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Country: Lithuania



Last week, Media Diversity Institute (MDI) Executive Director Milica Pesic participated in the Global Media and Information Literacy (MIL) conference in Kaunas, Lithuania, where she discussed our ongoing work countering hate speech in the media and online.

“What can we do with hate speech,” she asked during her panel, titled [Media and Information Literacy: Tackling Hate, Intolerance, Exclusion and Radicalization](#)

“At MDI we have different tools in our arsenal, but almost always find that when we encounter hate speech in the media, we struggle to choose the right tool to confront it. Do we complain to the relevant (self) regulatory bodies? Educate people who run the outlet, or post hate speech on the Internet? Mock it?”

In addition to our panel, MDI was able to participate in a robust conversation about the current

state of media and information literacy around the world today.

What is Media and Information Literacy

At the conference, media and information literacy was defined as understanding accessing information through libraries, archives and online resources to promote free and informed use of all information systems available. This began with a discussion of how the Internet, and digital media, have impacted digital literacy—particularly in the realm of media.

Anni Hellman from EC DG Connect brought up how our news sources are more and more fragmented and ordinary news consumers often lack time to assess the trustworthiness of information—and how this can impact democracy. The Council of Europe's Patrick Pennickx shared that he sees the digital revolution as more insidious than the industrial revolution, particularly in its power to influence the state and society. "The virtual world is also the real world," he said, giving the example of the Internet being the first place that many meet their life partners.

On the subject of the Internet, Sorbonne Nouvelle University professor and keynote speaker Divina Frau-Meigs stressed that we need to adapt the metaphors and terminology that we use to describe the Internet with its changing nature. She explained that we have gone from "surfing" a free and open web to "mining" content, using the example of three different colored continents. First, there is the blue continent where social media and search engines are owned by companies. Next, the orange continent which offers open source alternatives. Lastly, there is the black continent—the dark web of private networks, often engaging in illegal activities. This is where cyberterrorism and radicalization happens—while terrorists use the "blue" continent to spread propaganda, the "black" continent is where they coordinate their activities.

Frau-Meigs is quick to say that while the Internet has facilitated radicalization, it has not caused it. She also stressed that good media and information literacy practices are not just good personal practice, but should be integrated into public policies.

Improving Media Literacy

While almost every participant espoused the merits of improving media literacy education, LSE Professor Sonia Livingstone pointed out that it could hold unforeseen challenges. For one, there is an exponential rate of digital growth that even experts struggle to explain—how can teachers keep up with this rapidly changing field?

Elizabeth Milovidov pointed out that the Council of Europe's [Internet Literacy Handbook](#) offers families, educators and policy-makers easy tips and technical knowledge to help young people navigate communication technologies. These tips and technologies can be truly groundbreaking; Supreet Karanjit Singh shared that her organization, Red Dot Foundation in India, is addressing sexual harassment in India with a web app that allows people to report sexual harassment, with the goal of using the data to create a map of the most dangerous areas of the country. In a country where 20 percent of these events are reported, and justice is rarely served, this proves that media and information literacy can be truly life-changing.

We are also excited to see Jordanian Media Institute (JMI), who MDI has worked with in Amman, win one of the #GlobalMILWeek awards—congratulations!