

Media and Information Literacy - Policies and Practices

Introduction to the research report – Macedonia

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Strengthening the role of the Macedonian Radio-Television in promoting media and information literacy

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1. State institutions disinterested in media and information literacy

Media and information literacy in Macedonia came to the fore in 2009, as a result of the initiatives by several civil society organizations. Yet, even after ten years, the interest of the institutions about media literacy still remains on the margins, and the citizens have a very low understanding of the true essence of the concept and its significance for democracy.

There are no clear-cut definitions and guidelines for advancing media and information literacy (MIL) in the Macedonian legislation. The notion of media literacy in the Macedonian legislation was introduced with the adoption of the Law on Audio and Audiovisual Media Services (LAAVMS) in 2013. The Law does not offer a definition, instead it only stipulates that the Agency for Audio and Audiovisual Services shall promote media literacy (Article 26), and the Public Service Broadcaster (MRT) is obliged to create and broadcast programmes for encouraging media literacy (Article 110).

The strategic documents of the Ministry of Education and Science (MES) and the Ministry of Information Society and Administration (MISA) focus on the introduction of information and communication technologies (ICT) and the development of digital literacy. The MES "*Strategy for Education Development 2018-2025*"¹ does not cover the essence behind the introduction and development of MIL, but the relevant priorities focus mainly on acquiring digital skills by the students and staff, providing the didactic material and ensuring greater efficiency in its use.² The MISA "*Strategy of e-Inclusion*" (2011)³ aims to make ICT more accessible to all citizens and age groups across the country, to optimize the formal and non-formal education, and to ensure greater availability of the electronic government information and services. Although MISA has also adopted a "*Strategy for e-Content Development 2010-2015*",⁴ which envisages the creation of publicly available digital content in Macedonian (e-textbooks, commercially available e-content, etc.), as well as the "*Action Plan 2016-2017*"⁵ for enhancing the curricula in the primary and secondary

¹ MES. 2018. "*Strategy for Education Development 2018-2025*". Skopje: MES. Available at: <http://www.mon.gov.mk/index.php/2014-07-23-14-03-24/vesti-i-nastani/2168-2018-2025>.

² Ibid. p. 63.

³ MISA. 2011. "*Strategy of e-Inclusion 2011-2014*". Skopje: MISA. Available at: http://www.mio.gov.mk/sites/default/files/pbl_files/documents/strategies/Strategija_za_e-inklucivanje.pdf.

⁴ MISA. 2010. "*Strategy for e-Content Development 2010-2015*". Skopje: MISA. Available at: http://www.mio.gov.mk/sites/default/files/pbl_files/documents/strategies/strategija_e-sodrzeni_2.pdf.

⁵ MISA. 2016. "*Action Plan 2016-2017*". Skopje: MISA. Available at: http://www.mio.gov.mk/sites/default/files/pbl_files/documents/strategies/Akciski%20plan%202016%20-%202017_avgust2015.pdf.

schools,⁶ the implementation of all the afore documents in practice is quite slow and not effective enough.

1.1. Learning “media culture” instead of MIL as an approach in the educational process

Due to the lack of a systematic approach to introducing and studying MIL in the education, certain aspects of the area are presented in a chaotic manner, i.e. practically scattered throughout the curriculum, in different subjects and thematic units.

From 2009 to 2011, the Macedonian Institute for Media and the Institute for Democracy “Societas Civilis” trained over 1.000 primary and secondary native language teachers how to transfer the knowledge of the basic concept of media literacy to their students. Despite the cooperation with the Bureau for the Development of Education (BDE) and the MES in the framework of this project, media literacy was not included in the syllabus during the curriculum reforms in the past ten years.

The modernization of the education process in the past ten years focused more on introducing ICT, primarily as a didactic tool for interactive learning.⁷ In the past, through various projects, such as “Computer for Every Child”, the state provided computerization and introduction of the Internet in schools across the country, but this did not prove to be successful, as the established infrastructure was not efficient and appropriately used. Schools have neither sufficient, nor adequate computer equipment, let alone an Internet connection which would enable the teachers to continuously use ICTs in the educational process without any interruptions.⁸

In the past years, with the revision of the curricula and syllabus in the primary and secondary education, several projects were implemented (created Internet portals for e-textbooks and subjects included in the education), as well as trainings for teachers on digital literacy and the use of ICT in the teaching process. Even despite this, some professors “still do not understand what the application of ICT in the education actually means”.⁹ Moreover, compulsory subjects that integrate ICT in the primary education (Informatics, Working with Computers, Basic Programming, Innovations) have been introduced, while in the secondary education there were changes in the syllabus in certain subjects (Programming Languages, Informatics, Native Language).¹⁰

The practice and research show that additional efforts are needed by all actors in the educational process so that ICT can be effectively implemented in the education, and for the concept of MIL to be introduced as an approach to the educational process, rather than just focus on learning only about the “media culture”.¹¹ In order to incorporate the suggestions of the civil society and the educational institutions regarding the introduction of MIL in the educational process, in 2018, the BDE expressed their readiness for ensuring greater cooperation with the relevant actors working in the field. Thus, in cooperation with the School of

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Shopar, V., Kjupeva, T. and Temenugova, A. 2016. *Media literacy in Macedonia: the missing link in the active citizenship*. Skopje: SJPR. Available at: <http://www.medium.edu.mk/attach/Summary-of-MIL-research-in-Macedonia-ENG.pdf>, p. 32.

⁸ Ibid. p. 34.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid. p. 28.

¹¹ “Media Culture” refers to all the subject matter topics taught as part of the subject native language and literature from the fifth to the ninth grade, i.e. 10 classes per year. As part of these classes, the pupils/students learn topic relate to the media, i.e. media and types of media, film art, theatre, music etc.

Journalism and Public Relations, between June and November 2018, the Bureau conducted research and “scanned” the primary school curricula and syllabus focusing on media literacy in order to identify the shortcomings and to propose solutions as to where and how to intervene and include this concept in the education.

1.2. The regulator – the most engaged institutional actor

The Agency for Audio and Audiovisual Media is the only state institution active in the field of media literacy, acting in accordance with the obligations prescribed by the Law on AAVMS (2013).

As early as 2015, the Agency prepared a “*Draft Program for Encouraging Media Literacy in the Republic of Macedonia*”,¹² and despite the limited financial resources it still manages to achieve its goals. Media literacy is one of the key priorities in the Agency’s “*Strategy for the Development of Audio and Audiovisual Activity 2018-2022*”, which is being prepared in the course of 2018.

The Regulator conducted a *Media Literacy Survey of the adult population* (2016), first of its kind in Macedonia. The findings relate to the perceptions of the audience about what they understand by the media, how they are used, to what extent and in what manner they are active on the Internet, whether they express their personal attitudes and how, and to what extent they notice different information presentations about the same events and how they react in such cases. The survey seeks to profile the audience with regard to the level of their media literacy, in order for the Agency and all concerned actors to adjust the planned activities according to the situation on the ground, and more precisely to determine the strategic guidelines for the further development of media literacy.

One of the more important steps in the development of this field at the national level is the establishment of the *Media Literacy Network of the Republic of Macedonia* (2016),¹³ initiated by the Agency, in which 39 civil society organizations, policy makers, educators, state institutions and other relevant stakeholders are members. The Network is an informal structure that functions on a voluntary basis and is trying to contribute to intensifying the cooperation between different subjects through meetings that are called upon as needed, as well as through workshops and other events that it organizes. For regular communication with all members, a communication infrastructure has been established for quick and easy sharing of information electronically, which works through a separate e-mail address and a trilingual web-site of the Network (Macedonian, Albanian and English), and there is a tool that makes the content available for the visually impaired. One of the goals of the Network is to contribute to the mobilization of state institutions with respect to the introduction of MIL in the official strategies and in practice, and to date, its members are the Ministries of Education and Transport and Communications, the Directorate for Personal Data Protection and the Film Agency.

The network should influence on raising media awareness, especially with the public service broadcaster, in order to promote content related to media literacy. Several video and audio clips from *the European Association for the Interests of Viewers*

¹² AAVMS. 2015. “*Programme for raising media literacy in the Republic of Macedonia*”. Skopje: AAVMS. Available at:

http://mediumskapismenost.mk/media/2017/12/Programme_for_Promoting_Media_Literacy.pdf.

¹³ See more at: www.mediumskapismenost.mk.

(EAVI) were adapted for educating the general public, and they were broadcast on national and local TV and radio stations. In cooperation with the BDE and the MES, in the course of 2018, the Agency distributed educational materials in the field of media and information literacy to all primary schools in the country.

1.3. Civil society organizations – the “drive” for the MIL development

In the past 10 years, the civil society sector is the main pillar of informal education, promotion and research in the field of MIL. The activities in the area were made possible through various projects mainly through the support of the embassies and foreign agencies, mostly from the European Union, the US Embassy, USAID. Although it is difficult to keep the same dynamics and continuity in the implementation of the activities after the completion of the projects, several educational and civil society organizations have managed to continue working on the development of MIL in their area of expertise for a long time.

The informal education in this area is focused on the young population, mainly secondary school students and civil society organizations. Several civil society organizations and educational institutions (MIM, the Higher School of Journalism and Public Relations, the Youth Educational Forum, etc.) have organized various trainings, conferences and media literacy campaigns¹⁴ in the past years.

From 2011 to the present day, the Higher School of Journalism and Public Relations has continuously been active in the field of informal education on media and information literacy, primarily with a focus on the young population. In cooperation with the newspaper *Nova Makedonija* daily and the secondary schools throughout the country, the School issues the supplement *Medium* and the online platform under the same name,¹⁵ it organizes media laboratories and camps for secondary school students, as well as the traditional “Media Day”, when the students visit specific media outlets and learn about the way they produce information.

The Festival for creative documentary films “MakeDox” is responsible for one of the more original initiatives for affirmation of film and visual arts with the secondary school population. This civil society organization, which has been working since 2010, is the only one that managed to introduce the topic of studying the documentary film in the curricula (manual, trainings for teachers), and at the same time they organize a traveling cinema in the rural areas throughout the country.

The online Fact Checking Service (2012-2017) of the Metamorphosis Foundation is one of the long-term projects aimed at media professionals and the general public. In order to increase public education and encourage debates on the accuracy of media products, the Service produced professional reviews of journalistic articles by experienced journalist professionals who checked the stated facts and possible deviations from the professional journalist standards of media publications.

CSOs and educational institutions continuously explore the situation with the MIL development. Some of the findings from CSO surveys indicate that media and journalists often confuse media literacy with “linguistic literacy” and “journalistic skills”, and that there are no activities for promoting media literacy among the media employees and the citizens, and that there is a lack of educational content which

¹⁴ MIM media campaign “D-r Dragan”. Available at: <https://mim.org.mk/mk/video>; SJP media campaign “Mediana”. Available at: <http://www.medium.edu.mk/>.

¹⁵ See more on: www.medium.edu.mk.

would help the audience overcome the digital divide.¹⁶ In April 2018, a survey was conducted on the users of social networks¹⁷ in Macedonia for the first time. The result showed that one quarter of respondents rarely seek for additional information when they read some news on social media, and almost a third of the respondents only sometimes check the source. The findings of the survey are “a serious indicator of underdeveloped critical awareness for checking the content that consumers read online.”¹⁸

The media campaign conducted by MIM (2018)¹⁹ and spanning over a period of several months, was aimed to educate and help the general public easily recognize journalism propaganda, distinguish the facts from the comments, lies and manipulations from the truth through a series of short audio and video clips. The campaign, which was one of the more significant promotional activities for raising public awareness of the importance of MIL through traditional and online media, reached over 150,000 citizens.

Taking into account the level of MIL of the citizens and the audience in Macedonia, the activities of the CSOs played more of an educational role for opening other perspectives for interpreting information, especially the news, and helping them build their own views on certain key issues, including the government influence on the editorial policy, creating and sharing fake news, and manipulation on the Internet and the social media.

1.4. Thematic focus of the country research: Potentials for promoting MIL through the programmes of the Macedonian Radio-Television

MRT is obliged to produce and broadcast various programmes in the field of media literacy for different segments of the audience, and thus help citizens to understand information and the news, to analyze and assess the messages they receive through various media, to defend their right to free information, to creatively express themselves and react, and exercise their civil rights and duties accordingly. Despite their legal obligation to create and broadcast programmes on promoting media literacy, in the past years, the public service broadcaster, i.e. the Macedonian Radio-Television has not shown any initiative in this respect.

The research report in the next chapters focuses on why it is important for the public service broadcaster, i.e. the MRT, to promote MIL through its programmes for different segments of the audience. We have considered the legal framework and other existing strategic documents as well as the organizational structure and capacities (journalists, technical and financial resources) of the public service broadcaster as preconditions for developing programmes related to MIL. Through a comparative analysis of the positive examples from the public service broadcasters in the UK and the Belgium, the goal has been to identify the successful practices and initiatives that would serve as guidelines with respect to the direction and the manner in which MRT can qualitatively fulfill their legal obligations to promote MIL among citizens.

¹⁶ Shopar, V., Kjupeva, T. and Temenugova, A. 2016. *Media literacy in Macedonia: the Missing Link in the Active Citizenship*. Skopje: SJPR. Available at: <http://www.medium.edu.mk/attach/Summary-of-MIL-research-in-Macedonia-ENG.pdf>.

¹⁷ The research findings were presented on the panel discussion “How to inform and be informed?”, organized by the EU Delegation in Macedonia, 14 September 2018.

¹⁸ Aleksandra Temenugova, media literacy expert, Institute for Communication Studies, on the panel discussion “How to inform and be informed?”, organized by the EU Delegation in Macedonia, 14 September 2018.

¹⁹ MIM media campaign “D-r Dragan”. Available at: <https://mim.org.mk/mk/video>.