DEVELOPMENT OF MEDIA LITERACY AS A KEY REQUIREMENT OF THE EUROPEAN UNION

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ABSTRACT

This article traces the key documents of the European Union related to the media literacy development. Along with that it offers a new and more extended understanding of the very concept due to the rapid dynamics of the interaction of various political, technological and socio-cultural factors. The article is a part of an in-depth research offering a self-sustainable model for media literacy development in Bulgaria.

Key words: media literacy, EU, digitization, technologies

Mediatization is a term by which we designate the global penetration of the media in each sector of modern life`(Peicheva, 2016). Media play paramount importance equally crucial for institutions that structure every sector of social life, as well as for individuals in all their activities. There is no doubt the constantly growing time spent in media usage – computers, tablets, laptops, smartphones etc.-an indispensable part of life in the digital era, change radically the way we live and interact, and hence faces our main values with new challenges. Digital media give birth to new practices that shape both our behavior and mentality.

The more important the role of the media, the more needy is the identification and application of ways for management of media skills and competences. Hence, the growing importance of media literacy, which can be oriented in at least three directions:

a) Skills to access media, critical analysis and understanding of all kinds of media genres and formats, as well as skills to communicate through the media in various contexts;

b) Educational approach based both on critical thinking development and digital media usage and application;

c) Social inclusion and active civic participation in modern society.

Such an understanding goes far beyond the traditional concepts about media application and challenges a great deal of the perceptions related to what media usage means. This is due to the fact that on the one hand digital media tools provide billions of people with enormous opportunities to self-express themselves publically, and on the other, that those opportunities can be misused with. Today societies around the world witness unseen usage of hate speech, online abuse, violations of privacy etc. that could endanger the psychological wellbeing not only of public figures and journalists, but also of all consumers of social media and digital media tools. Such developments make people vulnerable to media manipulation as the endless flow of information exchange available via media 24 hours a day, 365 days a year contains a great deal of fake news and information disorders affecting people's mentality and behavior, their thinking, opinions and attitudes.

The analysis of the growing number of terrorist attacks and that of the different incidents and cases of violence taking place around the world show undeniably the fact that extremist groups are using more and more the internet and social networks for dissemination of hate speech and broadening of their influence. This context requires urgent steps in terms of policies taking into consideration the need of improved media literacy and critical consideration of world affairs. Hence, the European Union draws the attention upon those developments and in various documents stresses the importance of media and digital media literacy development in its member-states. Over the last decade media literacy is regarded as a key priority in maintenance both the rule of law and sound democracy. The European Commission pays efforts to formulate a common strategy in media literacy development and to push governments undertake concrete steps in this direction. *The European Approach to Media Literacy Formation in Digital Environment* (cf. EU Commission, 2007: Media Literacy: Do People Really Understand How to Make the Most of Blogs, Search Engines or Interactive TV?, http//Europa.eu/rapid/press-release_IP-071970_en.htm?locale=en)   and the *Recommendation on Media Literacy Development in Digital Environment for More Competitive Audiovisual and Content Industry and an Inclusive Knowledge Society,* 20.08.2009, can be regarded as leading initiatives in this field. According to the European Commission, media literacy is a matter of inclusion and citizenship in contemporary information society. Reading and writing skills are no longer sufficient to allow young people to successfully cope with the new digital world; people need also skills for analysis and evaluation of media content…and this makes information and education development even

more important than regulation. (Mary, Sol Perez Guevara (2017), EU Policy and Actions Related to Media Literacy, pp. 19-28 in Walbring, Ingela and Pekkala, Lars (eds.) Citizens in a Mediated World: A Nordic Baltic Perspectives on Media and Information Literacy. Goteborg: Exacta Print). The Paris Declaration and the European Union Work Plan aimed at Youth, 2016-2018 talk extensively about the need of media literacy development. According to the declaration, there are three key reasons that require the increasing importance of media literacy:

a) Importance of media literacy to democratic development

b) Potential of media literacy to explains the complexity of media landscapes

c) Capacity of media literacy to combat radicalization and encourage observation of main human rights (http://ec. europa.eu/education/news/20160316-paris-declaration-education_en).

The definition of media literacy used by the European Commission goes as follows: "Media literacy is the ability to access the media, to understand and to critically evaluate different aspects of the media and media contents and to create communications in a variety of contexts. It includes all media. The aim of media literacy is to increase people's awareness of the many forms of media messages encountered in their everyday lives. Media messages are the programmes, films, images, texts, sounds and websites that are carried by different forms of communication.Media literacy is a matter of inclusion and citizenship in today's information society. It is a fundamental skill not only for young people but also for adults and elderly people, parents, teachers and media professionals In short, Media literacy is the ability to access, use, evaluate, create and participate in the media. These competencies are considered to be key 21st century skills and a pre-requisite for an active and full citizenship. Critical understanding is the ultimate focus (and ambition) of media literacy. It should be identified as the key factor in the development of education and policy. This includes increasing competences for the understanding of media content and function; increasing knowledge about media context; and enabling sound judgment when adopting appropriate user behavior." (A Report on Media Literacy, available at http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/IDA). The report defines the following levels of media literacy:

Extensive knowledge on all types of media, from print to virtual communities

Active usage of all media types, including interactive television, and participation in virtual communities; more effective usage of media potential in regard to their cultural and entertainment functions; using media for intercultural dialogue, podcasting etc.

Critical attitude towards media both in terms of quality and precision of content; skills for proper evaluation of information; efficient usage of browsers as well as adequate response to media advertising;

Creative usage of the media in terms of the ongoing development of media technologies, enhanced access to the internet which allows more and more citizens of Europe to create and disseminate text, images and other forms of media content;

Understanding of media economy, media pluralism and media ownership;

Knowledge on authorship rights and copyrights etc. all of them of paramount importance to the legal culture especially in regard to young people who are simultaneously consumers and creators of media content.

According to the Report, "the very aim of media literacy is to bring about increased awareness of the different forms of media messages encountered on daily basis. This literacy has to make people understand how media filters believes and attitudes, shapes popular culture and affect personal choices. Media literacy allows for development of critical thinking and creative skills."

All those aspects of media literacy impact different spheres of public policy such as personal wellbeing, health, education etc. From such a perspective the European Union understanding of media literacy reconfirms UNESCO's strategic goal related to education, i.e. media literacy integrates all principles and values of sustainable development in learning and education. Therefore, the European Parliament Declaration issued on 16th December 2008 states that, "The European Parliament

having regard to the 2005 UNESCO Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions, the Directive 2007/65/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 11 December 2007 amending Council Directive 89/552/EEC on the coordination of certain provisions laid down by law, regulation or administrative action in Member States concerning the pursuit of television broadcasting activities and in particular to Recital 37 of Directive 2007/65/EC and Article 26 of Directive 89/552/EEC, as well as the Decisions of the Committee on Culture and Education prescribes the following thirty requirements:

1. Welcomes the Commission Communication on media literacy in the digital environment, but believes that there is room for improvement to the extent that the European approach intended to foster media literacy needs to be more clear cut, especially as regards the inclusion of traditional media and recognition of the importance of media education;

2. Welcomes the Council conclusions on intercultural competences; looks to the Member States to do their utmost to promote media literacy and proposes that the Member States" contact committee, as provided for in Directive 89/552/EEC, be strengthened through the recruitment of education experts;

3. Urges the Commission to adopt a recommendation, and develop an action plan, on media literacy; urges the Commission to organize a meeting of the contact committee on Audio-Visual Media Services with a view to facilitating information exchanges and effective cooperation on a regular basis;

4. Requests the authorities responsible for regulating audiovisual and electronic communications to cooperate at the various levels for the improvement of media literacy; recognizes the special need to develop at national level both codes of conduct and common regulatory initiatives; highlights the need for all stakeholders to be involved in promoting the systematic study and regular analysis of the various facets and dimensions of media literacy;

5. Recommends that the Commission also use the Media Literacy Expert Group to discuss media education matters and that the Group meet more regularly and consult, on a regular basis, the representatives of all Member States;

6. Notes that, in addition to policy-makers, journalists, radio and television broadcasters and media companies, it is mainly small local entities such as libraries, adult education centers, citizens" cultural and media centers, further education and training establishments and citizens" media (e.g. community media) that can make an active contribution to promoting media literacy;

7. Calls on the Commission to devise media literacy indicators with a view to fostering media literacy in the EU in the long term;

8. Notes that media literacy denotes the ability to use individual media unaided, to understand, and bring critical assessment to bear on, the various aspects of media as such and media content, and to communicate – irrespective of the context – and create and disseminate media content; notes in addition that, given the many sources available, what is most important is the ability to separate out information from the new media's flood of data and images and to categorize that information;

9. Stresses that media literacy is a basic element in consumer information policy, awareness of and familiarity with matters relating to intellectual rights, the mobilization and democratic participation of citizens and the promotion of intercultural dialogue;

10. Urges the Commission to expand its policy to promote media literacy, working together with all EU bodies and with local and regional authorities, and to intensify cooperation with UNESCO and the Council of Europe;

11. Maintains that media education activities have to encompass all citizens – children, young people, adults, older people, and people with disabilities;

12. Points out that acquiring media literacy begins in the home with learning how to select from the media services available – stressing in this regard the importance of media education for parents, who play a decisive role in the development of children's media-use habits – and continues at school and during lifelong learning, and is strengthened by the efforts of national, governmental and regulatory authorities and the work of media professionals and institutions;

13. Notes that the purpose of media literacy is to enable people to use media and their content in skilled and creative ways, critically analyze media products, understand how the media industry works, and produce media content by their own efforts;

14. Recommends that media education should shed light on copyright aspects of media use and on the importance of respecting intellectual property rights, in particular regarding the Internet, as well as on data and privacy security and the right of informational self-determination; stresses the need for new media-literate users to be aware of the potential risks concerning IT security and the security of personal data, and of the risks relating to cyber-violence;

15. Points out that advertising is an important part of the services provided by the media today; stresses that media literacy helps to provide criteria for assessing the tools and practices used in advertising;

16. Calls on European policy-makers to narrow the digital divide between Member States and between town and country by developing the information and communication infrastructure and, above all, setting up broadband in areas not fully equipped;

17. Notes that providing access to broadband Internet is also important for services of general interest and should be characterized by variety, a high level of quality, and affordability, and maintains that every citizen should have the possibility of using an inexpensive broadband connection;

18. Maintains that media education should be an element of formal education to which all children should have access and which should form part and parcel of the curriculum at every stage of schooling;

19. Calls for media literacy to be made the ninth key competence in the European reference framework for lifelong learning set out in Recommendation 2006/962/EC;

20. Recommends that media education should, as far as possible, be geared to practical work and linked to economic, political, literary, social, artistic, and IT-related subjects, and suggests that the way forward lies in the creation of a specific subject – "Media Education" – and in an interdisciplinary approach combined with out-of-school projects;

21. Recommends that educational establishments encourage the development of media products (printed page, audio/video new media) in a manner involving both pupils and teachers, as a way of providing practical training in media literacy;

22. Calls on the Commission, when, as announced, it lays down the media literacy indicators, to take into account both the quality of school tuition and teacher training in this field;

23. Notes that, in addition to educational and education-policy considerations, technical equipment and access to new technologies are also of vital importance, and maintains that

school facilities need to be substantially improved so as to enable all schoolchildren to have access to computers, the Internet, and the necessary instruction;

24. Maintains that media education is a matter of particular importance in special schools, given that, when people have disabilities, the media can often do a great deal to overcome obstacles to communication;

25. Recommends that compulsory media education modules be incorporated into teacher training for all school levels, so as to enable the subject to be taught intensively; calls on the relevant national authorities to familiarize teachers of all subjects and at every type of school with the use of audiovisual teaching aids and with the problems associated with media education;

26. Emphasizes the need for regular exchange of information, good practices and, in the field of education, pedagogical methods between Member States;

27. Calls on the Commission to devote a specific section of the successor to the MEDIA 2007 program to promoting media literacy, as the current program contributes little to the promotion of media literacy; supports the Commission's proposal to develop a new program called "Media Mundus" to support international cooperation in the audiovisual sector; calls for media literacy to feature more prominently in other EU support programs, especially Lifelong Learning, eTwinning, Safer Internet and the European Social Fund;

28. Maintains that media work with older people has to be done at the places where they are to be found, such as societies, old people's and nursing homes, assisted living facilities, recreational and enthusiasts" clubs, action committees, or senior citizens" groups;

29. Notes that digital networks enable older people in particular to share in everyday life by communicating and to remain independent for as long as possible;

30. Points out that the different kinds of environment in which older people live and their varied spheres of experience, as well as the way they use the media themselves, must be taken into account in media education aimed at them;

Those detailed requirements are not at all accidental bearing in mind that it is expected that media in all its forms will increase between ten and one hundred times its current volume in the next decade. Therefore, in the current environment and in view of future innovation, media literacy is no longer an advantage, its lack is rather a debilitating disadvantage. With the rapid rise of digital technology and its increasing use in business, education and culture, it is important to ensure everyone can understand and engage with digital media. Media literacy education is essential to safeguard European democracy. A media literate population is informed, engaged and responsible in their media use, both as consumers and producers. n the information age, it is necessary to be media literate in order to participate fully in public life, including in commerce, society and politics.

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РАЗВИТИЕТО НА МЕДИЙНАТА ГРАМОТНОСТ КАТО КЛЮЧОВО ИЗИСКВАНЕ НА ЕВРОПЕЙСКИЯ СЪЮЗ

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РЕЗЮМЕ

Тази статия проследява ключовите документи на Европейския съюз, свързани с развитието на медийната грамотност. Заедно с това тЯ предлага ново и по-разширено разбиране на самата концепция, поради бързата динамика на взаимодействието на различни политически, технологични и социокултурни фактори.

Статията е част от задълбочено проучване, предлагащо самоустойчив модел за развитие на медийната грамотност в България.

Ключови думи: медийна грамотност, ЕС, дигитализация, технологии