the states’ level too. The annex accompanying this handbook includes a very detailed description of all institutions involved in media literacy and education policy formulation and implementation in Bavaria, showing an intricate network of public institutions with overlapping responsibilities, working in close partnership with the civil society sector.

2.2.5. Hungary

In Hungary, there is one central public authority responsible for media and enforcing legislation on media, the National Media and Infocommunications Authority, further

⁴⁴ <https://www.km.bayern.de/eltern/erziehung-und-bildung/medien.html>, unofficial translation

referred to as NMHH. Considering that media literacy issues may be strongly connected to the field of education and child protection, depending on the nature of the topic, ministries responsible for these fields can also be involved into the elaboration of relevant policies.

The Act CLXXXV on Media Services and Mass Communication established the NMHH in 2010 through the merging of two pre-existing authorities, the National Radio and Television Commission and the National Communications Authority. The NMHH is an autonomous regulatory body, which submits reports on its operations to the Hungarian National Assembly on an annual basis. The general task of NMHH is the enhancement of the effective and undisturbed operation and improvement of the info communication market, the protection of the interests of info communication providers and users, the assurance of honest business practices in the sector, and the surveillance of the compliance of actors in the sector to the relevant laws and regulations. In the field of media, powers of NMHH are divided among three institutional sub-structures: the President, the Media Council, and the NMHH Office. NMHH is led by the President appointed for nine years by the President of Hungary based on the recommendation of the Prime Minister.

The Media Council is an autonomous organ of the NMHH with juridical person status, and supervised by the National Assembly. At its creation, it became the successor of the National Radio and Television Commission (1996–2010). The Media Council consists of a president and four members, elected by the National Assembly for nine years. Since the President of the NMHH becomes the candidate for the presidency of the Media Council by the power of their appointment by the President of Hungary, the President of the NMHH is the president of the Media Council at the same time. The tasks of the Media Council cover a whole range of dimensions from monitoring and enforcing prevalence of freedom of press, to providing expert opinions on legislation on media issues or monitoring of programs. The NMHH Office provides professional support for the work of the President of the NMHH and their deputies, the Commissioner of Media and Communication, and the members of the Media Council. Within the frames of the NMHH operates the Institute for Media Studies, which provides expert support for the Media Council by conducting research on media related topics in social sciences, organizing expert conferences and preparing publications.

Additionally, there the National Communications and Information Technology Council, a government advisory body, providing expert preview, opinion and advice on any kind of document (including strategies, legislation, etc.) in connection with regulations of media, information society, information technology, or communications.

2.2.6. Montenegro

In Montenegro, the most important institution focusing on media literacy is the Agency for Electronic Media of Montenegro. Throughout time, it implemented several projects, such as the Media Literacy - a joint project of the Agency for Electronic Media of Montenegro and UNICEF Montenegro. The slogan of the Media Literacy Campaign is "Let's Choose What We Watch". The campaign "Let's Choose What We Watch" focuses on raising awareness of the importance of media literacy for parents, caregivers and children, the importance of selection of media content for children, and improvement of the quality of media reporting on the issues affecting the children's rights.

Therefore, UNICEF and the Agency plan to establish a closer cooperation with the media and journalists in order to use the media resources to encourage both children and parents to a proactive attitude towards a planned media consumption. The cooperation which will allow children to be in contact with the media contents free of hate speech and prejudice on the one hand, while promoting tolerance on the other.

2.2.7. Romania

The national unit in charge with media literacy and education is part of the Ministry of Education, namely the General Directorate of Pre-University Education. Its main activities are strategy, evaluation and curriculum monitoring; developing and monitoring the dual

education in Romania; human resources management; developing the school network system, monitoring, and improving the continuing education.

Progress is made in re-formulating the first of the eight basic competence provided by the national educational law. Namely communication competences in the mother tongue, into “literacy competency” defined as “the ability to identify, comprehend, express, create and interpret concepts, feelings, facts and opinions both verbally and in writing, using audio-visual and digital means in any discipline and in any context”. In addition, this is in addition to the regular digital competency which includes, specifically, digital literacy.

Media literacy is part of the school-based curriculum developed by the Ministry of Education (the national authority in the education field). In addition, represents the educational offer, which is proposed to schools and high schools in accordance with the learning needs and interests of the students, with the specificities of the school and the needs of the local community/economic partners. The school-based curriculum consists of both optional packages of courses offered at national, regional and local level, as well as optional packages of courses offered at the level of the high school unit. The School Board of Management, after consulting students, parents and based on resources available, sets the school-based curriculum. In practice are two types of school-based curriculum programs, those accredited and offered by the Ministry of Education and those initiated at the school level, which are approved by the County Schools Inspectorates. The County School Inspectorates have the responsibility to elaborate and to disseminate among the schools its own procedure according to which the schools can proposed optional courses as part of the school-based curriculum.

Many initiatives in media education belong to the civil society sector. For example, Mediawise Society is active in organizing workshops, courses and developing various educational resources, aiming to raise awareness of the importance of media literacy and media education while it also advocates its introduction in schools. Furthermore, in 2020, another active NGO, the Centre for Independent Journalism signed a partnership agreement with the Ministry of Education through which high school students in Romania can acquire

media competences, indispensable in a context where interaction with information and, implicitly, misinformation, have become a dominant part of life daily and learning process.

2.2.8. Serbia

Although it is the most important public institution centered upon media, The Electronic Media Regulatory Authority of the Republic of Serbia (REM) is not required by law to promote media literacy, nor is it heavily involved in media literacy, except in a few sporadic cases (such as the media campaign conducted in cooperation with UNICEF). Regardless of whether it will be established as a national cross-sectoral body for media literacy, REM should take a more active role in encouraging and strengthening media literacy in Serbia. Not only because of social responsibility but also because the issue is almost complementary to other aspects of media regulation content and protection of minors and consumers, as well as due to a common preventive approach

One of the most important roles that REM should play when it comes to media literacy is to find, encourage and involve various social actors in media literacy and media education projects. Significant results can be achieved only when more partners are involved and only where there is a common understanding of problems and goals, with the exchange of knowledge and experiences. In this way, opportunities are created for the continuous development of media literacy projects, their maintenance and financing.

Partners are in a number of sectors:

- Media sector (from traditional to digital media, from public to commercial media);
- Education and academic sector (kindergartens, schools, universities);
- Civil society (NGO);
- Libraries;
- Professional associations (e.g. Film associations and journalists associations or self-regulatory bodies, such as the Press Council);

- State administration bodies and local authorities;
- International organizations (UNICEF and the Council of Europe, for example).

It is also important that REM work closely with the Ministry of Culture and Information and the Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development on certain projects, which will gain stronger institutional support and achieve a common understanding of the concept of media literacy. It is especially important to include the public broadcasting services Radio Television of Serbia (RTS) and Radio Television of Vojvodina (RTV) in all efforts. As public services, they should actively work on raising the level of media literacy of citizens.

2.2.9. Slovenia

In Slovenia, the most important regulation in the field of media is the Mass Media Act. In addition, the Audio-visual Media Services Act, the Radio and Television Slovenia Act, the Slovenian Press Agency Law and the Slovenian Film Center Act, a public agency of the Republic of Slovenia, should be mentioned. The importance of media literacy is mentioned in the Article 11 of the Audio-visual Media Services Act, which states that the Republic of Slovenia, in accordance with the law governing the media, promotes media literacy relating to skills, knowledge and understanding that enable users to use media and audio-visual media services efficiently and safely. The legislation emphasizes the importance of the protection of children and minors and the protection of vulnerable social groups. In accordance with the law governing the media, the Republic of Slovenia encourages providers to gradually provide persons with visual or hearing impairments access to their services. Special protection is provided for children and minors. The benefits of children and minors take precedence over all other rights and judgments.

The Media Directorate within the Ministry of Culture plays a key role in preparing regulations in the field of media. It plans and implements additional measures to protect the plurality and diversity of the media so that the population in the entire territory of Slovenia has access to sufficiently objective information from various sources. It especially supports

the creation, dissemination of program content intended for the deaf and hard of hearing, as well as blind and visually impaired, and the development of appropriate technical support and infrastructure intended for this group. It also keeps a register of media, in which basic data on the media in the Republic of Slovenia are collected. In the area of film and audio-visual culture, the Directorate's key task is to provide the conditions for the development of high-quality film, cinematographic and audio-visual activities in all stages of the cinematographic chain, from development, production, promotion, distribution and screening to storage and protection of film heritage to film education. The Directorate's tasks also include the implementation of European directives in the area of audio-visual media and cinematography and the implementation of the policy of the Council of Europe in this field.

In formulating policy decisions, the Ministry cooperates with various experts in the field of media landscape, either in the framework of forming permanent commissions or through periodic consultations with stakeholders in the field of media policy making. Agencies and organizations established by the state, civil society organizations, private organizations operating on the market and interested individuals participate in the preparation of legislation during the public presentation of opinions.

Public organizations that play an important role in the field of media in Slovenia as public service provider in the media field and in the field of information are RTV Slovenia (Radio and Television Slovenia) and the Slovenian Press Agency (STA). RTV Slovenia is a public institution of special cultural and national importance, also responsible for original audio-visual production, educational program content, children's and youth program and thus also for media education. The production of RTV Slovenia is complemented by the Multimedia Centre and information on websites and theme portals, mobile apps and the teletext. Besides, the MMC covers subtitling for the deaf and hearing impaired.

The Agency for Communication Networks and Services of the Republic of Slovenia governs the electronic communications market. . An independent body regulates and supervises the electronic communications market, performs tasks related to radio and television, and regulates and supervises postal services and railway traffic in Slovenia. The Broadcasting

Council (SRDF), as an independent expert body, gives opinions, proposals and assessments primarily to the Agency, and to a lesser extent to the Ministry of Culture.

The Ministry of Education, Science and Sport is responsible for legislation in the field of media education as well as curriculum development. The National Education Institute Slovenia, which is the central national research and development and counselling institute in the field of pre-school education, primary education, and general secondary education, offers Ministry support in this. The Pedagogical Institute also plays a role in the adoption of legislation and policy decisions, and in the field of adult education the Slovenian Institute for Adult Education, which is the central public institution and umbrella institution for adult education in the Republic of Slovenia.

3. Legislation governing media, media literacy and media education in MELIA countries

All MELIA countries have legislation measures in place governing the media sector. They range from fundamental constitutional provisions regarding free speech, to more specialized normative acts regulating media ownership, protection of vulnerable groups against hate speech or discrimination, and, in some (few) cases there are also regulations focusing on media education itself. In most post-communist countries, there is a preoccupation with politicization of the media and censorship, both legacies of the former regime, and exploring ways for limiting their negative effects. For example, although there is no official policy for media literacy in Croatia, the Draft Law on Electronic Media reflects a concern with censorship and the importance of protecting minors in the context of abusive online content. Media literacy is also present in Croatia education reform proposals, mostly defined as digital literacy. In the Czech Republic, the concern with the communist legacy on media is most visible in terms of ensuring media pluralism and increasing standards of media literacy.

In Germany, due to its federal structure, each state is responsible for its own legislation on media literacy, and multiple public institutions are involved in working on preserving media pluralism, fight hate speech and discrimination, develop media competences among the population, and increasing the media literacy dimension existing in all types of education processes (formal, non-formal, informal). Although there is no general policy on media literacy in Germany and no strategic and harmonized concept of media literacy, the multitude of public institutions working on media literacy at all levels (state/federal) makes it a rather successful case (in comparison to other countries included in the project).

In the 2011 Fundamental Law of Hungary, freedom of opinion and freedom of press are enshrined, but MELIA experts consider that media literacy in schools is not optimal and significant training of teachers needs to take place if media competences are to be acquired by pupils. In Romania, the National Audio-Visual Council is the institution responsible for monitoring and penalizing instances of hate speech and for raising awareness on media

education. Its mandate can be found in the 2002 Law 540 of the Audio-visual. The 2011 Law on Education is also an important normative act for media literacy, since it identifies eight competences that children/youth need to acquire, and two of them can be related to media education and literacy, namely digital competences and social and civic competences. In 2019, digital competences were once again reaffirmed and strengthened, but there is no media literacy competence per se as of yet. The same approach based on fundamental competences can also be found in Serbia, where in the 2012 Education Development Strategy media education and literacy are implicitly assumed. In 2013, the National Education Council adopted guidelines for improving the role of information and communication technologies in education and identified 8 literacies in the media environment. Be that as it may, there is no clear public policy or strategy for media and information literacy in Serbia (it is mostly at discourse level and connected to Serbia's EU integration efforts), where fears of media politicization are pronounced in Serbia as well. In addition to the fundamental rights and freedoms enshrined in the Slovenian constitution, the 1994 Mass Media Act is the most important legislative measure governing the media landscape. It been amended in 2001 by introducing an anti-concentration stipulation and in 2006 by introducing the right of correction. Two additional important legal documents are the Radio television Slovenia Act of 1994 and the Audio-visual Media Services Act of 2011.

3.1. Bulgaria

Mass media are independent in Bulgaria according to the Constitution. In reality, the National TV and the National Radio are state property and therefore are under state control. The printed media are not controlled legally and there is no legislation for the purpose. Both the state-owned and the numerous private TV and radio stations are subject of regulation by the Council of Electronic Media.

The legislative base of the electronic media is the 1998 Radio and Television Act, which has been subject of numerous and continuing amendments. The EU 2007 Audio-visual Media Services Directive transposed in Bulgarian law in 2010, including the requirements for

cultural diversity. A law was adopted in 2014 to restrict media ownership from offshore tax Haven-based companies.

The Bulgarian media are ranked as “partly free” in the annuals of Freedom’s House and Reporters without borders. Due to cases of soft censorship by the authorities, international agencies raised concerns about constraints on freedom of expression. Soft censorship includes control on positions for journalists, on grants, limiting access to information sources and TV or radio broadcasting, etc. The concentration of media in terms of ownership and the audience is high, as there is no clear regulation of TV, radio and print media in this respect. Advances in the liberal media regulations notwithstanding, Bulgaria has the lowest standards of press freedom in Europe and is ranked 111th globally in terms of press freedom for a third consecutive year in the Reporters Without Borders annual edition of the World Press Freedom Index.

The Radio and Television Act from March 2020 provided for the inclusion of the online space in the scope of the Act and provided the Council for Electronic Media powers to exercise control for prevention and restriction of disinformation in the internet environment. The Radio and Television Bill defined the disinformation in an internet environment as 'spreading in social media, internet sites or in another way in internet environment via websites accessible on the territory of the Republic of Bulgaria, of a publication that contains false information that affects natural or legal persons.' The parliamentary Culture and Media Commission rejected the Radio and Television Bill.

With the introduction of the provisions of the Audio-visual Media Services Directive in the Bulgarian legislation, provisions are envisaged to regulate the coordination of the media literacy policy in Bulgaria.

According the art. 33a. (New, SG No. 109/2020, effective 22.12.2020) (1) the media literacy policy shall contain measures for the development of skills and knowledge that enable citizens to:

1. Make informed choices about the media content and the media services;
2. Use the media services and the media content in a safe way;

3. Create media content and to participate responsibly, ethically and effectively in the various forms of communication.

(2) The Minister of Culture:

1. Initiate and manage the activity for preparation of a national policy for media literacy;

2. Report to the European Commission on the implementation of media literacy measures.

(3) The Electronic Media Council shall work for the development of media literacy in cooperation with a wide range of stakeholders, including the Ministry of Culture, the Ministry of Education and Science and other public authorities, media service providers, academia, organizations of civil society and consumers, such as:

1. Participate in the preparation of a national policy for media literacy;

2. Collect information regarding the participation of the media service providers and the platforms for sharing videos in the implementation of the policy under item 1, analyse the results and undertake updating of the policy every three years;

3. Prepare an annual report on the implementation of the policy as part of the report under Art. 39⁴⁵.

3.2. Croatia

While media freedom, media ownership, media pluralism, and media regulation in general are covered in by various legal acts, media literacy still lacks an official strategy.

Existing laws related to the media are primarily the Law on Media, the Law on Electronic Media and the Law on Croatian Radio and Television. In addition to Articles 3 and 14 that

⁴⁵ https://www.mtmc.government.bg/upload/docs/Radio_and_Television_Act_en.pdf, accessed on 8.02.2021.

guarantee the fundamental freedoms of citizens, Article 38 of the Constitution of the Republic of Croatia explicitly emphasizes the freedom of the press.

Article 3 of the Law on Electronic Media in items 1 and 2 guarantees the freedom of electronic media. This is in line with the Law on Croatian Radio and Television (HRT, which is a publicly funded broadcasting network), where General Provisions, Article 1, items 4 and 5 prescribe the independence of HRT and are in compliance with the Law on Electronic Media. The Law on Media defines freedom of expression and freedom of the media in more detail in the General Principles and guarantees the independence of the media:

Articles 52 and 53 of the Law on Electronic Media regulate public ownership of the media. Pluralism of the media is regulated by articles 54 to 62 of the same Act and by the Fund for the Promotion of Pluralism and Diversity of Electronic Media (articles 63 and 64). The Agency for Electronic Media and the Council for Electronic Media define the criteria for granting concessions for the provision of television and radio media services, among which it is important to single out the criteria of quality and diversity of audio-visual and / or radio programs

On 12 November 2020, the Ministry of Culture and Media submitted to the Government of the Republic of Croatia a draft law on electronic media. The public debate on the new law and criticism of the proposal was provoked by the issue of publishers' responsibility for user-generated content, which part of the public saw as potential censorship. Another criticism of the proposal is that in a way the responsibility is transferred from the author (in the case of comments it is a private person) to the publisher, where then any punishment or lawsuit would be moved from the real offender to the publisher. The Minister of Culture and Media Nina Obuljen Koržinek announced the results of the public debate. She stated that a large number of objections to the draft Law on Electronic Media were taken into account, and that the draft law would be sent to the government and subsequently submitted for a and parliamentary procedure.

The digital transition of society and economy is one of the strategic goals stated in the Draft Proposal of the National Development Strategy of the Republic of Croatia until 2030, where

the priorities for policy implementation in the field of education and training and work in a digitally transformed society are, amongst others:

- increasing the number of highly educated ICT professionals entering the labour market;
- support for secondary and higher education for jobs in the digital society;
- raising the level of basic and advanced digital skills of citizens for active participation in the digital society.

The Strategic goals of the Agency for the period 2017-2020. For media literacy, are proactive influence on future amendments to the Electronic Media Act and participation in the creation of a new media strategy of the Republic of Croatia, active participation in international regulatory groups, continuation of media literacy development and advocacy activities and adapting the Fund's technical platform with the aim of improving the user experience.

Media literacy is the focus of various projects primarily oriented to the education system. Although there is no official policy for promoting media literacy, the importance of media literacy is emphasized in the education reform proposal. Currently, the media literacy is not treated as a separate subject, but as an interdisciplinary topic, along the ICT subject (compulsory or optional, depending on the level of education).

3.3. Czech Republic

The legal framework for the print media and private radios immediately after 1989 was presented by the amended and changed legal acts from the non-democratic period. Furthermore, in both spheres we could observe dynamic liberalization and development. The main issue for the legislative debate and regulation became than the issue of state media – The Czechoslovak Television, The Czechoslovak Radio, and The Czechoslovak Press Agency.

As regards the Czechoslovak TV and Radio, two important impulses for the debate might be observed within the discussion about the new legal framework. Firstly and primarily, the

generally shared opinion that both state media must be – not only because of the experience of the Communist totalitarian control and censorship above them – transformed into the public media. Secondly, the crisis of the federal framework presented important impulse for the debate about the share of competences and duties between the federal level (Czechoslovak TV, Czechoslovak Radio). Because of these debates, two important laws were adopted by the Czech National Council (Česká národní rada, ČNR – the parliament of Czech Republic as the constitutive part of the Czechoslovak Federation). Act on Czech Television (Zákon o České televizi no. 483/1991) and Act on Czech Radio (Zákon o Českém rozhlasu no. 484/1991), both adopted on 7 November 1991 with the validity since 1 January 1991.

Both, the Czech TV and Czech Radio were created with the new Acts as public media. As the most important bodies ensuring the independence of both mass media from the political influence, the Councils were included into both documents – the Council of Czech Television with 15 members, as well as the Council of Czech Radio with 9 members.

Next to both above-mentioned public Medias, also the Czechoslovak Press agency was transformed into the new public medium in November 1992 with the Act on Czech Press Agency. Nevertheless, any type of the license fees was introduced, so the Agency behaves as a business-firm.

The plethora of legal acts organizing the radio and television broadcasting was partly rationalized with the renewal of legal acts on Czech TV, Czech Radio, on the Council for Radio and Television Broadcasting and other laws (Law no. 301/1995). In this law, we can find the stress on national background of the TV and Radio broadcasting (the broadcaster was newly obliged to have the permanent seat in Czech Republic). Important decision regarding the Council for Radio and Television Broadcasting gave to this body the exclusive competence to grant the licenses for broadcasting (§ 10, Article 3). The Council could newly decide that the information about the program structure presented by the applicant is fully or partly binding (§ 12, Article 2) – such amendment was clear reaction on the performance of TV NOVA that offered extremely different content than previously promised.

The decisive legal regulation of Czech media was prepared around the year 2000, also in the response on the continued Europeanisation of the country and preparations on the EU-

membership. Firstly, the Act on Press was adopted in 2000, one year later than the new Act on the running of the Radio and Television Broadcasting. The later legal act newly and more precisely defined also the rights and duties of the Council for Radio and Television Broadcasting (RRTV). All activities of the RRTV are defined in the second part of the amended act.

Other important legal documents are the Act on audio-visual media services on demand and several amendments of legal documents ensuring the implementation of Directive 2007/65/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 11 December 2007 amending Council Directive 89/552/EEC concerning the pursuit of television broadcasting activities

3.4. Germany

The freedom of media in Germany is a fundamental right enshrined in Article 5 (“Freedom of expression, arts and sciences”) of the German Basic Law (constitution) from 1949, together with the freedom of expression, the freedom of broadcasting and the freedom of information. Despite censorship being outlawed, Article 5 of the German Basic Law however, also provides restrictions regarding the freedom of media, the freedom of expression, the freedom of broadcasting and the freedom of information especially in relation to protection of minors/young people and personal honor.

The German media landscape is divided into print media (newspapers, book, publishing, magazine publishing), audiovisual media (radio, broadcast television, multichannel TV platforms, video portals, films), telecommunications media (wireline and wireless telecom), and Internet media (Internet Service Providers, search engines, online news market, Internet portals).

Regarding audiovisual media, a dozen public service broadcast institutions are the most important players which are organized in the broadcasters ARD (*Arbeitsgemeinschaft der Öffentlich-Rechtlichen Rundfunkanstalten Deutschlands*), working group of the public service broadcasters in Germany) including branches that are regionally organized and broadcasted and ZDF (*Zweites Deutsches Fernsehen*, Second German TV Channel). Even if these

institutions are organized within a public service broadcasting system, they are not “state media” in the sense that they are bound to governmental instructions (*Anstalten des öffentlichen Rechts*). They are public, not state media.

The 14 state media authorities of the German states (*Länder*) (*Landesmedienanstalten*) set the policy framework and monitor especially the private broadcasters. Some large print publishers have also successfully established a substantial role in television like Bertelsmann company with RTL (*Radio Télévision Luxembourg*) and Axel Springer Verlag AG with Sat1 and ProSieben.⁴⁶

Like already mentioned before, the state media authorities (*Landesmedienanstalten*) supervise and control private broadcasting regarding youth media protection and legal requirements (ensuring the diversity of opinions, violations of rules on advertising and tracking of glorification of violence, incitement of the people).

Because of the freedom of broadcasting, embedded in the *Basic Law*, the state is not allowed to directly or indirectly influence broadcasting, which is why media regulation is organized independent from the state. Moreover, digital platforms have been increasingly included in the supervision in recent years. The 2020 Interstate Media Treaty states that media intermediaries like social networks have obligations regarding transparency, non-discrimination and the labelling of social bots. The Network Enforcement Act of 2017 also takes aim at tightening the social networks’ obligations to tackle hate speech online more effectively. The law for the protection of minors is also to be adjusted to protect against online harms more effectively.

In Germany federal institutions like the State Ministry for Media and Culture or the Federal Ministry of Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth support different projects and initiatives promoting media literacy, but the responsibility for legislations on media literacy lie within in the responsibility of the *Länder* (states). Media literacy is also referred to as digital education or media education. The Competence Framework for Media Education in Bavarian Schools sets the framework for the teaching of media literacy in Bavarian schools.

⁴⁶ see <https://www.britannica.com/place/Germany/Media-and-publishing>

The framework focuses on five areas: basic competences, searching and process relevant content, communicating and cooperating, producing and presenting, analyzing and reflecting. Although there are directives regarding media education by the Bavarian Ministry for Education and Culture, there are no legally binding instruments regarding the implementation of media literacy at neither state, nor federal level.

3.5. Hungary

Media regulation is subject to several legal regulations and fundamental laws in Hungary and Europe. It is important to note EU rules because the community obliges members to regulate/adjust this area according to uniform rules.

In the Fundamental Law of Hungary, Article IX deals with freedom of opinion and freedom of the press. In this sense:

(1) Everyone has the right to freedom of expression.

(2) Hungary recognizes and protects the freedom and diversity of the press and ensures the conditions free information necessary for the development of democratic public opinion.

(3) In order to provide adequate information for the development of democratic public opinion during the election campaign period, political advertising may be disclosed in media services without any consideration and under the conditions laid down in the cardinal law ensuring equal opportunities.

(4) The exercise of freedom of expression shall not be intended to violate the human dignity of others.

(5) The exercise of freedom of expression should not be aimed at violating the dignity of the Hungarian nation, national, ethnic, racial or religious communities. Persons belonging to such a community, as defined by law, shall have the right to enforce their claims against public opinion for violation of their human dignity.

(6) The detailed rules on freedom of the press and the body responsible for supervising media services, press products and the communications market are laid down in a cardinal law.

The diversity of the press is regulated in accordance with the laws, such as the Media Act, although it seeks not only to inform but also to influence the content of the diversity.

The Fundamental Law and the media law also protect violations of human dignity. By tightening the rights of the person, it is forbidden to publish any recording or photograph in any medium without his consent. With regard to content incorrectly published in the media, it is possible to signal the correction of the wrong content to the editor-in-chief.

The National Media and Info communications Authority oversees the functioning of the Hungarian media market in compliance with the content and legislation.

One of the rights of citizens is a free, non-authorized and limited expression of opinion through the press. In Hungary, the new press law specifies in detail what rather content the broadcasting of the public service media is obliged to broadcast within a minimum timeframe, and the board of trustees elected by the parties oversees the operation.

In terms of ownership, we can talk about private property, association property, corporate property and state-owned media. In terms of state ownership, the number of media owned by municipalities is significant. These are televisions, radios, weekly newspapers, and websites.

3.6. Montenegro

The new Media Law in Montenegro (2020) established a Fund for Media Pluralism/Diversity with the aim to promote media pluralism and media diversity. The State finances projects in the field of information from the budget of Montenegro, by providing financial resources for the provision of public services through this Fund. Funds from the Fund are used to encourage media pluralism, and in particular, to produce and publish content that is relevant to the promotion of media literacy and media professionalism

(among other categories). Regulations on distribution of these funds are yet to be established. It is important to notice that the new draft Law on Audio-visual Media Services also recognizes the importance of the media literacy. Having in mind the importance of media literacy on the society as a whole, as well as the recommendations of the JUFREX analysis of the media sector of Montenegro (2017/2018), this Draft defines and expands the jurisdiction of the Agencies for Audio-visual Media Services (Agency for Electronic Media of Montenegro) in order to promote and develop media literacy.

3.7. Romania

The Law 504 of the audio-visual, from 2002, constitutes the backbone of the legal media framework. It institutes the Romanian National Audio-visual Council (CNA), which has a regulatory role and has an autonomous status while also being subject to parliamentary control. The law guarantees social cultural and political pluralism, it requires audio-visual providers to inform the public objectively and represent events accurately. It bans censorship and guarantees editorial independence and fair competition. In 2009, the law was modified to include a new prerogative of the CAN, that of raising the awareness of the public about how to use audio-visual media through developing and promoting media education for all social categories. Another change was made in 2009 to allow for the broadcast of programs, which may present harm towards minors' physical, psychological or moral development only under conditional access or with a visual or audio warning.

Hate speech based on race, gender, religion, nationality, sexual orientation is banned, and CNA can sanction media providers who do not comply. Either based on CNC's own monitoring of the media or based on a complaint from a public authority or from a civil society organization or a complained from a person injured by a violation of the law regulating the audio-visual services. Likewise, anyone may claim the right of rebuttal. The print media is not regulated. In the digital media, the ministry of communication (Law 106/2020 Art 5) is tasked with preventing, analyzing, identifying and reacting to violent incidents in the digital media. When it comes to "cybernetic violence", it has the obligation to develop public awareness campaigns as well as to organize digital literacy programs

addressed towards a “large variety of (Internet) users”. It must also assist authorities in preventing and responding to cybernetic violence.

Romania’s approach to media education has only very recently started to address media literacy. Starting from 2004, when the first legal provision for the introduction of *Information and Communication Technology* courses in the school curricula was adopted (Popescu et al. 2015); the policy focus has been on building “digital skills”, “digital education” and “digital literacy” alongside developing digital infrastructure and resources for schools. The phrase “media literacy” is absent from the legal media framework with one minor exception. The public relations department of the Ministry of Defense is tasked with monitoring the media and rebutting misinformation, propaganda and fake news. At the same time, one of its prerogatives is to organize courses media literacy for the military and civil personnel of the ministry of defense.

Consequently, media literacy took a background role, and educational initiatives fell mainly upon civic society organizations. Only starting in December 2020, Romania’s educational policy started to address media literacy through a pilot project introducing media literacy training to high school teachers and student as well as in the government’s new strategy concerning the digitalization of education, which was submitted to a public consultation in January 2021.

The status of media literacy within the mass-media policy framework remained in a less developed stage. The Romanian law of the audio-visual (504/2002) services was updated in 2008 (Art 10.3.j) in order to conform to the European Audio-visual Media Services Directive (2018/1808), to include an obligation for the Romanian National Audio-visual Council to promote media education (Art 10.3.i). Its role, however, remained limited to the protection of minors from violent and adult content, rather than developing media literacy skills through educational efforts.

Up to this point, the Romanian legal framework does not include a dedicated media education policy, but it looks like the introduction of one is imminent as part of the newly proposed policy for the digitalization of education.

The education law does not, in its current form, prescribe any media literacy courses. However, it leaves the possibility open for such courses to be introduced on a school-by-school basis as optional courses through the extracurricular program “School after school”, in partnership with NGOs, parents associations and local public authorities. In 2019, the Ministry of Education and Research considered bringing changes to the policy of the national school curriculum as part of the Strategy Europa 2020 and the Strategy concerning school drop-out, adopted by the government in 2015 (Ministry of Education and Research 2019). In the policy paper submitted to the public consultation, the Ministry takes note that one of the important global tendencies is that people are increasingly becoming consumers and producers of media content and that most jobs require digital skills. As such, the ministry believes school has an important role to play in teaching digital skills (Ministry of Education and Research 2019). This opportunity to improve the school curriculum for digital education has not yet been used for the introduction of media literacy in the curriculum, but rather to strengthen the already existing programs of digital literacy, as well as to strengthen the complementary use of traditional and digital or multi-media pedagogic resources.

The first dedicated program on media education was introduced through a regulation approved by the Order no. 6234/2020 of the Minister for Education and Research. It establishes a pilot program in 100 high schools across the country for the duration of three years (2021-2023). Its purpose is to train 600 Romanian language and literature teachers to be able to teach media literacy. The Ministry of Education in collaboration with the NGO Centre for Independent Journalism initiates the project. Alongside the media literacy pilot, a new digital strategy for education, SMART.Edu was proposed by the Romanian Government. The project’s domains of action are developing the digital competencies of students, adapting the school curriculum to emerging jobs, life-long digital education, and professional training of teachers on digital education, digital resources and infrastructure, connectivity, creation of open educational resources, cyber security and IT ethics.

3.8. Serbia

Media and information literacy (MIL) is understood as a complex concept, modeled on the

wording provided by UNESCO, which recognizes the roles that the media and other sources of information play in our personal lives and democratic society in general. The Strategy for the Development of the Public Information System in the Republic of Serbia until 2016 (hereinafter: the Strategy) determines the guidelines for the development of the public information system in the Republic of Serbia until 2016, with the basic goal of further strengthening established democratic relations in that area.

The goal of the Strategy is to determine the most important directions of development of the public information system in the Republic of Serbia and parts of that system in order to develop the freedom of the media and the media market and to strengthen democratic relations in society. Improving the public information system includes harmonization of domestic legal framework and practice with international and European regulatory framework and experience, the obligation of the state to respect and implement them, as well as strengthening the capacity and obligation of all participants in the public information process to work in the public interest and all social groups.

Public information is free and not subject to censorship. Direct and indirect discrimination of media editors, journalists and other persons in the field of public information is prohibited, especially according to their political affiliation and belief or other personal characteristics. The free flow of information through the media must not be endangered, as well as the editorial autonomy of the media, especially by exerting pressure, threatening or blackmailing editors, journalists or sources of information. Physical assault on an editor, journalist and other persons involved in the collection and publication of information through the media is punishable by law. Freedom of public information must not be violated by abuse of official position and public authority, property and other rights, as well as the influence and control over the means of printing and distribution of newspapers or electronic communication networks used for the distribution of media content.

The determination of the state is not to be the owner of the media. The state, territorial autonomy and local self-government unit, as well as institutions, enterprises and other legal entities that are wholly or partly state-owned or financed in whole or in part from public

revenues, according to the law governing the field of public information, cannot be, neither directly nor indirectly, the founder of the media. In order to ensure the public interest in the field of public information, the state may be the founder of national, provincial and regional public radio and television services. The state can be the founder of a public media in the Serbian language for the needs of the population of Kosovo and Metohija. The state can be the founder of specific media that are in the function of closer information and acquainting citizens with the work of state bodies and public companies (internet portal, assembly channel, etc.). National councils of national minorities may be the founders of public media in the language of the national minority for which they were established.

The media in Serbia are mostly in the hands of private owners and companies, although the state still has a significant share in the ownership of some media, such as Politika and Večernje novosti. The main characteristic of media ownership in Serbia is that on paper, everything often looks relatively clear and simple, but in practice, this is often not the case. In a small number of print media cases, the owners are journalists (for example, Danas or Vreme), while other media are most often owned by business people and media companies. Two groups dominate the print media market - Ringier Axel Springer, which has in its portfolio the daily Blic, the weekly NIN and numerous other lifestyle issues, and Igor Žeželj, the new owner of Adria Media Group, which, among others, publishes the daily Kurir. These two media houses also have some of the most visited web portals such as blic.rs, kurir.rs and espreso.rs.

In the field of electronic media, the concentration of ownership is higher than in other parts of the media arena. In this part of the media sector, the influence of telecommunication operators is visible - cable operator Copernicus now owns the former Antena Group (owner of national televisions O2 and Prva), while N1 television is owned by United Group, the largest telecommunications provider in the region. The state telecommunications operator Telekom Srbija has cooperation with Pink Media Group and the public service RTS through joint production, primarily of serial content. Three companies - S Media Team, Maxim Media and Media Public Service, have about a 40% share in radio listenership. As for online media, companies that already own other types of media own most influential

portals.

Despite the fact that most media are privately owned, the ruling party has a huge influence on the media - through advertising control, directing state funds, acquaintances and influencing owners. All this has the consequence that, despite the fact that private property is diverse, editorial policies often have the same directorate, news programs look similar, and there is a noticeable lack of criticism of those in power.

The state of Serbia owns a small number of influential media - these are primarily two public services, Radio Television of Serbia and Radio Television of Vojvodina. In addition, the state has some ownership in the dailies Večernje Novosti and Politika. Other media are commercial, and their owners are individuals or private companies (domestic or foreign). Most companies headquartered in Serbia are registered as limited liability companies (LLCs), and a small number of media outlets are joint stock companies (JSCs), whose shares are traded on the stock exchange. The Republic of Serbia supports the development of media pluralism, which includes the diversity of ownership, sources of information and media content. Preserving and promoting media pluralism implies measures that enable citizens to access various sources of information, opinions and media content that help them form their own opinion and resist the influence of dominant opinion created in the centers of power.

The Republic of Serbia will harmonize the laws related to the media in such a way that media pluralism at the national, regional and local levels is not endangered.

The Republic of Serbia will monitor the development of the media on new technological platforms and take measures that encourage the preservation and strengthening of media pluralism and the diversity of media content.

There are no clearly formulated public policies and a comprehensive strategy for the development of media and information literacy in Serbia. However, the importance of some

of its aspects has been recognized in various documents. In strategic documents, it is recognized as a necessity, it is an important topic of public debates, and its development is at the level of designing public policies and strategic framework. Since Serbia is in the process of joining the European Union (EU), the concept of media literacy is mainly considered within this process. Many strategies and policies state in their guidelines the importance of empowering specific social groups, but in practice, it has been shown that it is necessary to coordinate this motivation at the national level with a multi-stakeholder approach, that means with all interested social actors as well as citizens in this MIL framework.

The Education Development Strategy of Serbia until 2020 (adopted in 2012) emphasizes the development of eight competencies and lifelong learning, and media education and media literacy are implicitly assumed as one of the outcomes. The Strategy emphasizes the importance of information literacy and emphasizes the role of school libraries as learning spaces and resource centers for the implementation of media literacy.

One year after the adoption of the Education Development Strategy, the National Education Council of the Republic of Serbia adopted the Guidelines for Improving the Role of Information and Communication Technologies in Education (2013), which lists eight different literacies that are important in the new media environment.

In 2017, the Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development started an important process regarding the draft Digital Competence Framework - Teacher for the Digital Age, which was designed to support teachers in the education system in the process of integrating digital content into the curriculum practice. Nevertheless, there is no single accepted MIL formulation or explicit public policy in this area in Serbia.

3.9. Slovenia

The Constitution of Slovenia (Article 39) guarantees freedom of thought, expression, public performance, press and other forms of dissemination of public information and expression.

Every citizen has freedom to gather, consume and spread information and thoughts. Further, every citizen shall be provided with the public information, which is in the legal interest according to the law (PIS 2021). Based on the Constitution, three different acts are put in order regarding media environment in Slovenia. The most important is Mass Media Act, which was first introduced in 1994 and adopted few times in the following years. As it is stated in the Article 1, the act defines “(...) *rights, obligations and responsibilities of legal and natural persons and the public interest of the Republic of Slovenia in the area of the mass media*”.

As we mentioned above the Mass Media Act was changed few times. Regarding protection of media pluralism, we should mention the 2001 Section 9 of the Mass Media Law. Those entities or persons, who are publishers of basic informatively newspapers or journals and have more than 20% of the ownership share of this newspapers or journals, or more than 20% of management or voting rights, are allowed neither to be the owner or co-founder nor anyhow connected in creation of television or radio activities. Other changes of the Mass Media Act happened in 2006, when former restrictions on media ownership were abolished. Referring to the revised act, local or foreign investors can own 33% of the media company. Another thing that was changed in 2006 was the introduction of the right of correction. Thus, any citizen who was offended by something that was publicly written or said has the right to present his opposite fact or point of view and this correction shall be published at the same place.

The RTV Slovenia Act, which came into force in 1994, stipulates status, activity, leadership, management, control and funding of the only national public broadcasting organization in Slovenia. As the name indicates, RTV Slovenia offers radio, television and from 2002 multimedia portal (MMC). According to the law (Article 1), RTV Slovenia as a public and non-profit institution, “(...) *shall perform a public service in the area of radio and television activities as specified by this Act, for the purpose of providing for the democratic, social and cultural needs.*” Article 4 specified, that RTV Slovenia should provide citizens with information that are impartial and credible.

The Audiovisual Media Services Act was adopted by the Slovenian parliament in 2011. With this act, the Republic of Slovenia transmitted special *Audiovisual Media Services Directive* (AVMSD), which stipulates coordination of some laws and regulations with other EU member states.

In Slovenia five different bodies regulate media. The most important is the Media Directorate, which belongs to the Ministry of Culture. According to Mrs. Menih Dokl, the Head of the Media Directorate, the main aim of the body is to frame the field of media in terms like “(...) *protection of children from harming content, then some limits, to set some limits in media buying, then to assure the right to answer, to publish the opposite opinion and the presentation of opposite facts.*”⁴⁷

Other four bodies, we could mention in relation to the media regulation are:

- 1) *The **Broadcasting Council of the Republic of Slovenia*** (SRDF), body that is responsible for broadcasting regulation.
- 2) *Agency of Communication networks and services of the Republic of Slovenia* (AKOS), which role is to organize and control the market of electronic communications.
- 3) *Culture and Media Inspectorate of the Republic of Slovenia*, which cares that everything what is related to media and culture is according to rules, laws and regulations.
- 4) *Council of Electronic Communication of the Republic of Slovenia*, which is treated as a consultative body (giving opinions, suggestions etc.)

⁴⁷ Menih Dokl, Uršula. 2021. Interview with the author. 26.01.2021.

4. Media education best practices in the project countries

This section offers insight into various examples of best practices in the field of media literacy and media education identified by MELIA experts in every country included in the project. In general, best practices were selected based on any particular project's high impact and visibility, and the emphasis was on selecting projects that look at media literacy from the perspective of creating or encouraging civic engagement. MELIA experts selected projects or developments in the field of media literacy that have been implemented either by public authorities or by the civil society. If most projects implemented by public authorities focus mostly on amending or changing existent legislation in order to secure a niche for media literacy and media education, NGOs focused mostly on projects that raise awareness about the importance of media literacy. Especially in conjunction with democratic values and principles, and also on projects that have very tangible results, in the sense of offering beneficiaries concrete skills and competences helping them to navigate the rather complex landscape of media. A special type of frequently encountered projects focuses on workshops and trainings centered upon the identification of fake news and fighting against this ever-developing phenomenon, especially in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic.

4.1. Bulgaria

Amendments of the Radio and Television Act

The Radio and Television Act⁴⁸ belongs to the most contested legal documents in the country. After numerous amendments, currently it has been an arena of public debate in the efforts to transpose the provisions of Directive (EU) 2018/1808 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 14 November 2018 amending Directive 2010/13 / EU relating to the provision of audiovisual media services (Audiovisual Media Services Directive) into the national legislation. Rules are being introduced to extend the scope of the obligation to protect citizens, in addition to line and on-demand services, and to video-sharing platforms.

⁴⁸ State Gazette No. 138/24.11.1998; Judgment No. 10/25.06.1999 of the Constitutional Court of the Republic of Bulgaria, SG No. 60/2.07.1999

Protection against incitement to violence or hatred and public provocations to commit terrorist offenses for linear services, video-on-demand, and video-sharing platforms will be strengthened.

The amendments to the law envisage the provision of the necessary tools and powers to the national regulatory authority to carry out more effective market control, which will reflect on the mechanisms for protecting the rights and interests of users of these services. The responsibilities of the Council of Electronic Media as regulator will have to be increased in the promotion of media literacy. The Council should have the responsibility to exercise control for prevention and restriction of disinformation in the electronic environment. This control included the responsibility to announce that a given media spreads disinformation and to require a specific court in the country to order all electronic communications networks and services to discontinue the access to the media. The changes in the legislation also provision the registration of all media services providers who had intentions to provide said services online. The amendments aim at restriction of publications that contain false information that affects natural or legal persons.

Competences for democratic culture

New standards of civic, environmental, intercultural education, health education have been elaborated recently. Most of them are based on the competency approach. This is valid especially for the new elaborated standards of civic education, environmental education, intercultural education, or health education. Elements of the competences for democratic culture could be found in Civic Education, Philosophy, and History subjects' curricula. The big debate whether to have teaching Civic Education as a single subject or to use a cross curriculum approach has been solved by the beginning of 2000s in favor of the latter. Nevertheless, there are Civic Education standards reframed in 2016 and in the curriculum "Man and Society" subject (from 1st to 4th grade) and "Personality and Society" (for 12th grade). Recent legal changes have been elaborated as well standards for Intercultural Education, Environmental Education and Health Education introduced into curricula but these subjects could be only optional. There are no standards for Human Rights, Global

Education. The cross-curricular approach in fact means that the students are not going through a basic Civic Education.

Thus in a contrast with the development of the ICT and its use in formal and non-formal education there is no analysis on CDC in on-line space. There are initiatives and programs on safety in the net (“Safe Internet”) initiative, “Day of Safe Net” initiative, Centre for Safe Internet, “To counter the language of Hate!” and etc.). However, the initiatives and programs are more instrumental and behavior oriented and are not trying to change the focus on development of competences for democratic culture as a basic precondition for a safe or informed behavior online.⁴⁹

The Association of European Journalists (AEJ)⁵⁰ – Bulgaria launched a media literacy project in partnership with the Bulgarian-American Fulbright Exchange Commission. It included some 30 high schools across Bulgaria. Media Literacy in the Classroom initiative aiming at the improvement of students’ skills to critically assess and interpret news and information they consume. Journalistic clubs and online school media were set up in order to supply materials for a national online platform. The program provides media literacy classes to students who are not involved in the journalistic clubs. The project is supported by the America for Bulgaria Foundation and is worth some more than BGN 200,000.

AEJ-Bulgaria is a member of the international Association of European Journalists⁵¹, which is represented in more than 20 European countries. AEJ is an independent organization, uniting journalists from all national sections. Its role is to support quality journalism in the context of European integration, as well to protect freedom of speech. The Association is an official Observer in the Council of Europe’s Media Steering Committee.

⁴⁹ The Bulgarian Safer Internet Centre is operated by the Applied Research and Communications Fund, Association Parents and DeConi advertising agency, with the financial support of the Connecting Europe Facility of the European Commission.

⁵⁰ <https://www.aej.org/>

⁵¹ www.aej.org

Media Literacy Coalition, Sofia, Bulgaria⁵²

The Media Literacy Coalition brings together organizations and stakeholders in the fields of education, journalism and civic participation, academics and media literacy experts. The Coalition works to integrate media literacy fully into the educational process and to increase media literacy in society. The stakeholders participating or supporting the activities of the network include representatives of

- Friedrich Naumann Foundation for Freedom;
- Ministry of Culture;
- Active Citizen Fund;
- Ministry of Education and Science;
- German-Bulgarian Chamber of Industry and Commerce;
- American Chamber of Commerce in Bulgaria;
- Bulgarian Association of Software Companies;
- Bulgarian Public Relations Association;
- Branch Association of Bulgarian Telecommunication Operators.

The aim of the Coalition is to develop critical thinking and creativity, first, for children and young people in the digital-media world, but also for all other age groups in Bulgaria. The Coalition is open to joining all organizations that support the mission and are active in the field of education by:

- Developing digital media literacy from the beginning to the end of the educational process;
- Building partnerships and cooperation with organizations and institutions relevant to education and media literacy in Bulgaria (ministries, non-governmental organizations, media, etc.);
- Promoting the importance of digital media.

The Media Literacy Coalition consists of the following Bulgarian organizations: Safe Internet Advisory Line, Applied Research and Communications Foundation, Radio FM+, Media

⁵² <https://gramoten.li/about-us/>, accessed on 10.03.2021

Democracy Foundation, ELA Shared Learning Association, Association of European Journalists –Bulgaria, European Studies Department at Sofia University “St. Kliment Ohridski”, Media Democracy Foundation, Faculty of Journalism and Mass Communication of Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski", Regional Department of Education – Ruse, etc.

Coverage of media literacy projects:

Projects of the Coalition for Media Literacy: Media literacy in Bulgaria. What have we learned from the crises; Internet risks: Protection of personal data on social networks; Index and Methodology for measuring the acquisition of media literacy skills of high-school students; Internet Risks: The Dangers of Photo Sharing; How to create media content on social media without copyright infringement, etc.

Target audience, goals and objectives:

“The Coalition for Media Literacy works to integrate media literacy fully into the educational process and to increase media literacy in society. The aim is to develop critical thinking and creativity, first of all, for children and young people in the digital-media world, but also for all other age groups in Bulgaria.”

4.2. Croatia

The Media Literacy Days

One of the examples of the best practices concerning media literacy in Croatia is The Media Literacy Days project. It has been launched by Agency for Electronic Media (AEM), an independent regulatory body for the electronic media in Croatia, and the UNICEF Office in Croatia in 2018. The aim is to raise public awareness of the importance of media literacy, empowering citizens with media literacy skills, creating a platform for cooperation of numerous social stakeholders and developing sustainable media literacy projects and supporting educators and teachers by developing educational material for media education. Media Literacy Days are held with the support of the Ministry of Culture and Media and the Ministry of Science and Education. Regular participants include kindergartens, schools, colleges, libraries, cinemas, media, NGO’s and many other partners.

The project consists of three main elements: 1) various events (lectures, workshops, debates, screenings etc.), 2) production and distribution of educational materials and 3) one-day workshops for primary and secondary school students called Children get to know the media. In 2019, 294 events were held in more than 90 cities across Croatia, and the project became the largest media literacy project in the country. In connection with this project, there is also the website www.medijskapismenost.hr, that was launched in June 2016 by AEM and the UNICEF Office in Croatia. The idea behind it originated in the need to protect children and youth as users of electronic media. Given the fact that there is no law that obliges someone to deal with media literacy, no institutional body or strategy of media literacy in Croatia, the initiative is particularly important. The main goals of the project are: 1) raising public awareness about importance of media literacy, 2) empowering parents and teachers in teaching children and young people how to critically consume media content or how to analyze, evaluate and critically reflect on media messages, 3) encourage conversations about the media and safe use of technology. The content of the portal and the main activities of the project are: 1) research findings on the impact of media on children, young people and adults, 2) recommendations for parents, 3) examples of good practice from Croatian schools, kindergartens and NGOs, 4) educational materials for teaching children various aspects of media literacy. The portal covers a wide range of media literacy topics: safer Internet, media and children's development, violence in media and stereotypes in media.

The Children of the Media project

Another example of a good practice is the Children of the Media (Djeca medija) project, which is the main project of the Association for Communication and Media Culture (DKMK). The project was created in 2011 as a joint initiative of the organizers and students of the Matica hrvatska School of Communication, which has been organized since 2008 by Matica hrvatska, the Faculty of Croatian Studies and the Faculty of Political Science of Zagreb University. The project involves professors and final year students from the Faculty of Political Science, the Faculty of Croatian Studies and the Croatian Catholic University. The main goal of the project is to empower media users in the field of media literacy to become

wise and responsible users of media content, able to critically analyze and evaluate media and media content, recognize and use the positive sides of the media and protect themselves from potentially negative consequences of media exposure. The project targets several groups: academia (students and teachers), children and youth, families and parents, the elderly, national minorities, educational institutions, and the general population. The main activities of the project include educating media users of different ages (with lectures and interactive workshops) and publishing educational materials. Trainings are held on all topics in the field of media literacy, such as electronic violence, internet safety, the role of influencers in the lives of children and youth, media and family, media use in teaching, creating your own media content, the impact of media violence on children and older media users. Other topics as misinformation and fake news, sensational journalism, advertising and covert advertising, media in the lives of children of different ages, recognition of stereotypes and imposed ideals of beauty in the media, manipulation of media content, recognition of media propaganda, media addiction, etc. are also included. During ten years of project implementation, the association has ensured excellent cooperation with schools from all over Croatia. In 2013, the association published, together with the Ipsos Puls agency, the first Croatian research on media education. They are also the main coordinator in Croatia of the leading European research on children's media habits and online safety, EU Kids Online. The association connects various stakeholders with the aim of creating an alliance for media literacy. In cooperation with their partners, in 2014 they organized the first debate on media literacy in the Croatian Parliament. Through their activities, they also contributed to the inclusion of the concept of media literacy in the Strategy of Science, Education and Technology in Croatia. The project activities cover the whole of Croatia, from large cities to islands and areas of special state concern. More than 1,300 workshops and interactive lectures were held for more than 32,000 participants of different ages - from preschool children, primary and secondary school children to university students, parents, teachers, educators, professional associates in schools to pensioners. In 2017, the Evens Foundation, the largest promoter of media literacy in Europe, awarded the association and Children of the media project for their impact with the prestigious Evens Media Education Prize.

Gong's media literacy approach

Gong is a civil society organization focused on enhancing democratic processes and institutions as well as developing democratic political culture and encouraging active and responsible participation of citizens in political processes, particularly in decision-making processes related to good governance of public and collective property, protection and promotion of the rule of law, human rights and solidarity. Gong was founded in 1997 as an initiative of citizens organized to monitor elections, and since then more than 21,000 Gong observers have monitored a total of 15 elections, 1 national referendum, and numerous local elections and electoral processes in other transition countries. GONG has developed non-formal media literacy education programs. GONG's educational modules aim to significantly contribute to civic media literacy competencies through collaboration with educators and students, through learning about how the media system works, and by facilitating the strengthening of citizens' critical access to newspapers and electronic and digital media. Since 2012, Gong has been continuously conducting supplementary professional training for teachers, within Education for civic literacy that consists of three modules: political, media and EU literacy. An educational program for educators and teachers tackling media literacy is one of the most important educational programs that GONG has designed. It aims to equip teachers to properly educate and inform their students about the significance of media literacy today. It is conducted by civil society organizations and it is recognized in contributing to teacher's competences. Overall, it covers the topics like media system, advertising and money in media, media depictions of various groups, the democratic role of media, problems with the media like disinformation and hate speech. The program focuses on teaching students how to develop a critical approach towards newspaper, electronic and digital media. In 2015, Gong established Croatia's first fact-checking media platform Faktograf.hr⁴, because of necessity to fill the gap of a dedicated fact-checking entity in the Croatian media space, and the prevalence of misinformation and disinformation. It strives to be a relevant non-profit media space where political life in Croatia will be treated in the manner of professional and ethical journalism, deprived of the influence of various particular interests. WeB Media Literacy is the most recent project related to this topic, started in March 2021. The goal of the project is to improve media literacy through cooperation and

exchange of experience and knowledge among young people from Montenegro, Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Croatia. The focus is on strengthening the capacity of young journalists and youth-workers who deal with topics in the field of media literacy. It will include fact-checking internship for young journalists. It will provide a space for young people to be active citizens and vocal advocates of media professionalization and the great importance of critical thinking.

4.3. Czech Republic

Currently media education is established as a **Cross - Curricular Theme** in the Framework Education Program for Elementary Education (FEP EE). It is a mandatory part of elementary education. The Cross-Curricular Theme is characterized as a theme, which blends into the content of other school subjects and positively influences the formation and development of key competencies. In 2004 the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports approved new principles into the policy for the education of pupils from 3 to 19 years of age.

Media Education is defined in FEP EE as follows: „Media Education is to equip the pupil with a basic level of media literacy. This includes familiarization with certain basic knowledge on the functioning and social role of contemporary media (its history, structure of function) on the one hand and acquisition of skills facilitating the individual’s informed, active and independent involvement in media communication on the other. Primarily the ability to analyze the offered messages, consider their trustworthiness and evaluate their communication intent or associate them with other messages, but also orientation in media content and the ability to select the proper medium for the fulfilment of miscellaneous needs – from gaining information through education to leisure-time activities.“ Media education has been taught in primary schools since the school year 2006/2007.

At the level of elementary education, Media Education comprises the basic knowledge and skills related to the media and media communication. Schools regulate the inclusion of media education in their curricula.

In practice, each school divides the methodology and the overall content of media education into individual subjects or courses. The school curriculum states that cross-curricular themes must be implemented into an education within several years.

Civil society involvement – the case of JSNS.cz

A frequent problem in the Czech Republic is the insufficient qualification of teachers in the field of media education. There are a number of educational institutions offering educational programs, training or methodological assistance not only to primary school teachers. However, this possibility is often limited due to a lack of time and money as well. It is not yet possible for teachers to study media education as a separate field. Teachers are not sufficiently prepared for teaching media education; they lack materials and methodological support. At the same time, they are also often facing a lack of interest from the school management. This greatly complicates the whole situation. Graduates of Media studies who would like to teach media education do not have enough pedagogical education and, on the contrary, teachers lack sufficient media skills. Luckily, various educational institutions, including JSNS.cz, offer this.

The most well-known non-profit organization in this area is „**People in Need - One World in Schools**“ (JSNS.cz). This organization uses modern digital forms and cooperates with primary and secondary schools. Among other things, JSNS.cz helps them with media education. Through discussions and especially digital documents, JSNS.cz teaches students to distinguish between objective and communicative media messages (fake-news). In addition, People in Need published the Media Education Handbook „Being in the Picture I, II. “It is intended for primary and secondary school teachers, to whom it offers a wide range of activities aimed at strengthening pupils' media literacy (e.g. some lessons are devoted to migration and fake-news).

A very successful project is the work in cooperation with the well-known influencer Karel Kovář („Kovy“). He is the most popular influencer for a target group consisting of youth and high school students. He has approximately 850,000 followers on his YouTube channel and

his videos often reach millions of views. JSNS is also known in schools for its wide range of activities, which are all offered free. At the same time, it provides comprehensive materials in high quality. It concentrates itself on topics, which are insufficiently available in Czech language. These materials are prepared by experts on the given topics and are suitable for pupils as well as for educators. More than 3,800 primary and secondary schools, teachers and pupils work with JSNS.cz materials. Through more than 310, discussions and teaching activities, it brings important topics and specific stories to schools. They focus on human rights, modern Czechoslovak history, media education and many other themes. One of the focuses is to develop pupils' media literacy. The rise of digital technologies places ever-increasing demands on all those who want to orientate themselves and move confidently in the media world. This requires knowledge and skills that fall into the field of media education.

During COVID-19-pandemic JSNS.cz adapted its activities to the needs of schools and started to orient itself on distance learning. Therefore, JSNS.cz brings a selection of films and activities on which students can work independently at home. JSNS.cz focuses itself on all three educational stages:

The educational platform World of Media

Since 2010 Michal Kaderka has been teaching media education at the Grammar School in Prague called „Na Zatlance“. In 2017, together with other teachers, he founded the „Teachers' Platform“, which brings together teachers from kindergarteners to higher vocational and art schools. According to teachers' needs and experiences from practice, the basis of its activities is counseling for policy makers in the creation of educational policies. In 2019 the World of Media.info website received the Domino Award from the National Institute for Further Education (in Czech language „NIDV“) for the best digital teaching resource in the humanities category. In 2020, the website won the 3rd place of the expert jury in the competition for the best educational innovation of Eduín. Kaderka also prepared the so-called "Open Textbook". He thus responded to the lack of teaching materials and support from the state. Materials for

teaching are created primarily for students of the „World of Media“ seminar. As a Part of the presentation are prepared worksheets and descriptions of activities.

The general goal of media education is to strengthen information literacy (assess the content and importance of news), create multimedia content, gain an overview of the media market, Internet security or improve self-presentation in the online space. The overarching goal of media education is for students to learn how to use media for their studies.⁵³

4.4. Germany

Strategic Concept “Education in the Digital World” (Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs)

In December 2016, the Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs (*Kultusministerkonferenz, KMK*)⁵⁴ proposed and adopted the strategic concept “Education in the Digital World”. The policy provides a binding framework for the German *Länder* (federal states) and expanded their educational responsibility about the complex integration of digital changes in society into the teaching and learning process. The undertaking aims towards a more harmonised education policy of the *Länder* in light of the increasing digitalisation. The strategy identifies six fields of actions in which:

1. “Education plans and the development of teaching, curricular developments;
2. Initial, further and continuing education of educators and teachers;
3. Infrastructure and equipment;
4. Educational media;
5. E-government and school administration programs, education and campus management systems;

⁵³ All comprehensive materials, methodologies, worksheets and open textbooks are available to all teachers free of charge, by accessing <http://svetmedii.info/>.

⁵⁴ “The Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs is the oldest conference of ministers in Germany and plays a significant role as an instrument for the coordination and development of education in the country. It is a consortium of ministers responsible for education and schooling, institutes of higher education and research and cultural affairs, and in this capacity formulates the joint interests and objectives of all 16 federal states.” (<https://www.kmk.org/kmk/information-in-english.html>)

6. Legal and functional framework.”⁵⁵

Since the developments and specific needs regarding digitalization differ in the different educational institutions with regard to actors, educational mandates and legal frameworks, the strategy “Education in the Digital World” is structured into three main chapters: schools and vocational education, institutions of higher education, and continuing/adult education (the latter has been added in December 2017). Considering the circumstance that the main target groups of the MELIA Observatory project are the youth and the people who work with them, the chapter schools and vocational education is of particular importance in this context.

The strategy defines two goals in the field of general schools, integration of digital competences in the curriculum and digitalizing teaching and learning processes. Also, the KMK strategy “Education in the Digital World” sets itself the goal that by 2021 every pupil should have the possibility to “use a digital learning environment and have access to the internet, whenever deemed useful in lessons from a pedagogical point of view” (KMK 2016b, p. 2).⁵⁶

The competence framework is the centerpiece of the KMK strategy, as it constitutes the basis for all future revisions of the school curricula of the *Länder* regarding media education. The implementation of this competence framework is designed to enable individual and self-regulated learning, (political) maturity, identity formation, strengthening of self-confidence and the self-determined participation in an increasingly digital society. In the strategy, all 16 federal states committed themselves that all pupils that are being enrolled in the schoolyear

⁵⁵ More information can be found at Kultusministerkonferenz (2016): Bildung in der digitalen Welt. Strategie der Kultusministerkonferenz. (Available at: https://www.kmk.org/fileadmin/pdf/PresseUndAktuelles/2018/Digitalstrategie_2017_mit_Weiterbildung.pdf). Accessed: 03 February 2021. Kultusministerkonferenz (2019): Verwaltungsvereinbarung. DigitalPakt Schule 2019 bis 2024. (Available at: https://www.kmk.org/fileadmin/pdf/Themen/Digitale-Welt/VV_DigitalPaktSchule.pdf). Accessed: 03 February 2021.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

2018/2019 in primary schools or those who enter into secondary level 1 (*Sekundarstufe 1*)⁵⁷ gain the competences formulated in the competence framework until the end of compulsory education. The strategy acknowledges the fact that the federal states will follow different paths regarding the implementation of the “Competences for the digital world” and that the integration of the competences in existing curricula can only be carried out gradually. In November 2020, the KMK published a report regarding the implementation and the previous achieved impact of the strategy. The report stresses that due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the strategy is not being implemented by the German federal states as planned and therefore under duress, so it concentrates on the most urgent points (e.g., digital equipment of schools, technical and didactical qualification of teachers, imparting digital skills) while postponing longer-term undertakings. The report also states that in 2020, the federal states have made special efforts regarding three areas: support of schools to enable home-schooling by providing access to digital educational media and learning platforms and tools, improvement of the digital equipment of schools and the compensation of social disadvantages regarding digital learning, and the budget increase for the (online) qualification of teachers.

EU initiative klicksafe

In 1999, the European Union initiated the “Safer Internet Programme”, “an action plan focusing on preventive measures against illegal, undesirable, or detrimental content, and on emphasizing the importance of a safe media environment and of public awareness. In Germany, the Saferinternet DE group⁵⁸ offers different support hotlines among which there is klicksafe. klicksafe is a public body and an awareness campaign aiming towards the promotion of media literacy and the adequate use of the internet and new media. The most important areas of activity are the production of content, qualification of their target groups, marketing, public campaigning, and networking with a broad range of partners and stakeholders. klicksafe is a joint project of the state media regulatory authorities of

⁵⁷ In Germany, *Sekundarstufe 1* comprises the school levels of intermediate education, which correspond to level 2 of the ISCED (International Standard Classification of Education).

⁵⁸ Website of the group: <https://www.saferinternet.de/index.htm>

Rhineland-Palatinate (*Landeszentrale für Medien und Kommunikation, LMK*), acting as coordinator of the project and North Rhine-Westphalia (*Landesanstalt für Medien NRW*)⁵⁹

Klicksafe adopts an approach focusing on:

- Focus on encouragement rather than admonition. To protect the target groups from negative internet phenomena and at the same time imparting how to take advantage of media literacy skills, klicksafe in the first instance identifies potential dangers and problems to then be able to provide users “with learning options toward handling new media competently, assessing diverse problem areas themselves, and responding actively and adequately.”⁶⁰
- Reaching the target group of parents and educators as a link to children and youth: klicksafe identifies young internet users as especially vulnerable group regarding negative internet phenomena like disinformation and hate speech, but also cyber-grooming, cost traps and the dangers related to the revelation of personal data. As the access to children and youth is only possible to a limited extent, klicksafe’s activities are primarily targeted towards the people who engage with children and youth on a daily basis (parents, educators, youth and social service workers).
- Indication of content that is harmful to young persons as a key priority: klicksafe aims towards increasing public awareness regarding content that is harmful and unsuited for minors. klicksafe thereby not only points out the dangers that arise from illegal content (e.g., glorification of violence, racist content, pedophilia), but also from content that is legal for adults (e.g., pornography, computer games).

Professional Association for Media Education, Media Literacy and Communication Culture (*Gesellschaft für Medienpädagogik und Kommunikationskultur, GMK*)

⁵⁹ see <https://www.klicksafe.de/ueber-klicksafe/die-initiative/project-information-en/what-is-klicksafe/>

⁶⁰ <https://www.klicksafe.de/ueber-klicksafe/die-initiative/project-information-en/what-does-klicksafe-do/>

The Professional Association for Media Education, Media Literacy and Communication Culture (*Gesellschaft für Medienpädagogik und Kommunikationskultur, GMK*), founded in 1984, is a German registered non-profit organisation and a “nationwide professional association for education, culture, and media. It stands for the advancement of media education and media literacy. The association brings together interested and engaged people from research and practice, and ensures the exchange of information.”⁶¹

With around 1,000 personal members coming from the field of media education and media-pedagogy and approximately 90 institutional members⁶², the GMK is the largest professional association in the field of media education for institutions and private individuals in Germany. With the idea of bringing together interested and engaged persons and stakeholders to enable an exchange of knowledge and ideas to exhaustively promote media literacy and media education, the GMK is also active in Austria and Switzerland.

The GMK aims towards achieving the following goals:

- Promotion of media education and media literacy in the sense of life-long learning (from preschool children to senior citizens).
- Fostering participation by media and the creative and critical use of media: The GMK advocates for the equal support of all social groups with regard to media education.
- Bringing together research and practice by enabling the free exchange of ideas and practices between different players.
- Comprehension of media education as a societal cross-sectional task by making sure that also people from diverse backgrounds get the opportunity to use media responsibly and successfully. The GMK furthermore, also promotes gender-sensitive approaches to media education.
- By connecting and combining media work with cultural activities, the GMK strives towards the linkage of media and culture.

⁶¹ <https://www.gmk-net.de/about-gmk/>

⁶² A list of member institutions can be accessed here: <https://www.gmk-net.de/ueber-die-gmk/unsere-mitglieder/>

- In order to promulgate exceptional projects in the field of media education in Germany, the GMK along with the Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth awards the Dieter Baacke Award⁶³. Dieter Baacke⁶⁴ was a German media educator, who coined the term *Medienkompetenz*⁶⁵ (media literacy) and introduced it to the political and academic discourse in the 1990s.
- By organizing qualification seminars regarding hot topics and current methods of media education, the GMK strives towards inspiring professionals in the field of media education and education in general.
- By granting another award, the medius award⁶⁶, the GMK supports junior scientists with outstanding theses in the fields of media education, media research and youth protection.
- Another field of activity is policy consultation: by its contribution in political councils, the GMK “develops concepts and advises in the context of youth protection, cultural and educational policy and youth policies. The GMK takes a stand on current media pedagogical debates.”⁶⁷ The GMK, for example published a statement regarding the adjustment of the Protection of Young Persons Act in spring 2021.
- Taking advantage of fresh opportunities for intercultural and international exchange by acknowledging the globalization of media.⁶⁸

4.5. Hungary

⁶³ Website of the Dieter Baacke Award: <http://www.dieter-baacke-preis.de>

⁶⁴ From the foundation of the GMK in 1984 until his death in 1999, Dieter Baacke was chairman of the GMK.

⁶⁵ Dieter Baacke comprehends *Medienkompetenz* as a supraindividual and societal objective within the information society discourse. Baacke subdivided *Medienkompetenz* in four dimensions: media critique (*Medienkritik*), media studies (*Medienkunde*), media use (*Mediennutzung*) and media creation (*Mediengestaltung*). The model that is also known as *Bielefelder Medienkompetenzmodell* (Bielefeld Media Literacy Model) is still applied in contemporary media education (see Baacke 2001 quoted after <https://dieter-baacke-preis.de/ueber-den-preis/was-ist-medienkompetenz/>).

⁶⁶ Website of the medius award: <https://fsf.de/veranstaltungen/medius/>

⁶⁷ <https://www.gmk-net.de/about-gmk/>

⁶⁸ see <https://www.gmk-net.de/about-gmk/>

Blue Cinema Project of the PontMás Foundation

It aims to shape the view of society, by making the most important facts about autism known to wider publics. The Blue Cinema project targeted teenage young people. One of the important goals of the Foundation is that Szombathely and Vas County are an inclusive place for people living with autism.

Every year the foundation plans and organizes several programs in connection with World Autism Day (April 2), so that more and more people know about the special needs of people living with autism or the difficulties encountered by an autistic person and his family. In cooperation with the AGORA Savaria Film Theatre, film was considered an adequate medium for raising awareness on autism. The Blue Cinema aims to shape the attitudes of seventh and eighth graders on matters revolving around people with autism and their needs. In the course of the project, four films were presented during a period of a month and a. The participants had the opportunity for discussion after watching the films. Media specialist, parents, AOS animators, psychologist and specialist medical teachers led these discussions. The program reached about 400 students who could watch films. The performances were free of charge, and the PontMás Foundation provided the financial background.

Campaign against internet bullying - Mediaunió Foundation

The founders and members of the Media Union⁶⁹ are media and surface owners who have offered valuable advertising platforms and content to support the establishment of a national campaign against internet bullying. The aim is to involve as many media as possible, to achieve a uniform, effective, social awareness-forming effect in the broadest sense.

Internet harassment or bullying was the main theme of 2014 Médiaunio Foundation's campaign. All media and partners that provided or assisted in the social advertising campaign recognized their own responsibility for content related to minors. According to experts, children rarely ask for help, parents have to ask what happens to the child on the Internet. Only adults can provide help, so they need to be more aware of the issue. The social-

⁶⁹ <http://www.mediaunio.hu>

purpose campaign related to Internet harassment in 2015 – on pro bono media platforms – is therefore aimed mainly at parents to raise awareness of the problem. The aim of the campaign is to make the problem publicized. New communication devices, smart phones, tablets are becoming more popular.

More and more young people are using the Internet and social networking sites, consuming various media content. However, it does not matter how these tools are used and whether they know their dangers. As has been the case, the Media Union aims to develop a responsible, conscious citizenship attitude, emphasizing the responsibility of parents in understanding their children and their impacts.⁷⁰ The director of the online harassment campaign film is Béla Paczolay. Telekom is the main sponsor of the 2015 “Responsible Media Use” campaign.

4.6. Montenegro

The Agency for Electronic Media already has many activities on promoting media literacy in Montenegro. **Media Literacy**⁷¹ is a joint project of the AEM and UNICEF Montenegro. The campaign named *Let's Choose What We Watch* focuses on raising awareness of the importance of media literacy for parents, caregivers and children, the importance of selection of media content for children, and improvement of the quality of media reporting on the issues affecting the children's rights. UNICEF and the Agency plan to establish a closer cooperation with the media and journalists in order to use the media resources to encourage both children and parents to a proactive attitude towards a planned media consumption. The initiative will allow children to be in contact with the media contents free of hate speech and prejudice on the one hand, while promoting tolerance on the other.

The most active organization in the field of media literacy in is Montenegro Media Institute whose activities are implemented through the **project *Read between the lines*** with funding

⁷⁰ https://nepszava.hu/1059037_kampany-az-internetes-zaklatas-ellen

⁷¹ www.medijskapismenost.me

from the US Embassy in Podgorica. The first phase of the project *Read Between the Lines* was implemented from January until December 2020. The focus of the project was to raise awareness among teachers and students about the need to strengthen media literacy in the Montenegrin education system. During the second phase, which officially kicked off on January 1st st 2021, they continue working on improving the status of media literacy in Montenegrin schools. Through the informal National Coalition for Media Literacy, which consists of, inter alia, experts in the field, representatives of state institutions, and the civil sector, they proposed to the Ministry of Education, Science, Culture and Sports to include Media literacy (as a compulsory elective subject) in all primary and secondary schools across Montenegro. Since 2018, their focus is to develop knowledge and raise the capacity of students and teachers to understand and practice MIL in schools and everyday life. Also, to support already formed National MIL Coalition to advocate for systematic improvement in education policies and to increase interest of all stakeholders (institutions, school management, teachers, students, parents) for introducing MIL in all elementary and high schools in the country, during the 2020/2021 school year. In addition to numerous advocacy activities with stakeholders and civil society, MMI organized a set of trainings for over 50 teachers and 64 workshops for students. Through our different educational activities for youth, MMI managed to reach over 1300 students from 2019 onwards.

4.7. Romania

Center for Independent Journalism – the media education program

The program I Teach media education, rebranded as *The media education program*, started in 2017 and has targets going all the way to 2030. The organization had programs on media education, human rights education and education for democracy even before 2017, but they were not concentrated in one flagship program, but rather they were implemented according to funders' requirements. In 2017, media education becomes a strategic direction of the organization, putting together all three fields. There is a goal that by 2030 about one third of high school students to have already been through a program of media education (approx. 175,000). Between 2017 and 2019 there was a pilot project testing their formulas to reach to students, and since 2020, they scaled up their strategy. The strategy included working

with teachers who teach humanities subjects – Romanian literature and language, English literature and language, French literature and language, History and Social Sciences – and not encourage optional courses, but rather insert media education elements in usual courses (infusion is the term they use). They trained 92 teachers – selected by announcing the program, and teachers were not offered any clear incentive, except for a participation certificate (5 days intensive course on media education), and then they started working with students. Teachers were from 42 cities and rural settlements, and represented 75 different schools. Most schools included in the project were located in urban areas, although two were from rural areas and the project functioned particularly well in these last two schools. They were given courses (in print too) and a set of activities, but were highly encouraged to create their own activities, according to what they thought worked (this is did not work very well so CJI offered activity scenarios).

Initially the project aimed to work with different teachers in the same school, so integrating media education issues in different classes, to see how knowledge is transferred between classes, but they observed that this is not happening. Students did not have the ability to use the same concepts in different courses, although teachers tried to collaborate.

Each teacher participated overall in about 20 days of training, including a summer school, then mentorship and assistance to course, CJI went to places and selected 20-25, 30 students, which were trained by CJI, and the teachers assisted to see how formation worked. This was the first formula. They realized that it is too difficult to mentor that many people. Then, they decided to train a smaller/selected group of teachers that have high impact, and then measure the impact. They decided to work with teachers of Romanian language and literature, because they have the highest impact having many hours of teaching per week. This is the second phase, where 600 teachers of Romanian literature and language will be trained on media education, then they have to apply at least 12 activity scenarios, and in 2023, an impact evaluation will be conducted regarding media literacy competences. They started with EC's definition of media education: access, analysis, information creation to which they added civic literacy, which comes from UNESCO. For CJI it is very important to work on media literacy with a view towards democratic values, because CJI's mission is to

work on protecting human rights especially in terms of freedom of expression. For them, the program works if students become civic citizens – this is part of impact. The goal is to have students think with their own minds but starting from a human rights baseline.

They have a partnership with the Ministry of Education. Through a ministerial order the schools were selected (100 schools), but apparently there are more schools that showed interest. They trained 13 trainers in the first phase of the program, so they could become resources in the second phase. The ministerial order stipulates that a minimum of 12 hours/cohort during one school year should be devoted to media education.

CJI made their own toolkit for teachers. They will also create a students' kit because they have a partnership with UNICEF – so they work on materials. They are not working on their own toolkit because this would encourage creating an optional course, and rely on a manual, because they want to avoid this (it may come later), because having an optional course would mean less impact (fewer students take an optional course that integrating media education concepts and competences in various courses already offered).

Forum Apulum

Founded in 2017 in Alba Iulia, Forum Apulum FA⁷², was focused from the very beginning, on implementing projects on the development of critical thinking among youth. At the very beginning, after conducting research on argument mapping, the organization had its first public event – on identifying and counteracting fake news – in April 2017, in Alba Iulia, before many organizations started to offer workshops on this topic. FA created a small brochure about how to identify fake news and made it available in both digital format and in print. FA distributed a few hundred copies to some of their events. Briefly, the organization entered this field because its founding members thought it was a societal necessity.

In general, FA see the connection between media literacy and democratic values as critical. The youth are very much confused, they get some information from various communication

⁷² <https://forumapulum.ro/ro/>

channels, do not talk about it with others, and so misperceptions can easily be formed. Lack of political information among the youth is significant: for example, some young people do not understand the meaning of ideological self-positioning, or the way political parties are formed. In general, the youth are trying to find rapid solutions to difficult social problems, without understanding the complexities and nuances that characterize the social milieu. This is why, sometimes, the youth develop radical options. In addition, the school context, especially high school, does not help students in forming moderate and well-informed political views: for example, teachers - who are important contributors to the socio-political formation of the youth - are, sometimes, radical themselves. For example, when debates take place in the Romanian political arena, focusing on liberal democratic values, some teachers have tried to convince students and their parents to choose the illiberal option, even by personalized phone text messages.

Participants at FA projects are recruited through public announcements, and it is common that those that participated in one project are involved in other projects as well. The organization is perceived as conducting interesting projects for the youth, and FA has partnerships with the National Council of Students (CNE), The National Alliance of Romanian Student Organizations (ANOSR), and the Youth Council of Romania (CTR). Increasing outreach was created by capitalizing on these partnerships that grant FA's projects widespread visibility. For example, in one project, FA created the Illustrated Guide of the Student, aiming to inform students about their rights that was distributed in 6,000 copies, and promoted at events in the country. They have also created an illustrated guide of communism that was distributed in schools by working directly with interesting teachers and students. FA also runs a project with the French Institute in which about 40 young people work with journalists and a photographer, in order to create a magazine of the youth and for the youth – entitled Gen Revista –, which comes out both online and in print. When FA launched the project, they were looking for 20+ participants, had more than 100 applications, and selected 40. Another project entitled Civic Influencers (ended recently), focused on the idea of informing young people vis-a-vis local and national elections. FA trained so-called young ambassadors, who spoke in their

communities/schools/friends/organizations on the importance of voting, on the need for proper information about public projects, and on civic engagement more generally. The youth engaged in FA's projects come from all over the country.

Factual.ro

Factual.ro is a website aiming to explain to wider audiences the importance of fact checking when reading/listening/watching the news. It is the first such initiative, especially focused on policy and political declarations. The project was initiated in 2013 and launched in the spring 2014. It brings together a group of enthusiastic civic activists, corporate employees, entrepreneurs and political consultants, all interested in good governance. Since 2014, an active Romanian NGO – Funky Citizens Association, has implemented the project. All experts work on a voluntary basis and offer their expertise for the benefit of the general audience. Throughout time, it has been funded by various nongovernmental organizations, such as the Open Society Institute or the Civic Innovation Fund, grant programs of embassies (Dutch), companies, while a significant amount comes from private donations. The experts choose various instances of political news, and then catalogues them as false, partially false, true, partially true, or truncated. The experts identify the issue, undergo a process of verification, explained in lay terms for every reader to understand, and then decide over the value of truth included of every analyzed unit.

4.8. Serbia

Fake news tracker from Novi Sad school of journalism

The FakeNews Tracker is intended for media professionals, educators, future journalists, as well as all citizens who want to join the fight against misinformation. FakeNews Tracker is the result of the Debunking Disinformation project implemented by the Novi Sad School of Journalism in cooperation with the media development organization Transitions online from Prague. The idea of the project is to build local capacities in Serbia in the fight against media propaganda and misinformation in the public sphere. FakeNews Tracker presents an electronic Guide to Combating Fake News, which provides many useful tips in the field of

verifying content from social networks and risky sites. How to determine the original version of the photo? How to recognize a photomontage and how to take a shot out of context? What are the features of cloned sites? What is the structure of prototypical language manipulations? Some of the questions that the project aims to answer. The FakeNews Tracker portal allows readers to report news they suspect is fake. After receiving the application, the editorial office reviews its content. If it is false, they publish the analysis on their website, and if it is not, or if it is impossible to conclude - they post information about it.

"Click safe" - project for child protection on the internet

Thanks to digital technology and the Internet, today's young people can access a huge amount of diverse information in digital format. However, this does not mean that they are able to assess the credibility of the source and the reliability of the information, which is confirmed by the results of a large number of foreign and domestic surveys. The results of a domestic survey from 2017, conducted in 22 primary schools from ten municipalities in Belgrade, show that only 5% of surveyed fourteen-year-olds have a critical attitude to the information they find on the Internet. And are able to recognize the reliability and validity of this information and also explain the criteria on the basis of which they decide whether it is a reliable and valid information or not. Today's young people tend to uncritically accept the information they find on the Internet or, on the other hand, to uncritically reject it. Very few students rely on prior knowledge and experience when assessing the reliability of information from the Internet. Children's interest in the Internet has opened up the possibility of numerous abuses; so many children are often victims of electronic violence. Representatives of the Center for Prevention of Deviant Behavior of Youth (Centar za prevenciju devijantnog ponašanja mladih) and the Ministry of Telecommunications (Ministarstvo za telekomunikacije) and Information Society (Informaciono društvo) visited 30 cities in Vojvodina with the aim of introducing children, teachers and parents to the "Klikni Bezbedno / Click Safely"⁴ project.

During the children's week, representatives of the ministries and the Center for Prevention visited 15 schools in order to be acquainted with the current situation and offer solutions. Example of the "Click Safe" Project - "Children are mostly abused via Facebook and Skype. During 2012, 15 people were arrested for pedophilia. One of the arrested blackmailed a girl holding her almost in a slave position. In the action "Armagedon" for the protection of children on the Internet, during 2012, 15 people were arrested for pedophilia and 34 criminal charges were filed. As with other children who were victims of violence on the Internet, the parents had no idea what was happening. Research by the Institute of Psychology (Institut za psihologiju) indicates that every fifth child is a victim of some form of violence on the Internet, and only 15% of parents use the Internet. That is why victims should always ask for help.

Media literacy campaign by Media Coalition

In August 2013, the Media Coalition, led by the Independent Association of Journalists of Serbia and the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), launched a 15-month long project, worth 248,000 USD, aimed at strengthening and supporting democratization in Serbia by promoting media literacy and independent and responsible journalism. The Media Literacy Campaign project aims to determine the perception of the media and the level of understanding the role of the media and media culture among the younger and older population and also, through a series of activities, to contribute to the development of an analytical approach to media content. The target groups of the project were high school students, civics teachers and journalists. In the end, the goal of the project was to promote quality and responsible journalism by spreading awareness, especially among young consumers, of the need for critical access to information and responsible production of media content. In addition, a special focus was placed on security and privacy on the Internet, and especially when using social networks. The Media Coalition consists of the Independent Association of Journalists of Serbia (Nezavisno udruženje novinara Srbije), the Association of Journalists of Serbia (Udruženje novinara Srbije), the Independent Association of Journalists of Vojvodina (Nezavisno društvo novinara Vojvodine), Local Press (Lokal pres) and the Association of Independent Electronic Media (Asocijacija nezavisnih

elektronskih medija). The Media Coalition conducted a multimedia campaign within which it produced eight videos and eight radio jingles, as well as the production of an Online Resource Center⁶ for civic education teachers, journalists and high school students. The coalition worked to secure the support of national and local media so that the campaign would have the widest possible coverage. In January 2014, the Online Resource Center website was launched - a place where teachers can find sources of material for lesson plans on topics related to media literacy for civic education classes, and high school students materials that will further interest them in the nature and role of the media in their lives. Journalists on this site can find the latest online tools they can use in their work, as well as ideas on how to use responsibly social networks and the Internet to develop topics and produce texts of public interest. Workshops for high school students aimed to develop young people's awareness of security and privacy on social networks, responsible online behavior and to teach them ways in which they can use social networks and new media for their work in school and in the future, on college. In addition to new media, the workshops and the campaign itself has been focused on the importance of critical analysis and consumption of content in the so-called traditional media.

4.9. Slovenia

When it comes to legislative impact, project **MiPi**, designed by the Agency for Communication Networks and Services of the Republic of Slovenia (AKOS) for promotion of media and information literacy stands out. As a converged regulator, AKOS follows the Audiovisual Media Services Act presented in 2011⁷³, because currently there is no legislative regulation on media literacy in particular. In Article 11, the Services Act states: "In accordance with the law governing the media, the Republic of Slovenia promotes media literacy relating to skills, knowledge and understanding that enable users to use media and audiovisual media services efficiently and safely". Following the mentioned article, it can be concluded that AKOS is accomplishing a good practice by raising public awareness of the importance of critical use of media and information technologies and building partnerships

⁷³ Audio-visual Media Services Act, Republic of Slovenia: <http://pisrs.si/Pis.web/pregledPredpisa?id=ZAKO6225>.

that contribute to increased visibility of the content. MiPi is a portal for the promotion of media and information literacy, with which the Agency for Communication Networks and Services of the Republic of Slovenia (AKOS) wants to make the public aware of the importance of critical and thoughtful use of media content and information technologies. Although media and information literacy do not have a single definition, their importance for modern man and society is so great that they are dealt with, for example, at the level of the European Commission and the Council of Europe. In Slovenia, media literacy is mentioned in the Audiovisual Media Services Act, namely in Article 11, which states: "In accordance with the law governing the media, the Republic of Slovenia promotes media literacy relating to skills, knowledge and understanding that enable users to use media and audiovisual media services efficiently and safely." The website MiPi is raising public awareness of the importance of critical use of media and information technologies, building partnerships that contribute to increased visibility of the content, in time it is our goal to become the central point of access to information regarding media literacy. Content combined with information literacy, because AKOS is a converged regulator.

The Infrastructure program by the Faculty of Media in Ljubljana has so far provided support for the successful implementation of research projects and programs in Slovenia and internationally. The faculty operates in the field of media and communication, social effects of development and use of modern media and media education. The collected data is used by researchers in the implementation of targeted, applied or basic research projects both at home and abroad. They also strengthened cooperation with other infrastructure programs in both Slovenia and internationally, which contributes to the quality and up-to-date provision of infrastructural support to the interested research community. The results and activities of the infrastructure program at the Faculty of Media provide information support to state bodies in the implementation of public services in the field of media, media education and media literacy. To the entire population as well as specific publics (pre-school children, primary schoolchildren, youth, and seniors) and vulnerable and deaf, blind and partially sighted people with mental health challenges). In the last five years, they have also organized numerous activities (workshops, trainings,

meetings, consultations, mentorships, media announcements, radio appearances, etc.), which were intended for users, interested professionals and the public.

The main project of **Časoris** is publishing articles in an online newspaper for children. The newspaper aims at teaching children how to access and use the media, how to distinguish facts and opinions or how to spot fake news. It also includes a section for teachers and parents with tips how to discuss difficult issues with children. The website of the newspaper has 10k of monthly visits and it includes a selection of articles in English. The project has become nationally and internationally well-known and it has been nominated for a Media Literacy Award in 2019 by the European Commission. The editor of the newspaper also creates media literacy campaigns, for example a round table for children and seminars for students. They collaborate with museums and other organizations to present media literacy in Slovenia, and act as local partners in the organisation of events for the government, journalists and broader public.

The mission of **Centre for Safer Internet** is to offer the comprehensive solutions on the data protection, personal data protection. The biggest project the organisation deals with is education of employees. As the interviewee said: "the more you educate people, the more they see what they are doing wrong". The reason behind this project is that every mistake in a company has to be reported, according to the GDPR (General Data Protection Regulation). There was a shift in reporting incidents when employees started attending education seminars on media/digital literacy. For example, they taught them encryption of sensitive personal data, and how to deal with files that are not your personal property. The project is only about a year old, so it is still new, however, the reports to the National Information Commissioner have risen drastically, more than 100%. Currently they are involved in about 50 seminars. The important part of the project is to learn that employees are the weakest link, regarding media literacy. If they are not educated properly about data protection and media literacy, the company can have significant problems. Therefore, the main goals of the project are to empower employees with sufficient knowledge regarding data protection, in order for them to be safe, or even to save the company from unmetered employees. The centre strives to ensure continuous improvement of digital literacy.

Kinobalon is a project created by Kinodvor, a central cinema in Ljubljana, founded by the city itself. The goal of Kinobalon is providing vibrant and quality film culture and programme to young public in Slovenia. The objectives of the project that are related to media literacy are to broaden the horizons of young audiences and deepening the understanding of film as a culture. In this case, media literacy is intertwined with film literacy; film is part of media and is therefore a part of media literacy. The goals of the project are to provide quality and diverse film offers, deepen the understanding the film and nurture and maintain cinema-going habits. The project forms a part of media education of youngsters and tries to change the understanding of media (film) literacy in an accessible and fun way.

In order to see how close Slovenia is in establishing media literacy as a mandatory subject in a curriculum, we established contact to ensure collaboration with the Institute of Educational System of the Republic of Slovenia, as the institute holds the power to change media education in Slovenia. While conducting interviews and collecting data on the curricula of media literacy in Slovenia, the Institute of Educational System of the Republic of Slovenia was a main point of reference concerning building the school curriculum on media literacy. The Institutes advisers are connected with a network of stakeholders and therefore co-create changes on a higher political level. The questionnaire on a school curriculum, completed by the institute, has shown on which levels of education media literacy is included in the curriculum. While collecting the data for the questionnaire it has been shown that the institute collaborates within its entities on a national level, which is crucial to implement media literacy as a mandatory subject. It is important to mention as well that persons who work in Ministry of Education and Directorate of Media have helped create the curriculum in the past and now have policy access to influencing legislation on a national level.

5. Media education programs in Central and Eastern European countries

Media education is a hot topic in most countries in the project, although context varies significantly.

5.1. Comparative analysis of media education programs

Media education takes various forms in MELIA countries. From mandatory courses in media at even the youngest age, to media notions being included in other subjects, the diversity of approaches is significant. In this section, we offer information regarding different types of teaching media education (including media literacy) in some MELIA countries. First, we offer two critical examples from Slovenia and Hungary, which are telling for diversity existing in this sphere. Second, based on MELIA collected data, we offer a review of school curricula on media education and literacy in some countries of the project, where such curricula do indeed exist.

For example, in Slovenia – one country where media education is rather relatively advanced - content that educates primary school students about mass media is part of various courses that students attend during the nine-year period of primary education. Media education is also offered to students in the form of elective courses. In the last triad of primary school (grades 7-9), students can be offered three elective courses that are directly related to media and media education, namely courses entitled Media Education: Press, Media Education: Television and Media Education: Radio. From 2006, these courses are offered to primary school pupils as optional elective courses in those primary schools where teachers educated in media contents, who can carry out the lessons and act in accordance with the envisaged curriculum, are employed. In primary schools, where there are no teachers of media education, they are less likely to choose to offer these electives. In addition to elective subjects of media education, primary schools can also offer pupils in the last triad a subject called School Journalism. Recently - in 2018 - Film Education was added to the list of elective subjects, which is a positive step towards updating the content of media education.

Up until 1996, there was no special course in primary or secondary schools that would focus just on media education. One year later, there was a special international conference, which took place in Piran and was dedicated to the topic of media education. The event was co-organized by the Slovenian Ministry of Education and Sport, School Office of Slovenia, National Education Institute of Slovenia and the European Association of Audiovisual Media Services. As a result of the conference the National Curriculum Council of Slovenia decided to include Media Education in the school curriculum for the school year 1997/1998.⁷⁴

With the integration of media education in the school curriculum for primary schools, Slovenia became one of the first Central European countries who decided to do that. Media Education, which was in case of Slovenia defined as a process where children are teaching about media through the media, was offered as a compulsory subject to those interested children who entered last three classes of the primary schools.

The last change in school curriculum was made in 2006 when the name of the subject also got its own subtitle: press, radio and television. These topics are separately divided in three years, yet they complement one another. In introduction lessons, children are learning about basic topics that relate to media. For example, educators teach children about characteristics of the media, construction of media reality, promotion media propaganda as well as journalism ethics and standards. The goal of this subject is to raise the awareness among children to become critical citizens. As stated in the school curriculum of Media Education from 2006, there is, however, little said about the use of modern technologies like smart phones, tablets, computers and particularly internet.

Internet is just partly integrated in the school curriculum, yet it was written already in 2006. It should be taken into the account that this school curriculum is not in accordance with time we are living. In comparison to 2006, the use of internet has increased. It has never been easier to kids reach the information and share it to the community, yet without proper education they can become easy target for manipulation and victims of hate speech. There are, however, some possibilities for children to improve their digital skills in Slovenian primary schools. The latter offer Computer Science as compulsory subject for children in 4th,

⁷⁴ Dragan, A. N. (1998). Uvod. Vzgoja za medije z mediji. Zavod Republike Slovenije za šolstvo: Ljubljana.

5th and 6th class. In these subject children are thought basic things (like accessing, collecting, editing, evaluating and processing information) about computers and how to use them in everyday life Curriculum for Computer Science 2013.

Speaking about digital literacy in Slovenian secondary schools, we have to mention here Information and Communication Technology (ICT Studies), which is a mandatory subject for students who are entering the 1st and 2nd class of secondary schools. The school curriculum of the ICT Studies, which students have two times a week, is divided into theoretical (25% of time in the week) and practical part (65% of time in the week).

Media Education as a theme within existing courses

Children from Slovenia are shaping their first experience with the media already in their pre-school period in three different areas. First is the area of Arts where children are discovering media through games, films, television and educational programs. It is in this area where children are expected to use media, identify, comment and use them (recording, taking photos). Next, is the area of Languages, where children are teaching media through listening to fairy tales, singing songs or watching different video materials that are appropriate for them literature, books and reading. The last area, which is covering media, is Society. It is in this area where children are introduced with themes like commercials, trends and fashion. This is also the opportunity to encourage children to speak openly about prejudices or stereotypes that are presented in media .⁷⁵

Speaking about the media education in secondary schools, there is no special subject that would cover this area. It is integrated into already existing subjects like for example Slovenian language, Psychology, the History of Art and Sociology. In comparison to other three high subjects, Sociology is the one that gives the most emphasis on contents that are

⁷⁵ Lepičnik Vodopivec, J. (2011). »Some aspects of teaching media literacy to pre-school children in Slovenia from a perception standpoint of teachers and parents.« Acta Didactica Napocensia, 4(2-3).
<https://dk.um.si/lzpisGradiva.php?id=35406&lang=slv> Accessible on 21.02.2021; Rek, M. (2019). »Media Education in Slovene Preschools: A Review of Four Studies.« Center for Educational Policy Studies Journal 9(1):45.

relating to media. According to the Curriculum for Sociology (1993), students are here learning about media institutions, media persuasion and media propaganda.⁷⁶

However, from the perspective of Mrs. Hrast Debeljak this is “(...) *really not enough. I think we need a new course, but as I, you know, I think you probably too, new subject called Active Citizenship will be part of our school curriculum in the third year of the education, but it would be mostly, less or more about active citizenship and critical thinking (...)*”.⁷⁷

Principal of the high school later on in our interview explained that the best idea in her opinion would be to have media literacy education integrated in more courses. “*So I hope it won't be a part of only one course, but I think there will be multi, there will be more themes involved, more teachers (...)*.” She believes “*(...) that only in that way we can educate people to be really active citizens, to take part in our society (...)*”.⁷⁸

On the other hand, in Hungary, the new National Curriculum adopted in 2012, **MovingPicture** Culture and Media Knowledge is among the Arts, and its teaching is aimed at obtaining basic media literacy, especially with regard to the development of cinematographic literacy, and to explore the social role and functioning of the media. A system of skills and personality development that is necessary for students to be able to navigate and choose in the public created by traditional and new media, giving them the chance to be competent, critical, equal participants in the new social scenes.

Unfortunately, the conditions for developing media and information literacy in schools are not optimal. The Búvösvölgy Media Understanding Centre was established in 2014 as an informal development stage in Budapest, established by the National Media and Information Communications Authority to support children in the conscious and safe use of the media. The revised National Curriculum did not touch the essential elements. In the 2012 plan, motion picture culture and media literacy were separated, this is not reflected in the 2020

⁷⁶ Erjavec, K. and Z. Volcic. (2008). »Becoming Media Literate? Media Education in Slovenia after Ten Years. « Journalism & Mass Communication Educator 61(3).
https://www.researchgate.net/publication/43455566_Becoming_Media_Literate_Media_Education_in_Slovenia_after_Ten_Years/references. Accessible on 21.02.2021.

⁷⁷ Hrast Debeljak, B. (2021). Interview with the author. 20.01.2021.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

plan. Cinema is not the same as media culture. We should not train film directors, screenwriters, but really the mechanisms of the media, the concept of news, the process of making it, and the recognition of its truth content, with examples and analyses. This would require the training of educators who are interested in this area.

5.2. Analysis of media education school curricula

The project team applied a questionnaire to education specialists in seven countries from Central and Eastern Europe. This section presents descriptions of the state of media education in each of the seven countries.

Montenegro

In Montenegro, there was an anemic attempt to introduce a high-school level optional course on media education in 2005. The course was cancelled in 2007, despite high levels of interest for the course among students. Teachers had been trained by an NGO and the program was financed through Open Society Institute. There is only one media literacy course currently being taught at post-secondary level in a Faculty of Philosophy and, for the program to which it belongs, the course is mandatory.

Starting in 2018, the National Coalition for media Literacy was formed to develop a national policy of media literacy. Now, Montenegro does not have a national regulatory document for media education, nor is this topic explicitly mentioned in the general national curriculum.

The main obstacle identified by education specialists in Montenegro to the introduction of media education in schools is political will. Media literacy is an elective one-year program that is studied in the 2nd or 3rd grade of high school with two classes per week.

GENERAL OBJECTIVES OF THE SUBJECT PROGRAM

The general objectives of the course Media Literacy are:

1. Awareness of one's own attitude towards the media and media texts;

2. Development of the ability of critical reception of media texts.

A student will:

- understand that all media texts are constructs that do not reflect empirical reality, but construct media reality;
- understand that media texts are constrained by the use of creative language with its own rules;
- understand which determined the reception of the media text;
- be able to reveal the values and purposes inherent in the media text;
- be able to identify who benefits from the effects of media text;
- understand the role of the media in democracy;
- know and understand the basics of heads of media ethics.

3. Development of the ability to produce media texts with regard to their aesthetic, technological, and organizational-production aspect.

A student will:

- be able to construct media text using media language in an adequate way;
- be able to design a media text according to the type of audience;
- know how to use the media in advocating certain democratic values or ideas (civic initiatives, NGOs, etc.);

4. Encouraging, meaningful and productive inclusion of elements of media literacy in other subjects, especially in language teaching and literature, sociology, psychology, philosophy and history.

Germany

The national German curriculum includes media education and every age group from primary school to tertiary education benefits from media education integrated into the study of other topics. In primary education, media literacy is included in the disciplines of German language social and communication studies, while in the other levels of education, it is included in visual arts, civic education, history and ICT. Moreover, digital literacy and media literacy are considered complementary. Teachers employ a large variety of teaching and learning methods as well as teaching materials (including digital and multimedia tools) to media education topics, and students have the opportunity to produce media content extracurricular.

In general, those who hold a university degree can include media education in their courses, but media pedagogy and media production courses are available at university level for those who have an interest in media pedagogy. Due to the dispersed nature on the inclusion of media literacy across a variety of disciplines, approximately 60% of teachers do not have specific qualifications in media studies.

Among the obstacles to teaching media literacy named by German educators are the fact that other subjects have priority due to overloaded curricula oriented towards factual knowledge. This is also, why teachers tend to see media education as an extra workload.

Romania

Media education is included in the Romanian national curriculum implicitly at all education levels with the exception of the upper secondary level, where it is explicitly mentioned as the separate discipline of “Mass-media competence”. Each individual school is free to decide whether to introduce this subject in the school curriculum.

All other levels have tangential references to media literacies included in other disciplines (visual arts, Romanian language and literature, civic studies, information management and counseling). A shift towards media education is noticeable at the national level, marked by the replacement of the notion of “written text” with that of “multi-modal texts” in the curriculum for Romanian language and literature in 2017. It is currently at the latitude of

teachers' willingness to update their methods to include media literacy more prominently in their courses.

The general approach to media literacy is to include it within digital literacy. A large part of the style of teaching media literacy consists in frontal lecturing either traditionally or using ICT tools. Teachers in training can access media and communication courses during their post-secondary studies, but they are allowed to teach media literacy in schools regardless of their specialization. Around 80% of teachers engaged with media literacy do not have media-related education.

Media educators have a dedicated platform: Media Literacy Europe - MEDIAWISE Society⁷⁹ initiated in the spring of 2015 as cross-country informal network for media literacy practitioners in Europe.

The one major obstacle identified by education practitioners in Romania is lack of funding. The decision of many schools to drop the media education upper secondary course based on costs associated with technological and software support. There are many civil-society-led projects initiated to support media literacy in Romania. However, media education suffers from underfunding and policy gaps.

Croatia

The national curriculum in Croatia explicitly includes media literacy at the levels of primary, lower-secondary and upper secondary education. Media education is present in post-secondary education too, but it falls entirely under the purview of universities and faculties. In primary and secondary education, media literacy is taught within cross-curricular subjects and integrated into other subjects, mainly, mother tongue education the subjects of culture and media and ICT.

The tendency in Croatia is to understand digital literacy as part of media literacy or to view the two as unrelated. Feedback on the quality of curricula regarding media literacy indicated

⁷⁹ <http://mediawise.ro/>

that curricula are not detailed enough to allow teachers to create their own lesson plans on media literacy. Students have the opportunity to produce media content through school media or summer schools and workshops, but this is highly dependent on particular schools and teachers. Concerning the professional training of media educators, there are absolutely no regulations on the qualification of a teacher engaging with media studies. However, Croatian teachers interested in media literacy do have a network where they can exchange knowledge and practices at www.medijskapismenost.hr.

According to educators' feedback, the main obstacle to media education in Croatia is that policymakers are unaware of the importance of media education. Secondly, they believe that other school subjects take priority over media literacy and that the curricula are too overloaded to offer enough space to this topic. Moreover, respondents have reported research in Croatia which shows that Croatian language teachers themselves believe that they are not educated enough to teach students about the media. Teachers also complain about lacking educational materials, and in some schools access to technology support or even the internet. Respondents also believe that having media education teachers educated exclusively trained in media studies is a prerequisite for the introduction of a stand-alone media education course.

Czech Republic

In the Czech Republic, media literacy is explicitly included in the national at the upper and lower secondary levels of education. The upper secondary level includes a dedicated subject for media literacy, but it is also included in other subjects such as mother tongue courses, social studies, civic studies and history.

Media literacy and digital literacy are not integrated, being conceived as separate subjects. Feedback indicates that media literacy curricula are detailed enough for professors to create their own lesson plans.

Hungary

Media literacy is included in the Hungarian national curriculum, implicitly for the primary and lower secondary levels of education and explicitly only for the upper secondary level. Consequently, media education is mainly taught through a dedicated subject in upper-secondary education and integrated into other subjects in lower levels and well as in the upper secondary level (visual art, mother tongue, social studies, civic studies, history, ICT, communication, environmental studies, science). The dedicated course consists in media studies and is taught in the last year of the upper secondary cycle. Moreover, the subject of media studies is eligible to be an examination subject at the end of high school, which forms the basis of graduation from the upper secondary cycle. This subject is awarded one hour of study per week.

The focus of the media studies course is on protection of students from the negative influence of the media and critical evaluation of the media. The working concept of media literacy in Hungary places it as part of digital literacy or indistinct from digital literacy.

Concerning instructor training, MA programs on the pedagogy of primary or secondary school include media studies instruction. Media studies teachers must have a media studies pedagogy master's degree. These master's programs in media studies pedagogy have been implemented for the last approximately 15 years and they provide qualified instructors for media studies courses.

Media studies teachers in Hungary benefit from the support of the Hungarian Motion Picture and Media Education Association⁸⁰, founded in 1997.

Media studies used to be more extensive in Hungary. Our surveyed specialists contend that the Hungarian government may be an obstacle for improving media studies in the country, as they do not seem to support media studies. In 2020, the government brought a modification to the national curriculum, which restricted media studies to the last year of upper-secondary education.

⁸⁰ <https://mamome.hu/>

Slovenia

Media literacy education is implicitly included in the national Slovenian curriculum at the primary, low secondary, and upper-secondary levels. Therefore, media literacy teaching is integrated within other subjects (visual art education, mother tongue education, social studies, history, and ICT). Digital and media literacies are seen as related.

The approximate amount of time devoted to teaching media studies at the primary, lower secondary, and upper-secondary levels is 0-1 hour per week. The focus of media education in the classroom is mainly on the protection of students from the negative influence of the media with a heavy emphasis of dissuading students from bad habits of media consumption.

There are slight differences between the three levels (primary, lower secondary, and upper-secondary) as regards to the extracurricular activities that linked to formal media education. Therefore, activities as film clubs, school media (TV, radio, news, etc.), visits to the headquarters of professional media, competitions and summer workshops, media camps are found at all three levels. Meanwhile, study circles for film-making or media is taking place only at the lower secondary and upper-secondary levels and internship at media institutions only at the upper-secondary level.

Teachers can select their own teaching materials and have access to digital support for classes. Regarding instructor training, teachers with degrees in other subjects can teach media studies without a special qualification. Among the obstacles to media education in Slovenia, the following were identified: other subjects are prioritized, and teachers tend to see media education as an extra workload.

6. Media messaging in the project countries

This section contains examples of media messaging instances in the countries of the project, especially focusing on hate speech and disinformation. Project partners identified and summarized several occurrences of such media messaging in the written press, television or online media. Although the styles of reporting vary and the stories presented are somewhat diverse, they are all quasi similar in terms of the topics that were more often subject of disinformation or hate speech.

The table below presents an overview of the topics covered by the report in different countries.

Country	Topics covered
Covid-19	Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Germany, Hungary, Montenegro, Romania
Minorities	Czech Republic, Montenegro, Germany
Gender	Serbia
Ethnic minorities	Croatia, Serbia
Roma	Bulgaria, Hungary, Romania.
LGBTQ	Bulgaria, Hungary, Romania, Slovenia
Migrants	Serbia, Slovenia
Supranatural Phenomena	Hungary
International Relations	Czech Republic, Montenegro, Slovenia
Weapons	Croatia

First, the Coronavirus pandemic was very often the favorite topic of disinformation. The range of subjects varied significantly, from false information about miraculous treatments, to conspiracy-driven panic-inducing information about vaccination and its hidden agenda (i.e. surveillance by insertion of chips), to false allegations of infections of public figures.

Second, minorities were most often the target of hate speech, frequently combined with disinformation. In many countries, sexual and ethnic minorities are presented as enemies of the national community, the nation state, and the traditional family. The Roma minority is too often defined as the one group that is threatening the majority of the community. The LGBT community is also subject to frequent attacks from various directions and is commonly constructed as either a danger for traditional mores, but also commonly and deliberately associated with pedophilia. Finally, migrants are also generally portrayed as an inherent source of danger and insecurity. Third, disinformation also characterized some categories of international news, mostly in those situations where a country's historical enemy is demonized, in order to create fear and suggest the imminence of potential conflict.

As the information below shows, in some instances the parties responsible for inciting to hatred or spreading fake news were prosecuted according to the law, but most often, there were no legal consequences. Moreover, the impact of hate speech and disinformation was significant in many cases, as shown by the large number of people either joining into the various conspiracies usually launched by unknown authors or reacting to them by calling in the bluff.

The stories presented below are not a representative sample of media landscape in these countries, the main objective of this report being to introduce the reader to the diversity of stories, styles of reporting and methods used to fight against hate speech and disinformation.

6.1. Covid - 19: Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Germany, Hungary, Montenegro, Romania

The disinformation regarding Covid - 19 is very likely these days. In Germany, the demonstration from 18 November 2020 emerged from the comparison that was made between Infection Protection Law and the Nazi Enabling Act of 1993. The link made people mobilize against the Infection Protection Law often labelled as “National Socialism measure”, “firing order” or the “Enabling Act” – symbol of the absolute evil, which is used by the right wing groups to further an antidemocratic agenda or even to foster anti- Semitic narrative. To this initiative, more than 10,000 people were mobilized making the outreach and impact

of this disinformation far – reaching and very alarming. As it can be seen Covid - 19 topic is used to delegitimize democratic system and to shift the debate culture.

- In Bulgaria the disinformation campaign regarding Covid – 19 promoted that Bulgarian plum brandy might be used as a medicine against coronavirus pandemic. This has been ongoing throughout the last year and a half since the pandemic started. The stories capitalize on widespread rumors and target the whole population by speculating uncertainty. Fake news about Coronavirus in Bulgaria appeal to feelings of national pride, albeit represented by Bulgarian brandy, constructed as universal medicine. A long tradition and historically constructed facts help create a societal context in which uncertainty and fear are counteracted by stories of resilience based on adherence to tradition.

- Czech Republic faced the disinformation campaign against vaccination initiated by Denit N Daily. The impact was so significant that almost 40% of the population refused the vaccine. The strategy of Denik N Daily is based on three theories. First, whether the virus is artificial or not, case in which the narrative supports the idea that this virus was artificially created in China and it is a biological weapon. Second, concerns the vaccination, which according to Denik N Daily is a way to establish a new form of totalitarianism and an undercover for the microchipping process. Third vaccination is dangerous for health and body functions, causing death. Both vaccination and the restriction of social contacts were interpreted by the media as some kind of step – back to a non-democratic situation.

- In Hungary only one in six to seven people are sure about getting vaccinated. The lack of confidence of the Hungarian population in the Covid – 19 vaccination is caused by the conspiracy theories that have been bandied in the media. Some of them claim that the vaccine involves also microchipping in order to monitor people and force them cooperate with anyone injected. Moreover, while the EU approved vaccines such as AstraZeneca and Pfizer Biotech have undergone important quality control process, researchers due to the circumstances in which they were introduced have also publicly contested Russian Sputnik V and Chinese Sinovac.

- Like most countries around the world, Romania was not spared from the spread of fake news related to Covid- 19 pandemic. Flavia Grosan, a pulmonologist with a private practice supports the idea that patients are being killed by the usage of oxygen masks

because oxygen in excess provokes cerebral edema. She has stated that this infection is nothing more than an atypical form of pneumonia and it should be treated by short walks around the room and not by administering oxygen supplies. She even claims that she has successfully treated 1,000 people. Following the statements, Flavia Grosan has publicly declared that facial masks lower immunity. Moreover, it appears that Grosan has ordered nurses to secretly reject medications prescribed by doctors. Grosan's opinion gained instant popularity on 17 March and became a topic of national news, which led to a crisis in hospitals. An increasing number of patients were reported to refuse oxygen or intubation. The phenomenon started even before Grosan's misinformation was picked up by the national television.

- Another country facing the effect of false news related to Covid – 19 is Montenegro. On April 8, the portal alo.rs published the false news that the President of Montenegro, Milo Đukanović, was infected with Coronavirus and that he was in serious condition. In Montenegro, the news attracted attention because it was shared on the Facebook profile of the citizen Radovan Rakočević. The Montenegrin Prosecutor's Office charged Rakočević with committing the criminal offense of "causing panic and riots", and no criticism was levelled by the prosecution against the tabloid that published the news.

The source of information in the news is not stated / not specified. Montenegrin media did not report the false news as such, but it reached the citizens because everyone read that Rakočević was arrested because he shared the false news that the president was infected with the Corona - 19, so that in addition to the correct news, false news was launched. Rakočević was tried for allegedly causing panic, but was acquitted, and the reasoning of the verdict stated that any other verdict would be a violation of Article 10 of the European Convention on Freedom of Expression. 76,000 readers on the alo.rs website alone read the fake news, and the fake news was the topic of every media outlet in Montenegro and part of the media in the region, so it is difficult to estimate how many people it has reached.

6.2. Minorities

- In Germany, there was the case of alleged rape of a 13-year-old girl by the Southerners or refugees published in January 2016. The actors involved the far right "Convent of German-

Russians”, right-wing extremist groups from Germany (NPD, Bärgeida) and Russian media (Sputniknews, RT Deutsch, Perwy Kanal) can be described as initiators or at least as agitators of the incident. The target groups of disinformation was clearly the population group of German – Russians. The impact and the outcome can be classified successful since agitators mobilized 10,000 people in the federal territory for demonstrations. About 1000 people appeared at demonstration in Berlin in front of Chancellery. Ultimately, this disinformation – if deliberately created or not – led to a deterioration in German-Russian relations and to statements by high-ranking politicians. In addition, the already tense crisis in the German public was further aggravated.

- In Montenegro the former counselor at the Embassy of Montenegro in Ankara, Mirna Nikčević, had an outpouring of hate speech directed at the predominantly Serbian national community on Facebook. Nikcevic, discussing the Trinity Council on Facebook, held in front of the Cathedral of Christ's Resurrection in Podgorica, among other things, wrote that she would set fire to that church and "all the cattle there". This case of obvious hate speech benefitted from a double treatment, because part of the media wrote about it in a critical tone, while the media closer to the ruling structures relativized the story and tried to present it as freedom of speech.

Nikčević was found guilty before the Misdemeanor Court and sentenced to a single fine for 600 euros, for three violations of the Law on Public Order and Peace, for insulting the religious feelings of Irena Tatar, endangering public order and endangering personal safety. Due to hate speech, the counsellor was first suspended, after removed from office and in the end dismissed.

Although this is a person convicted of hate speech against a third of Montenegro's population, the Serbs, as well as the majority religious community, the Serbian Orthodox Church, the portal aktuelno.me published an interview with Nikčević in December 2020, which presented insulting connotations and again had outbursts of hatred towards previous targets. That is how she called the Serbian Orthodox Church a "political and criminal" organization.

- The Czech Republic's report in 2020 about expressions of extremism hate and prejudice in Czech Republic during the year 2019 revealed that there are a variety of ways

of stereotyping regarding Muslims. The common denominators of these stereotypes is terrorism. Muslims are “terrorists”, “parasites” or “an entity with the power to decompose the maintained order and destroy Europe”. The “nodal point” is based on several rhetorical topics:

- colour of skin (those who do not have “white” skin are excluded from public presence and public discourse as subjects);
- different cultural background;
- socio-economical differences: immigrants or other minorities – as it is presented – are ready to abuse “our” economic system and social welfare state parasitically.

In mainstream media metadiscourse, both disinformation and hate speech are understood as a threat to liberal democratic system and identity based upon belonging to “Western democracies”. This assumption is based on two basic cornerstones:

- the disinformation/fake news as a part of complex propaganda campaign focused on dissemination of mistrust and uncertainty among citizens
- the hate speech aimed at minorities is supporting the construction of “people” as territorially, culturally and economically homogeneous nation.
- Women are often victims of hate speech. In 2018, a tabloid in Serbia published in the news “TERRIBLE: The state of war in the city centre!!! The shots resounded, the husband fired several bullets at the woman and ran away ”- explaining that after a short quarrel, the man forcibly took the woman out in front of the cafe where they were and fired several bullets at her. Then he shot himself. The source is unknown/unreliable, but social media blew out of proportion the incident. The piece of news has strong impact by spreading “fear” to women and victims of domestic violence, inciting media dissemination by spreading misinformation - for profit, inciting internet anonymous hate speech.
- Two Croatian cases and one in Serbia highlight the way in which media messages can be direct against ethnic minorities. The first refers to the message of Ivan Dacic, a son of a prominent Croatian politician has posted a picture of a “ustasa” holding “cetnik’s” severed hand and was complemented with the text saying “to all friends Serbs, Merry Christmas”. It is well known that “ustasa” is a pejorative word, which associates Croatians with Nazi regime, while “cetnik” associated with Serbs, means being brutal and primitive.

Ivan Dacic has been judged in November 2019 and received 11 months of probation punishment as the post was considered incitement to hatred, and incitement to intolerance that targets Serbs as a national group. Secondly, there is a positive result of this event, meaning that this example is the unification of almost every official person and / or department condemning this act as hate speech sending a strong message through mass media that this kind of behavior is not acceptable.

- The second refers to the Marko Juric a Croatian journalist and publicist made defamatory statements against Serbian priests in Zagreb on a local TV station Z1 saying “Message to the citizens of Zagreb, everyone who walks along Cvjetni Square, be careful, since there is a church nearby where, to paraphrase a Serbian minister, chetnik vicars preside. Be careful, when you walk through Cvjetni Square, especially mothers with children, that one of these Chetnik vicars does not run out of the church and in his manner of slaughter perform his bloody feast on our most beautiful square in Zagreb, which may be marked with signs' *watch out for an aggressive Chetnik nearby.*” Z1’s broadcast concession has been temporarily suspended and so was the Project Velebit podcast where is editor. Marko Juric for breaching terms and conditions. It has been linked to controversy in 2019 for hate speech. Direct targets were priests of the Serbs protestant church in Zagreb. The main problem is that Croatian have not moved on since the war in 1990 and still see Serbs as their enemies.

- In 2020 in Serbia, a tabloid ran a story entitled "Horror in Borča, Shiptar traitors" - A photo in which a relative of a baker from Borča shows a double-headed eagle, an Albanian national symbol. The information came from Special Prosecutor’s Office for High-Tech Crime and the impact was significant by spreading hate speech against national minorities, endangering their freedom and security; inciting violence and discrimination against them.

- The Roma minority is habitually associated with widespread prejudice within societies. The public is generally exposed to the idea that Roma people are to blame in cases of violence, disease, break of the rule of law and many other negative situations. In supporting this pattern of beliefs, media, Courts of Justice, civil society, intellectuals are all contributing to reinforcing the already prominent anti- Roma prejudice within societies by supporting narratives that engender high emotional activation on such topics.

- In Bulgaria Roma people are usually portrayed as criminals who deserve harsh punishments. Most of the time media associates with Roma words like “theft”, “drug dealing”, “looting”, “conducting illegal economic activity murderers”, “colored thugs”, “pedophiles”.

- Bulgaria is not a singular country case where Roma are victims of racism or stigmatization. The case of the Hungarian village Devecser demonstrates how even the rule of law is bound to unjustly support cases against Roma community. A fistfight between two neighbors, a Roma and non – Roma, aroused because the non – Roma had parked his car in front of the Roma’s house. The incident and the story of the attack of the Roma family against the non – Roma family after the incident trying to revenge the lost fistfight have created the background so that the far – right party organize a protest against Roma. Organizers have claimed the demonstration to be a response for this alleged attack describing their aim as resistance “to Gypsies who lynch Hungarians” and “to Gypsy criminals unable to comply the norms of coexistence”. The manifestation took place in spite of the requests that were made to the police in order to deny permission of the demonstration. The demonstration started with speeches, which could be clearly considered as manifestations of hate speech, promoting ideas like: Gypsy people intend to exterminate Hungarians, that wherever Gypsy people appear ravages and destruction inevitably follow, Gypsy people are genetically coded criminals and that this genetically coded rubbish should be eradicated from public life.

Demonstrators expressed even their intent to trample the harmful phenomenon. Another speaker, the leader of the “For a Better Future Civil Guard Association” labelled the Gypsy collectively as criminals, parasites, and said that all the rubbish should be swept out from the country, and that people should organize himself or herself in every settlement in order to rebel against and expel the parasitical criminals. After the speeches, the fueled demonstrators marched across the village imitating a military procession, deliberately walking along the streets where Roma people live and loudly reciting racist and discriminative words and phrases like “Roma criminality”, “filthy Gypsies”, “you’re going to die”, “We will come back when the police are gone”, “We will burn down your house and you will die inside”, etc. At one point, the demonstrators began to throw stones, plastic bottles, and pieces of concrete at the houses of the Roma – two people were hurt, one of them being

the main organizer of the demonstration. Instead of securing the venue, the Police did nothing.

Two members of the Roma community filed a lawsuit with the legal support of the Hungarian Helsinki Committee. During the lawsuit, the police argued that the general discourse of demonstration could not and did not provoke incitement and could not be sanctioned by means to criminal law. The Curia has announced its final decision on September 2015, which agreed that the police was right and that any intervention in the moment the demonstrators were throwing stones could have done more damage than the suffering of the Roma people. Dissatisfied with the sentence, the Hungarian Helsinki Committee filed a petition to the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg. The ECHR delivered a judgement in favor of the applicants on 17 January saying that the police has committed an error by not providing protection under the freedom of speech for the anti - Roma racist and intimidating utterances of the speeches, and by failing to carry out identity checks on demonstrators and hold suspects for questioning. The judgement emphasized that the police's failure to act conveyed the message that the demonstrators' behavior is considered legal, or at least tolerable, that openly racist behaviors were left without consequences, and that the Hungarian authorities had not defended the applicants' rights to ethnic identity and intimidation-free private sphere. The ECHR held that the respondent State was to pay ca. € 10.500 to each applicant.

- In Romania the subject of Covid - 19 pandemics opened a covertly racist tone in content regarding the Roma communities after Recorder, an independent online outlet with national coverage, did a report on the outbreak of infections in Țândărei (Ialomita County). Despite the neutral tone, the fact that it mentioned that the causes of the Covid break up implied that authorities have neglected the beginning of the outbreak , that education and improper social conditions are to blame for people not practicing social distancing, the material ended- up being unlisted because of the hate speech outbreak towards Roma community in Țândărei.

The negative reactions was compounded by declarations from local public officials which grossly inflated the numbers of inhabitants that came back from work from other European states and potentially brought the virus with them. The default narrative has been

perpetuated by all the national televisions, more than half of them classified Roma people as affected communities dominated by violent criminals, clans, and uneducated ignorant people. A small minority talked about the slow response of the authorities and social system and material disadvantages. Even important intellectuals such as Vladimir Tismăneanu referred to Roma population as “crows”. The racist frame interpretation of the event lead most Romanians to the conclusion that the outbreak of Corona happened because a large number of Roma people returned from abroad ignoring the pandemic restrictions.

- Disinformation and fake news about the LGBT community is an efficient way to create divisions within the society. In Bulgaria, there is a significant social distance between the general population and LGBT communities. Most people feel uncomfortable having LGBT neighbours: 63 % if the persons are bisexual; 65 % if they are lesbians; 66 if they are gay men; and 68 % if they are transgender. *The main topic revolves around the online premiere, of “Don’t Tell Mama”, a new Bulgarian genre-defying novel that stands beyond the literary traditions and prejudice, presented by The Single Step Foundation and GLAS Foundation.* In fact, this event is associated with the efforts of NGOs fighting for tolerance and TV channels fighting prejudice. Per se, it is not an example of fake news, but rather an attempt to fight fake news by socializing the society in the context of tolerance and acceptance of minorities.

- In Hungary, the attacks on homosexuals increased significantly on 20 September 2020 when the book for children, *A Fairy Tale for Everyone* was published. The book retells 17 children’s tales but introduces members of ethnic, sexual or social minorities as heroes of the story. Soon after being published the book ended up, being boycotted by several people and organization who considered that the content of the book is a manifestation of homosexual propaganda and that aggressive homosexual lobby was trying to clandestinely slip the homosexual lifestyle into tells intended for the most vulnerable. Two days later a deputy head of the far right shredded a copy of the book during a press conference declaring that *No fairy tales for the aberrant* followed by a second public book shredding of the **Vaganybagoly book** which presents two mothers rising a children. Even the Prime Minister, Victor Orban declared himself against the book by saying that in spite of the Hungarian tolerance towards homosexuals, homosexuals should “*leave our kids alone*”. Further right sided public figures expressed their disapproval of the book by saying that the book intended

to convey homosexual propaganda, present abnormal behavior as novel and that the book was not fit for kindergarten and elementary school children.

During 3th October demonstration in front of the publisher's building, speakers claimed that education has a crucial role in the formation of one's sexual identity, hence the book was dangerous for children and that one of the greatest dangers to human liberty is liberalism. On the other side, the initiators of the first boycott had received life-threatening messages from commenters calling them "Nazi bitches".

One psychologist sustained the critical opinion on the book claiming that presenting deviant behavior like two princes falling in love with each other might be harmful. The opinion has been immediately criticized by hundreds of her colleagues for her outdated and scientifically controversial standpoint. The case ended up being brought to the court by the author of the book in her way to seek justice.

- Romania's attitude towards LGBT right was explicitly expressed at the referendum in 2018 on whether should the Romanian Constitution explicitly ban same – sex marriage. One of the latest high – level anti LGBTI efforts in the country was the amendment to the law of education proposing the complete ban of what is called gender ideology in schools, at all levels. The initiators of the amendment deplore or sex or gender proselytism as the main reason of the law. The public debate on the topic of the law offered ample space to use the term gender ideology to denigrate gender studies and transgender people. The most vocal parties, like the churches pushed forward ideas as gender ideology is diabolic, using terms such as anthropology manipulation and an academic posture, gender ideology is intellectual terrorism and a toxic lie. The views were supported by the conservative blogs and mainstream media who were favorable to the traditional values describing LGBTI people as "those who march their sexual promiscuities in our faces", "gender ideology is preaching monstrosities", "and gender ideology is an attack on humanity".

The amendment was voted in June 2020 and it was declared unconstitutional in December 2020. Cristian TV stations have continued to release material on the topic in 2021 affecting not only LGBTI communities but also sex educators and academics.

- In Slovenia, the subject of children adoption in the case of same-sex couples brings forward contrary attitudes in the society and media. The leftist support this kind of adoption

and the rightist oppose it. The topic of same-sex child adoptions was often covered in media in very emotional and ideological way, with conservatives opposing them on one side and socialists and liberals advocated them on the other. Again, the targets can be found on different sides: from LGBT community, left-wing parties and activists to traditionalists, Catholic Church, right wing political parties and activists and even Constitutional Court (which allowed the referendum). The initiators can be found on different sides of political space and ideological spectrum. The labels, used for the purpose of defamation, ranged from 'homophobes' and 'fascists' who are 'intolerant' and want to 'oppress minorities' on one side to 'decadents who destroy family' on the other.

6.3. Migrants

In general, migrations are one of the most important but also most neuralgic issues in the European Union in the last years. Even in the countries that are not affected by the phenomenon migration remains one of the most burning topics, evoking strong sentiments, emotions, accusations, counter-accusations etc.

- In 2018 in Serbia, a news flash online state "DETAILS OF THE INCIDENT IN VOŽDOVAC Libyans aggressively attacked the girl, and then attacked the communal policewoman". The information came from the Prosecutor's Office and the Ministry of the Interior. The impact was significant by launching the term of terrorism in association with this incident and spreading hatred towards migrants. It also caused the creation of an appeal to the authorities regarding a solution to the migration problem and contributed to spreading of fear and popularizing the idea according to which migrants are a danger to which no one is allowed to expose their children because they attack the inhabitants of Serbia for no reason.

- The migrant wave in Slovenia in 2015 was not only Slovenian phenomenon but also is concerned the entire Europe and as well some other parts of the world. What is interesting is the evident discrepancy between attitudes of citizens and the media with regard to the migration-related issues. While majority of people oppose migrations from the Third World, mainly from Muslim countries, and advocate for tighter controls at state borders, most media strongly promote open border policy and advocate for the reception

of migrants. This is related to left-right cleavage where this issue is one of the most divisive one, with the leftists oriented as pro-migration and the rightist as anti-migration. In this regard, majority of Slovenian media, which support leftist parties, have positive attitudes toward Third World migrations while the minority of media, which supports rightist parties, rejects them.

Media content that deals with the issue of migration is often very emotional and value-based, depending on the political and ideological orientation of the author. They often contain prejudice, accusations and even outright insults. The targets can be found on different sides: from migrants, particularly Muslims among them, and left-wing parties, politicians and activists to right-wing parties, politicians and activists and government institutions as well as general population (being labelled as “backward”, “xenophobic” etc.). The initiators can also be found on different sides of political space and ideological spectrum (generated particularly by right wing and left-wing radicalism), in political organizations, NGOs and media (both traditional and new). Those on one side are labelled as “xenophobic”, “racists”, “populists”, “fascists”, while those on the other side are “Islamists”, “terrorists”, “globalists”, “and terror-appeasers”. The outcome of such type of messaging is increased ideological polarization and radicalization, generating uncertainty, fear, and political distrust. We have been witnessing protests, signing petitions, recrimination between opposition and coalition, meeting proposal for referendum and establishment of new political initiatives.

6.4. Supernatural phenomena

- In Hungary, a glittering sphere that stood still in the sky seemed like a star, looked like it and was emitting pulsating lights created controversy. The phenomenon was reported to have lasted for about an hour long and then disappeared into the darkness. Many people immediately reported the event and especially in the times of social media, it quickly emerged to being in the spotlight with the fake scenario “Aliens could have been seen above Hungary”. Attila Mizser (astronomer) who said that the sphere could have been the Antares, the brightest star in Scorpion has clarified the event. It can be seen on the summer evenings in the southern part, causing many to notice it as its light squints very strongly due to the disturbing effects of the Earth’s atmosphere.

6.5. International relations

- Czech mainstream identified Russia and China as main sources of the spread of fake news. Apparently, both countries turn the reality upside down by a trivialization of certain phenomenon using manipulated photos or videos denying any news that reveal the disinformation character of what has been said, labelling opponents, and (paradoxically) using the rhetoric of citizens` freedom and denying any kind of violation of civil rights. If lately, China is the guilty party in spreading disinformation about vaccination and origin of Covid- 19, Russia seems to be the one interfering in the political issues of Czech Republic by bribing. Milos Vystrcil, the chairperson of the Senate of the Parliament of the Czech Republic, appeared in media as the one bribed by Russia to go to Taiwan. The mission was widely interpreted as a gesture supporting the democratic values violated by China`s politics.

- The Serbian portal borba.me published in June 2020, from "several sources" that "the state of Serbia is negotiating with Chinese officials to buy a loan from their Exim Bank for the construction of the Bar-Boljare highway section that goes through Montenegro". Eventually, the raskrinkavanje.me platform also determined that this was not true. The Ministry of Finance of Serbia also told the Tanjug agency that they are not negotiating on taking over the Montenegrin loan from the Chinese, and that news was transmitted by numerous regional portals - Politika, Kurir, Standard.me, Novosti, Srbijadanas, Seebiz, CDM, Nova, RTV and Blic. Although the news was officially denied in June, borba.me stated in a fake news story in September that their earlier writing, which had otherwise been denied, had been confirmed. It is not known if anyone was responsible for this publication, although the media publication was entirely produced by the media that published it; no source was mentioned that could be credible for creating the news.

- Hungarian investments in Slovenia became a burning issue, extensively covered by mass media, due to "special relations", i.e. close alliance between current Hungarian Prime Minister and leader of party *Fidesz* Victor Orban and current Slovenian Prime Minister and leader of *Slovenian Democratic Party* Janez Janša. In the last three decades, there were several foreign investments in Slovenian media space. The entry into ownership structure of the right-wing broadcaster Nova24TV by the side of Hungarian media companies Modern

Media Group, Ripost Media in Ridikul Magazine induced public controversy because the later are allegedly affiliated to Hungarian ruling party. Leftist politicians, activists and the considerable number of media raised concerns about 'Hungarian interference' in Slovenian political and public space. The rightist side of political and media space reacted with claims of political instrumentalisation of dominant media (including public radio-TV broadcaster) by the leftist camp who strive to maintain their media monopoly.

The primary targets were thus Janez Janša, his party and his Hungarian allies, although the leftist initiators became themselves targeted by their political opponents. The first were accused of 'Orbanisation' and promotion of authoritarian values, while the later of maintenance of media monopoly and leftist indoctrination.

6.6. Weapons:

- Croatia was annoyed by the Bosnian Journalist Avdo Avdić published on 13 March 2019 an article in the Sarajevo news portal *Žurnal* under the title "Consul Ivan Bandić coordinated an action: Croatian intelligence recruited Selačević's to transfer weapons to mesdžid in Bosnia and Herzegovina". The article stated that on two occasions' Croatian intelligence and diplomatic officers tried to recruit Selečić members to smuggle weapons and explosives in Zenica area. It also stated that Bosnia and Herzegovina security agency had documents to prove it. It implicated deputy minister of security of Bosnia and Herzegovina Mijo Krešić and Croatian consul Ivan Balabanić as coconspirators in this operation.

Žurnal, which first published the story, is a web news portal that first came online in 2009. Minister Mektić then went on and confirmed the story on *N1 television* (a CNN regional partner), *Radio Sarajevo* (founded in 2005.), and web news portal *Faktor.ba*. The story started on 13 March 2019 and has run its course by May 2019. There were several media events surrounding this story. First was the story itself, the day after came the reaction from all sides (mainly from Croatian and Bosnia and Herzegovina side), Then there was a talk of Bosnia and Herzegovina prosecution opening an investigation into the charges.

Avdo Avdić was an editor of the Information Program on Federal Television (a public broadcaster in Bosnia and Herzegovina) before being dismissed in 2015. There where media speculation that his termination was politically motivated, but the Federal Television's

general manager dismissed the charges. Dragan Mektic is a Bosnia and Herzegovina criminalist and politician.

Croatian intelligence services were the direct targets, but the whole story was targeted towards the Croatian president Kolinda Grabar- Kitarović, and implicitly the whole government. In addition, the timing of the publishing of that story was very serendipitous because Croatian Prime minister Andrej Plenković was in Neum on a conference, which was centered on the initiative to make changes to the Constitution of Bosnia and Herzegovina. The main source of information for Avdo Avdić was an anonymous source Č.H. who is a member of Selefic community. He claimed that during 2018 he was intercepted when going through the Croatia/Bosnia and Herzegovina border by Croatian intelligence officers and was asked to take a packet with firearms and take it to medžid near Zenica.

Among the notable people of Croatia who commented on the allegations, were the Croatian intelligence service (SOA), the Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs, the Prime Minister Plenković, the President Kolinda Grabar Kitarović, the Special Adviser to the Prime Minister for National Security Robert Kopal, the Political Scientist Jasmin Mujanović, the Minister of Croatian Veterans Tomo Medved, the Chairman of the Committee on Internal Policy and, Minister of Justice Dražen Bošnjaković.

Conclusion

In many countries, the concept of media literacy is still a challenge when it comes to transform it into applicable policies with clear objectives to reach. Although media education has a positive impact on democratic participation and active citizenship, many states seem to have other priorities that take precedent to the media literacy issues.

The information included in this handbook helps the reader form a clear and comparative image of the state of media literacy and media education in the MELIA countries. Discussions of legal provisions and institutional settings related to media literacy and media education are complemented by analyses of school curricula and styles of media messaging. Moreover, success stories are also presented, aiming to raise awareness about the numerous initiatives promoted by civil society organizations or public authorities, in the field of media literacy and media education.

The dynamic of the societies in which we live forces people to rapidly develop social and cognitive abilities of online social interaction without any guarantees of improving at the same pace their capacity to critically assess the information that they access. Thus, in spite of the fact that nowadays the consumption and production of digital content is high and media literacy implies developed digital literacy and ICT skills, citizens are still facing the peril of misinformation and exposure to antisocial radicalised type of content.

Although media literacy is a wide concept that includes technical, cognitive, social, civil and creative capacities alike, and although it represents an important tool for active citizenship that should have command of, many countries concentrate their approach on the ways in which media can be evaluated. By focusing almost solely on the critical evaluation of media, the relevance of media to the democratic process is usually ignored.

Media literacy is thus treated differently in the MELIA countries due to many reasons, such as the institutional context, the existing legislation, historical background and the involvement of public authorities in programs promoting media literacy. Most post-

communist countries still strive to create a legal and institutional context regulating media activities. Bulgaria, Croatia, Hungary, Romania, or Serbia are states where media literacy is not a priority since the socio-economic problems seem to be more urgent issue, in comparison to media literacy. Therefore, most of these countries do not have a clear strategy aiming to train people to accurately evaluate information. Even if most of the campaigns on media education fail to be organized because they lack guidance or funding, a positive tendency can be remarked related to the growing number of initiatives of the civil society in rising awareness regarding the importance of media literacy.

In every MELIA country there is at least one institution that is concerned with improving media literacy level whether we talk about a ministry, a media regulating authority or an independent agency. Among all MELIA countries, Germany is the single one where media literacy is most visible in terms of policy priorities. There are four institutions focusing on the media education implementation in Bavaria alone: the Bavarian State Ministry for Education, The Bavarian State Centre for Political Education, The Academy for Teachers Training and Personnel Management and the Standing Conference of the Ministries of Education. Having strong institutions is not the only criterion that leads to the improvement of the media literacy level, but a strong institutional context surely helps. After all, in Germany, the fundamental right of freedom of media has been enshrined since 1949, together with the freedom of expression, the freedom of broadcasting and the freedom of information.

By comparison, all the other countries in this project have a more recent history related to the laws regulating the media sector. Even if all MELIA countries have constitutional provisions or specialized normative acts regulating ownership, protection of vulnerable groups against hate speech or discrimination, some of the ex-communist countries still face problems with politicization of media and censorship - most probably legacies of the former communist regimes. Bulgaria and Serbia are two country cases where the level of freedom of speech is comparatively low. If Bulgaria is ranked 111th globally in terms of press freedom for a third consecutive year in the Reporters Without Borders annual edition of the World

Press Freedom Index, in Serbia the ruling party still has a huge influence on the media, through advertising paid for by public funds, the existence of strong informal networks and political influence over media ownership.

In all MELIA countries there are several projects concerned with improving media literacy level that contribute in different ways to the development of the democratic process. They either focus on rising public awareness about media literacy, collecting data on media literacy and education, influencing policy making, or contributing directly to school programs teaching media education. Among MELIA countries, Slovenia and Germany are the states where media education level is the highest. Since the 2016 the adoption of the strategic concept "Education in the Digital World" Germany has expanded the education responsibility of the federal states with regard to the complex integration of digital changes into the teaching and learning process. On the other hand, Slovenia's project MiPi, designed by the Agency for Communication Networks and Services of the Republic of Slovenia stands out for promoting media and information literacy.

One of the main areas targeted by the institutions preoccupied with media literacy refers to improving the level of media education among the youth. The AEJ belonging to the International Association of European Journalist from Bulgaria, the "Read between the lines" initiative supported by the US Embassy in Podgorica Montenegro and the Centre for Independent Journalism in Romania want to increase the number of students that participated in at least one programme of media education.

In some countries, there is significant progress in the ways in which media literacy can be or is assimilated in the educational processes. The Media Literacy Coalition from Bulgaria uses the help of experts in order to integrate mass media literacy into the educational process. The Cross Curricular Theme in Framework Education Program for Elementary Education in the Czech Republic influences in a positive manner the formation and development of key media literacy competences despite the insufficient number of teachers. Also in the Czech Republic, the non - profit organization "People in need – One World in Schools" is offering

educational programs and training of teachers, and provide a wide range of activities aiming to strengthen young people's media literacy skills.

More than proposing media literacy in school, rising public awareness remains one of the main goals of many media literacy active actors - either governmental or non-governmental – and this is a positive development, since it has a direct effect on developing active citizenship and democratic values. The Croatian Children of the Media project, which involves professors and final year students has as main goal the empowerment of media users in the field of media literacy, in order to become responsible and responsible users of media content. The Romanian organizations Forum Apulum, which implemented one of the first projects focusing on developing critical thinking among the Romanian youth and Funky Citizens Association, brings a major contribution to developing democratic values. In the same manner, the Gong 3 project from Croatia concentrates on enhancing democratic processes and institutions as well as developing democratic political culture. Having responsible participants to the democratic processes can be facilitated by strengthening the citizens' access to newspapers and electronic and digital media and enhancing their critical thinking abilities.

Another facet of the benefits regarding media literacy stands in the way in which institutions fight against internet hate speech, discrimination and other forms of unequal treatment. In this sense the Blue Cinema Project of the Pont – Mas Foundation from Hungary campaigns against internet bullying. The Click safe Serbian initiative fights for child protection on the internet against the threat of electronic violence to which they are exposed on a quasi-daily basis.

Since education is the most effective way to develop solid media literacy competences in the long term, all actors involved in media education advocate creating a curriculum which includes media literacy in schools at all levels. Developing and implementing media education programs remains one of the main targets of the institutions involved in promoting media literacy within MELIA societies. Despite the benefits that an increased level

of media literacy competence may bring, in most of the analysed countries, there are numerous implementation issues.

In some MELIA countries, media education is not introduced in the curriculum due to the fact that there is no political will. In such cases, teachers are trained mostly by NGOs as it happens, for example, in Montenegro. Nevertheless, in most cases media literacy is present in primary and lower secondary education. The main difference among countries that have already included media education in their curriculum, resides in how media education is implemented in the upper secondary classes. In Croatia even if the national curriculum includes media literacy at all levels of education, digital literacy takes up most of the space dedicated to media literacy. Besides Germany where a professor teaching media literacy must hold a university degree in order to teach the subject, there are many countries like Romania, where 80% of the media literacy teachers do not have certified specializations.

In spite of all the initiatives that different organizations in each MELIA country offer, many countries still struggle with the fight against hate speech and disinformation. Covid 19 was one of the most popular topic used in fake news in Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Germany, Hungary, Montenegro and Romania. Besides the pandemic theme, disinformation campaigns against minorities are also frequent. The Serbian community in Montenegro, the Muslims in the Czech Republic and Roma and sexual minorities in most of the countries are often the subject of both hate speech and disinformation campaigns.

To sum up, the perception of media literacy in MELIA countries highlights the importance and the effect that media literacy has in relation to the interaction between media and public opinion, democratic participation and active citizenship. Nowadays it is no longer sufficient to continue teaching civic education, media education or digital education as separate subjects. Today, media education is the solution to learn to critically evaluate information and to understand the relevance of media especially in the context of democratic processes.

In order to strengthen media literacy in MELIA countries, there is urgent need for public authorities to assume a leadership role. The myriad projects implemented by civil society

organizations are all incredibly important in raising awareness about media literacy and media education and, also, in offering different groups in society, especially the youth, dedicated programs through which media literacy competences can be acquired. Nevertheless, their work will be more impactful if clear policies were formulated and implemented. This means not only prioritizing media literacy, but also making an effort to group together all stakeholders and create a strong message communicating a unified perspective on the importance of media education in every society. Moreover, fighting disinformation and hate speech is also very important and strong measures discouraging or penalizing such behaviour should be taken in a timely manner.

Diversity of contexts makes the implementation of clear measures leading to increased media literacy competences difficult. From a political point of view, many of the MELIA countries are recent democracies, and their processes of democratic consolidation have been rather complicated, as some issues of hate speech, discrimination, disinformation and shaky media freedom regimes show. Nevertheless, it is very important that media literacy and media education are prioritized in each country. Moreover, creating a clear and unequivocal connection between media literacy and education on the one hand, and active citizenship, on the other, is also paramount. The youth are the democratic citizens of tomorrow, and their commitment to democracy needs to be unfaltering. Their resolute support for democratic policy making is also created by offering them the necessary skills for fighting disinformation, especially since hate speech and cyber bullying are rather widespread phenomena.

