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**Region: Eastern Europe**



The First Eastern Partnership (EaP) Media Conference took place in Riga on May the 20th, as a side event of the 4th Eastern Partnership summit which gathered leaders of six Eastern European countries and the EU. More than 300 representatives of the media community, experts, academia, civil society and policymakers from the EaP and the EU discussed challenges media in the 6 countries experience, in particularly since the beginning of Russian-Ukrainian conflict and ever growing Russian propaganda.

At the Conference, organised by the Latvian Presidency of the Council of the EU, three different studies were presented. Each of them is related to Russian media interpretation of the conflict. As one of the outcomes, the conference provided recommendations regarding consistent and coordinated support from the EU to freedom of expression in the Eap partner countries.

While some media reported that [Russia casted a shadow](#) on the meeting between the

political leaders, those were the participants of the Media conference who posed the question about lack of any representatives from Russia.

'Regardless whether we like Putin or not, and it seems that none of us at the conference liked him, as journalists we should always give a chance to the other side of the story', said the Media Diversity Institute (MDI) Executive Director Milica Pesic, who was among the attendees.

'Not to have a single person from Russia - either from the Russian Union of Journalists which still cooperates with their counterpart in Ukraine, or some civil activists, independent journalists, media analysts because there are still many who are trying to oppose the Russian propaganda from within that country – gives an impression that the organisers of the conference believe that all Russians are the same. Simply, that is not the case. An excuse that Russia is not a member of the EaP and that is why its representatives were not invited, is not good enough either. Great Britain is not a member of EaP, but we see several invitees from that country present here,' protested Pesic insisting that a dialogue is always needed.

The media monitoring in Russia's neighbourhood presented at the Conference showed that political propaganda mixed with glamour and entertainment as produced by the Russian media is more than appealing not only to Russian ethnic minorities in those countries but to the members of the mainstream population too.

One of the media monitoring reports, "[Messages of Russian TV](#)", found that Russian viewers of television news and current affairs are being told that their country has been targeted by the United States in a 'western plot' to bring their country to its knees. Russian TV channels also accuse the US of fomenting the war with Ukraine, while the role of the EU has been downplayed.

'It is evident that Kremlin is doing its best to win 'heart and minds' not only of the Russian speaking neighbours but internationally too, through their media such as TV 'Russia Today'. What the international community should avoid this time is to repeat the mistakes from the Balkan wars from the late 20<sup>th</sup> century', says Pesic.

'We saw Milosevic, a little Putin, doing the same then – using media to spread his views. And we saw the international community putting millions in wrong solutions to fight Milosevic's

propaganda, such as the famous flop supported by Mme Mitterrand – a radio boat whose waves could not 'jump' over the mountains along the Adriatic coast. That's why is crucial to listen to the ideas of those from inside Russia, as well as those who have been through similar situations. In situation as this, it is not a problem to find money but to use them to fund feasible and fruitful solutions,' said Pesic.