



Supplementary Human Dimension Meeting II

Media Literacy and Democracy

Vienna, 27-28 May 2024

ANNOTATED AGENDA

BACKGROUND

From the OSCE's inception, the participating States have acknowledged that media are crucial for strengthening a climate of trust and co-operation within the OSCE region and, hence, contributing to comprehensive security. The participating States have repeatedly underlined that truly functioning, pluralistic and independent media are an indispensable part of our rule-of-law based democratic societies.¹ With new technological developments and the digital evolution, the way information and news are being consumed and shared has drastically changed. Digitalization and the rise of social media have in many ways facilitated access to information and created new spaces for communication, empowering previously marginalized voices and facilitating greater civic participation and mobilization. In particular for younger generations, social media have become the primary place where they access news or information and share content. However, technological developments have also brought many new challenges, such as the unprecedented flooding of the online space with mis- and disinformation, making it increasingly difficult to differentiate between facts and fakes. It has also led to the creation of information bubbles facilitated by algorithms that trigger polarization and, hence, negatively impact social cohesion. In contexts of conflict and war, information can become weaponized and misused for propaganda purposes, leading to enhanced insecurities. These developments have increased distrust among the population towards the media and democratic institutions, creating new or reinforcing existing cleavages in societies with negative implications for democracy.

Against this backdrop, media literacy has gained in importance and relevance. It enables citizens to navigate the modern media environment, to be able to participate in public debate in a meaningful way and to take informed decisions. Media literacy has become an essential tool to enhance the capacity of citizens of all ages, and particularly the youth, to understand and interpret information and provide them with the relevant and necessary skills and knowledge. Fact checking initiatives are equally growing in relevance and represent essential responses to the growing information disorder.

The ability to critically assess and use information, and to understand the vital function of media is an essential prerequisite for everyone to exercise their democratic rights and take active part in democratic processes, including in elections. In 2024, when a record number of elections are taking place across the OSCE region, and when information manipulation can massively impact electoral processes and the outcomes, the interlinkages between media literacy and democracy become more relevant.

¹ Copenhagen, 1990; Lisbon Summit, 1996; Istanbul Document, 1999; Astana Final Document 2010.

The second Supplementary Human Dimension Meeting will focus on these interlinkages between media literacy and democracy. It will provide a forum to explore challenges and opportunities in today's online information environment and their impact on democratic participation, discussing the role of media freedom and information literacy in promoting active citizenry and social resilience, specifically in an important election year like 2024.

Day 1

14.00 – 15.00

OPENING SESSION

Opening remarks

Introductory addresses

Technical information

15.00 – 17.00

SESSION I: Media literacy and social resilience: challenges and opportunities in the digital age

The first session explores the role the media play in strengthening social resilience amidst technological advances.

Technological advances have revolutionised access to a wide range of sources and sophisticated journalistic tools, improving the dissemination of news and enriching public discourse. However, the emergence of social media and artificial intelligence also poses significant challenges. These technologies, oftentimes driven by profit-oriented algorithms, have the potential to threaten democratic public debate, hamper the public's possibility to make informed decisions and undermine trust in democratic processes. In a complex global atmosphere, independent and diverse media are essential as they provide accurate and reliable information and mitigate the impact of misinformation.

Legacy media and traditional journalism had to undergo major transformations to adapt to these new realities and maintain their audiences. This is also true for Public Service Media, whose key role in democratic societies has long been recognized and valued as contributing to robust public debate in an inclusive manner. Declining revenues, budget cuts, and austerity measures add to the complexity of their situation. Technological developments have, however, also spurred innovation and creativity in the media sector. Innovative formats have emerged with the aim to foster investigative, data-based journalism that provides a counterbalance to misinformation and encourages audience engagement. New fact-checking initiatives have been established with the aim to provide well-researched facts instead of false information.

This session investigates the role of the media in strengthening societal resilience amidst technological and digital media advances. It explores the changing ways in which information is created, distributed and consumed, giving particular attention to younger generations and new forms of journalism, and assesses its implications for fostering informed citizens and robust democracies. It provides insights into the challenges and opportunities of the digital age, highlighting how media literacy and innovative approaches in the media field can enable individuals and communities to adapt effectively.

Questions to guide the discussions for this session:

- In the context of technological advances, how can the media adapt effectively to reach their audiences and promote access to information of public interest?
- What strategies should be adopted at the international and national levels to promote access to public interest information and ensure that platforms contribute positively to public discourse and uphold the right to freedom of expression?
- What measures should be taken to create a safer and more enabling environment for journalists to work independently? How can these measures strengthen the overall resilience of media institutions to pressures that threaten media freedom and diversity?

Day 2

10.30 – 12.30

SESSION II: Media literacy and informed democratic participation, including during elections

The second session will provide a focused discussion on the role of media literacy in the context of elections.

Strong democracies rely on the active and well-informed participation of their citizens. The session will explore the need to invest in skills and capacities to build an active democratic society. Equipping citizens with the necessary skills and knowledge to enhance their ability to understand and value democratic processes, including elections, as well as to critically evaluate the information they are receiving, is essential for the effective exercise of the right to vote. This set of skills, knowledge and competences – commonly referred to as media literacy - is of particular relevance for the fulfilment of “the ideals of democracy and political pluralism as well as [the States] common determination to build democratic societies based on free elections and the rule of law” as agreed by all OSCE participating States in the 1990 OSCE Copenhagen Document.²

In today's fluid but also highly polarized information landscape, the challenges to freedom of expression and access to information persist, both online and offline. Consequently, there's a rising imperative for individuals to acquire the competencies, knowledge, and skills necessary to navigate and critically engage with media, information of public character, and news sources. In that context, the participating States, their oversight institutions and all media have a fundamental role in providing accurate information on public events and processes, and striving to ensure information integrity, including by addressing manipulation narratives particularly present during election periods. Collectively, their aim should be the creation of an environment in which voters will be able to make informed choices, free of undue interference and manipulation. New technologies, social networks and online media, while providing great opportunities for free expression and dissemination of ideas, are often being misused and accompanied by a number of challenges, some of which can be detrimental to democratic societies.

The session will focus in particular on electoral periods and the role of State institutions, including election management and media regulatory bodies, in contributing to an environment, in which voters can make informed choices, free of undue interference and manipulation. Further, the session will highlight the importance of media literacy frameworks,

² See the [1990 OSCE Copenhagen Document](#).

tools and initiatives as necessary for informed democratic and electoral participation, as well as some of the common challenges present within the participating States and across the OSCE region related to this field.

Questions to guide the discussions for this session:

- How can media literacy initiatives address the challenges posed by misinformation and manipulation in today's information ecosystem, especially during election periods? What role do oversight institutions, media and civil society play in promoting information integrity?
- In what ways can new technologies, social networks, and online media be utilized to enhance media literacy and promote democratic engagement? What strategies can be employed to ensure that media literacy education is relevant to electoral processes and accessible to all segments of society, including under-represented groups and marginalized communities?
- How can international cooperation and collaboration contribute to the advancement of media literacy initiatives and the promotion of democratic values across the OSCE region? How can various initiatives to promote media literacy in the context of democratic processes be shared and tailored to address the diverse needs and contexts within different OSCE participating States?

14.30 – 16.30

SESSION III: Media freedom literacy as enabler of democracy and security

The third session will explore the nexus between media freedom and media literacy and their positive contribution to wider democratic processes and security.

The OSCE stresses the importance of adapting media freedom to the digital age and underlines the crucial role of freedom of expression and the flow of information in maintaining democracy, peace and security. The 2004 Sofia Ministerial Council Decision emphasises the importance of protecting these freedoms as digital technologies evolve and ensuring that the Internet remains a free forum for expression and a source of diverse information.

In this context, media literacy emerges as a critical skill that prepares citizens to navigate new forms of media and technology. Such adaptability is crucial for fostering civic resilience, allowing democracy to flourish. Understanding the nuances of the media landscape enables citizens to actively and meaningfully engage in democratic processes. Such active, informed engagement also strengthens the resilience of democracies by empowering citizens to create positive change and demand accountability from those in power.

Prompted by the many threats to media freedom, a new literacy concept is emerging – Media Freedom Literacy, encompassing a range of knowledge and skills that enables everyone in society to value the democratic functions of the media, both online and offline, and to understand the significance of a pluralistic, well-functioning media landscape, along with the ability to critically evaluate and produce media and information content. This also includes knowledge about the ethical and legal implications of today's digital ecosystem, and the importance of quality public interest content as an antidote to information disorders. Policies and initiatives that are anchored in this holistic approach, will pave the way for higher

effectiveness of responses to the current and future challenges in the rapidly changing media and information space.

This session will explore this new concept, and the nexus between media freedom and media literacy. It will also discuss the importance of inter-sectoral collaboration and the actions needed from various stakeholders, state and non-state, to foster media freedom literacy in the OSCE region, including some existing good practices. The session will offer tools and guidance on how to promote Media Freedom Literacy across societies and foster an environment where everyone understands and values the crucial importance of free and independent media for our democratic, rule-of-law based societies.

Questions to guide the discussions for this session:

- In the context of technological advances, how can media literacy be effectively integrated into public education and policy frameworks to enhance citizens' ability to critically evaluate news sources and content?
- How are media freedom and media literacy mutually reinforcing? How can innovative approaches in journalism foster civic engagement, especially involving the youth?
- What are the main enablers of effective Media Freedom Literacy approaches against the background of current threats to media freedom, pluralism and diversity?

16.30 – 17.30

CLOSING SESSION

Reports from the working sessions

Comments from the floor

Closing remarks