

Media Freedom Literacy Round Table

6 December 2022, Vienna

Opening remarks by Teresa Ribeiro, OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media

Excellencies, distinguished delegates, ladies and gentlemen,

It is my great pleasure to welcome you to this Round Table, in which we will discuss the important subject of media freedom literacy as one of the most sustainable responses to information disorders.

In today's increasingly saturated and invasive information ecosystem, there is a growing need for the people in our societies to grasp certain competencies – the knowledge and skills to understand and deal with media, information and news in a digital world. These competences are necessary to exercise our human rights to freedom of expression and access to information both on- and offline.

The term media literacy is more often and widely used these days. As a composite concept, media literacy is an essential cognitive, technical and social skill and there are varying definitions of it. In our discussions today, we will explore the intrinsic connection between media freedom and media literacy. In other words, the knowledge and skills that enhance the ability to understand and value the democratic functions of media and other information providers, online and offline, and the importance of information pluralism. It also includes critical evaluation and ethical production of information and media content.

The need for governments to promote media and digital literacy, including by concerting efforts with media outlets and civil society has been stressed in several RFoM documents. Among these are the Communiqué on propaganda in times of conflict published in 2017, the Joint declaration on freedom of expression and “fake news” published in the same year together with other international freedom of expression Rapporteurs; the Joint Declaration on Freedom of Expression and Elections in the Digital Age published in 2020,

and the recommendations we have made at several regional conferences in the past few years. Finally, my office's Policy Manual: *Spotlight on Artificial Intelligence and Freedom of Expression* issued earlier this year calls on OSCE participating States to establish sustainable media and digital literacy programmes for all societal groups, as well as to promote awareness and digital literacy so that individuals are empowered to better manage their own media consumption and use of internet intermediaries' services. All of these documents can be found on our website.

Ladies and gentlemen, unfortunately many of the disorders we witness in our information spaces are here to stay. Today we would like to offer this platform, with different stakeholders from our OSCE region, to discuss on how we can collectively work to create meaningful response - by promoting media literacy and by building a critical view towards the avalanche of information people are receiving, but also by establishing trust in quality media.

As said, developing a coherent response to the negative impact of information disorders through media literacy requires a cross-dimensional and multi-stakeholder approach. It also requires the pro-active engagement of intergovernmental organizations, state authorities, public service media, media regulators, media outlets, business enterprises, civil society, including media organizations and academia. State authorities can be particularly instrumental in promoting media literacy by adopting relevant action plans and programmes with a view to enabling individuals to access, understand, critically analyse, use and create content and by providing adequate resources for these purposes. At the same time, it is paramount for the national authorities to ensure timely and free public access to information including through pro-active publication, as an effective antidote to the spread of disinformation. Transparency of the media ownership and financing is another reform area which should be pursued urgently as it helps citizens make an informed and critical evaluation of the information and ideas delivered by the media.

Education and capacity building is the cornerstone of media literacy. The current media landscape necessitates complementing media education with online assessment strategies, including effective fact-checking techniques, prebunking (anticipation), debunking (correction), civil online reasoning and other methods. In this, media can play an important role by promoting media literacy through a set of self-regulatory initiatives, strategies and activities. Especially public service media have to assume leading roles in promoting media literacy, by virtue of their objective and mandates.

There are many media literacy projects and initiatives in the OSCE region and it becomes increasingly important to create mechanisms and platforms to build stronger co-operation between all the different stakeholders – governments, academia, media, freedom of expression advocates and civil society in the media literacy field – to empower individuals with the means allowing them to have a better management of the information they consume and produce.

I am delighted to see so many prominent speakers, who are here today to share their insights and experiences on these topics from this cross-dimensional perspective. Together, we will contemplate on the collective efforts required by several stakeholder groups in the OSCE region, to create an enabling environment for everyone to freely access a plurality of information and make well-informed choices when it comes to their freedom of expression.

My Office will continue furthering media freedom literacy in the OSCE region, raise public awareness on its benefits and promote multi-sectoral collaboration.

I thank you for your attention and wish you a very productive day.

