



DISICON

INFORMATION INTEGRITY CONFERENCE

APRIL 13 & 14, 2022



DISICON 2022
Information Integrity's Role in Defending Democracy
April 13-14, 2022, Pristina, Kosovo

Democracies around the world are attempting to meet the ever-changing threat of disinformation – and Kosovo is no exception. Kosovo is in a unique position to find technology solutions to combat this threat and help create a cleaner digital environment. DISICON has now become a significant annual event for local and regional discussion of both challenges of and solutions to information integrity. In this third conference, the National Democratic Institute (NDI) expanded its approach to include regional threats and responses from across the Western Balkans and introduced workshops to help participants acquire new skills in maintaining information integrity. The insightful discussions and contributions of renowned speakers again highlighted the myriad of challenges preventing disinformation and the importance of media literacy.

This year's DISICON also paid a special tribute to the significant and lasting contribution of Secretary Madeleine Albright in advancing democratic values. Albright's legacy will continue through the National Democratic Institute's work in Kosovo, the Western Balkans, and across the world.

NDI held its third conference on information integrity, DISICON, on April 13 and 14 in Pristina, Kosovo, with the overarching theme of "Information integrity's role in defending democracy." DISICON 2022 brought together local, regional, and international experts and guests to discuss the urgency of ensuring information integrity in the region and its role in maintaining democracy. World-renowned practitioners in journalism, academia, media and government, including the keynote speaker CNN Chief Correspondent Christiane Amanpour enriched the discussion. DISICON's program also included journalism students from public and private universities in Kosovo to discuss the urgency of information integrity in Kosovo, and how they can contribute to strengthening democracy within their country. During the two-day event, 70 guests participated in person, with 68 others online. The Institute held two in-person workshops with journalism students where they addressed the vulnerability of youth to disinformation campaigns and the challenges of information integrity disorders during election processes. The sessions helped participants learn new skills and tools and galvanized them to protect the information integrity of the democracies of the Western Balkans.

Stemming from the discussions and presentations over the course of the two-day event, the below recommendations became evident.

Key Recommendations:

1. Develop and promote a national strategy on media literacy, universal internet access, and improving analytical skills.
2. Launch a campaign to promote digital literacy to improve resilience to disinformation, especially at the community level.
3. Raise awareness of the threat of disinformation as a matter of national security.
4. Ensure robust innovative national strategies on cybersecurity and foreign threats in line with European Union practices, and coordinate regionally.

5. Establish a safer online environment for women, including fair gender sensitive reporting on women in politics, and combat discrimination and misogyny.
6. Have political parties develop norms and standards on combating disinformation, hate speech and sexist language, and improving public discourse for constructive and balanced narratives.
7. Ensure financial transparency of party expenditures in both traditional and social media, especially campaign expenditures.
8. Cultivate fact checking by the media and civil society to debunk disinformation online, especially during elections.
9. Empower young people to be the drivers of change in helping create the tools to combat disinformation.
10. Identify social media influencers who are uniquely positioned to promote positive narratives to combat disinformation.

DISICON in the media

The two-day conference reached¹ more than 216,763 people, with 151,500 via online news portals, Facebook, Instagram and Twitter posts and over 65,000 via views on Facebook and YouTube. Six hundred sixty-eight (668) people interacted with comments, likes or shares on social media. On Facebook, there were 24 posts related to DISICON, while on Twitter, there were 88 tweets. Additionally, there were 25 Instagram posts. On online news portals, there were 17 articles on DISICON. Three TV channels in the Albanian language, ATV, Klan Kosova and Kosovo Public Television's channels RTK1, and RTK2 in the Serbian language discussed the conference. NDI Kosovo live-streamed the conference on its Facebook page for both the [first](#) and [second](#) days. The infographic on the following page provides additional information.

¹ Reach includes both reach on social media posts and articles on online news portals and views of videos placed on YouTube, Facebook or livestreams of the events.



DISICON

INFORMATION INTEGRITY CONFERENCE

216,763

TOTAL REACH



69,065

VIEWS ON FACEBOOK



62,179

REACH IN NEWS PORTALS



18,131

REACH ON TWITTER



138

PARTICIPANTS ONLINE & IN PERSON



65,060

VIEWS ON SOCIAL MEDIA



45

STUDENTS OF JOURNALISM



2,328

REACH ON INSTAGRAM



17

MEDIA STORIES ON DISICON

OPENING REMARKS

Ambassador Derek Mitchell – President of NDI

“We know well that the threat of disinformation is not local or restricted to any particular place or time, but that it spreads quickly throughout regions and the globe if left unchecked.”

Opening the conference, the President of NDI, Ambassador Derek Mitchell, acknowledged the importance of combating disinformation at the local level, while emphasizing the need to also learn from practices regionally and internationally. Ambassador Mitchell commended the work of the NDI Ukraine team and the entire Ukrainian



population for showing remarkable courage in this time of tragedy. He said the crisis in Ukraine is a clarifying moment in history, as it poses a direct threat to a peaceful democratic order. Ambassador Mitchell condemned the autocratic systems that enable war and undemocratic values.

Ambassador Mitchell acknowledged that foreign influence is a particular threat to Kosovo’s media environment, but noted that political tension and intense political campaigns can also fuel political ethnic division, creating a breeding ground for hate speech, misogyny and other inflammatory language. The lack of media literacy, combined with poor media ownership and financial transparency also contributes to the nation's vulnerability to disinformation. He noted this is the case not just in Kosovo, but for the entire region and the rest of the world, emphasizing that no one is immune.

Ambassador Mitchell also noted the vulnerability of youth to disinformation campaigns, but emphasized youth can also shape a different and better digital future. He applauded the work of NDI Kosovo in helping increase awareness of the disinformation threat and provide the tools to combat it, noting that information integrity is essential to both a healthy democracy and national security.

“Disinformation narratives can take hold within a diverse array of audiences, including young people, and corrode democracies from within. Foreign influence and disinformation are a particular challenge in Kosovo’s media and information environment. But intense political campaigns can also fuel political ethnic divisions which are breeding grounds for hate speech, misogyny and other inflammatory language - the life blood of foreign influence and disinformation campaigns.”

Key takeaways:

- The importance of empowering young people to be the drivers of change in helping create the tools to combat disinformation in Kosovo;

- The need to provide a clean digital environment that allows for dialogue and balanced opinions/narratives; and
- The need to raise awareness of the threat of disinformation as a matter of national security.

OPENING REMARKS

Zeinah Salahi, USAID Mission Director for USAID/Kosovo



“We are all susceptible to the poison of disinformation. The internet and social media, in particular, are a veritable breeding ground for falsehoods, rumors and disinformation. We must, therefore, all be vigilant; we must learn to separate truth from fiction, to weed out lies and deception and we must ensure that our future - the youth - learn these skills to save and preserve truth and democracy.”

USAID’s Mission Director for Kosovo, Ms. Zeinah Salahi, emphasized the growing threat of Russia’s long-running disinformation campaign. The campaign aims to sow discord, destabilize democratic partners and further the Kremlin’s policy goals. She highlighted how Russia’s weaponized disinformation campaign in Ukraine set the stage for military action. “Launching conspiracy theories and lies, like missiles, these weapons are meant to change the truth and weaken the democratic societies,” said Salahi. She underlined that Russian disinformation campaigns deceive its citizens as its leaders try to justify their horrific actions to the world. She also affirmed that Russian anti-western messaging influenced Kosovo’s media, as these harmful messages actively undermine peacebuilding and ethnic reconciliation. The lack of media literacy makes societies vulnerable, and they must do more to equip the youth with skills to detect disinformation.

Key takeaways:

- The salience of increasing democratic societies’ awareness of Russian disinformation campaigns; and
- The need to support youth to be agents of change and create tools to combat disinformation.

PANEL: Summer Lopez, Senior Director, Free Expression Programs, PEN America and Tamta Otiashvili, Senior Program Manager Research & Countering Disinformation Programs, NDI Ukraine

Discussion facilitated by Ambassador Nancy Soderberg

Following recent developments in Ukraine, the world has witnessed in real time the emergence of disinformation and its powerful impact on maintaining democracy as a prerequisite for peace. This panel discussion focused on the war in Ukraine and, in particular, how propaganda and disinformation campaigns affect citizens’ perceptions of the war and the war itself.

Ms. Tamta Otiashvili of NDI Ukraine offered insights on the information space of the war from her work with partners on the ground. From this firsthand experience, Otiashvili explained how Russia is committing atrocities daily in Ukraine and threatening democratic values worldwide. She explained how Russian disinformation efforts changed in 2014, when Ukraine became a target of Russia's campaign to block Ukrainian attempts to join the EU and NATO. Most narratives produced by Russian propaganda attack western values and promote Russia. During her remarks, Otiashvili explained in detail how Russia invests in building anti-western narratives not only in Ukraine, but in countries around the world where democracy is fragile.



Otiashvili highlighted the work of NDI Ukraine in recent years to design programs that have helped identify and combat Russian disinformation attempts. Otiashvili noted that in recent years, the Ukrainian government prioritized finding solutions to Russian propaganda before it became dangerous. She considers these efforts successful, considering the Ukrainian population became more aware of Russian propaganda. With the increased intensity of Russian propaganda and disinformation during foreign elections, Otiashvili argued that Russia lost the battle on information in Ukraine and in the West.



Ms. Summer Lopez, of PEN America, underscored that disinformation is a tool of authoritarians and how they depend on establishing a single narrative that the public cannot question. She raised concerns about how someone can use disinformation to confuse and undermine sources of legitimate information by sowing doubts within the public. The panel discussion included challenges of combating foreign influence in the region, how it is affecting public opinion, and recommendations of ways to counter efforts to destabilize the Western Balkans through disinformation campaigns.

Key takeaways:

- The importance of encouraging governments to be more proactive rather than reactive to disinformation attempts by foreign actors;
- The need to promote factual information in advance of election day;
- The significance of working with local community leaders, local journalists, activists and elected officials to make sure they reinforce similar narratives about what elections and other important democratic processes are going to involve;
- The critical need to work with the media to ensure they have the tools they need to debunk false information; and

- The importance of identifying local and national channels that are sources of disinformation, raising awareness around these sources, and building trust with legitimate sources.

PRESENTATION: “NDI Public Opinion Research: Youth and Information Integrity and Recommendations from Information Integrity Assessment in Kosovo”
Presentation by Valon Kurhasani, Deputy Director of NDI Kosovo



Mr. Valon Kurhasani, Deputy Director of NDI Kosovo, presented the main findings from the Fall 2021 NDI Public Opinion Research: “Youth and Information Integrity,” as well as recommendations stemming from NDI’s Information Integrity Assessment in Kosovo. The presentation showed that Kosovo’s media environment is vulnerable to disinformation and how this disinformation affects public opinion. The poll shows that, even though Kosovo citizens are aware of information disorders, they often believe these false narratives.

In this poll, NDI surveyed youth from all ethnic communities in Kosovo from ages 16 to 29. The poll assessed opinions on various issues, including information integrity. The poll found that Serbian-speaking Kosovars receive their news primarily from Belgrade-based sources, while the Albanian-speaking population gets its news primarily from Kosovo-based sources in the Albanian language. The results further reinforce that ethnic lines divide Kosovo’s media landscape. The findings from the NDI assessment show Kosovo lacks a cybersecurity strategy, putting Kosovo at risk of foreign influence, especially considering Kosovo enjoys one of the highest internet penetration rates in Europe and an active online population. Kosovo’s public broadcaster, Radio Television of Kosovo (RTK), lacks independence and is vulnerable to political influence, especially given poor transparency around the election of its board members.

Most importantly, the results show a low level of media literacy among Kosovo citizens, with almost half of Kosovo’s population – 48 percent – not undertaking basic fact-checking steps when they encounter an unusual piece of information. The poll also highlighted that Kosovo’s national cybersecurity is outdated. Institutions and political parties do not have the necessary strategies and capacity to mitigate novel cybersecurity threats. The presentation also showed the lack of a regulatory framework for the media in Kosovo. Parts of Kosovo’s legal regulatory framework are outdated and not in line with the requirements of the EU to create a free, independent and transparent media environment.

Key takeaways included the following recommendations:

- The executive branch should develop and implement a national strategy on cybersecurity and foreign threats in line with EU practices that addresses threats in this field, alongside novel technological developments.
- The legislative branch should ensure a transparent and independent process in appointing and monitoring Radio Television of Kosovo board members.
- The media should increase fact-checking and professional capacities, as well as improve working conditions for journalists and enforce implementation of the respective laws, in accordance with the Law on Labor.
- To advance a free and independent media, Kosovo should develop financial and ownership transparency of the media in line with EU standards.
- Kosovo institutions and political parties need to develop standards and protocols to mitigate disinformation campaigns, improve cybersecurity, as well as address hate speech, harsh public discourse, and misogynistic language.
- Civil society should help raise awareness on disinformation, as well as develop better mechanisms to monitor the media and combat disinformation campaigns, including those from external actors.

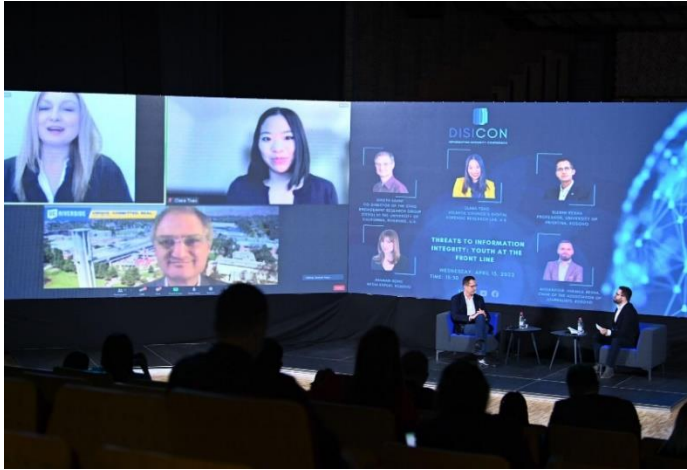
DISI-STORY I: Natasa Briski, Co-Founder of Media Network Meta's list, Strategic Communications, New & Social Media Expert, Slovenia

Ms. Natasa Briski shared her experience as a journalist fighting disinformation in Slovenia. Ms. Briski drew on examples from political and election campaigns, emphasizing that online violence against politicians is higher for women than men. She described an investigation by a group of journalists of *astroturfing*, the practice of creating the illusion of widespread grassroots support for a candidate, policy or cause when no such support exists. Public relations and advertising firms and political groups use multiple online profiles and groups to mislead the public into believing



that the position of the astroturfer is the commonly held view. Among those most attacked are journalists, activists and politicians. She noted that social networks are becoming crucial political tools in Slovenia, with Facebook, Instagram and Twitter being the main platforms. Briski shined a spotlight on some online platforms in Slovenia that attempt to combat disinformation. These platforms face an uphill battle against fake accounts and profiles that spread certain narratives for political gains.

PANEL: “Threats to information integrity: Youth at the front line”
Moderated by Xhemail Rexha, Chair of the Association of Journalists, Kosovo



Kosovo is a vibrant and young society, with almost two-thirds of the population under 35 years old. A key focus of this DISICON was the need to empower young people to be the drivers of change in their communities. The panel discussed the important role youth plays in finding ways to combat disinformation through technological solutions. Joseph Kahne kicked off the panel discussion by sharing academia’s perspective on the fight against disinformation and what educators can do to prepare young people

for this challenge. The role of academia, he said, should be a cornerstone for media literacy, and equip young people with critical thinking skills. Ms. Clara Tsao, a nonresident senior fellow with the Atlantic Council’s Digital Forensic Research Lab, shared her experiences working with big corporations such as Microsoft. She explained how these companies intend to incorporate young students into their next digital programming. Tsao emphasized that when young people are online, they spend a lot of their time gaming which has become a new recruitment target for extremists.

The discussion moved further with Mr. Blerim Rexha's experience at the University of Prishtina where he talked about Kosovar youth and information landscape. Rexha shared his work with his students from Kosovo and how he and his students have established courses named ‘cyber hygiene’. Many of the models looked at how young people can identify disinformation and how to verify the information. This panel discussed the importance of election cycles and how young people are often targeted with the intention to misinform and manipulate.

Key takeaways:

- The need to establish a national approach to a better media and digital literacy among the teachers and educators of the young generation;
- The importance of educating young people about disinformation and constantly updating citizens on the ever-changing threat; and
- The need to help young people to find ways to combat disinformation by creating digital tools; the most recent being the ‘cyber hygiene’ model developed by more than six hundred students from University of Pristina.

DISI-STORY II: Inva Hasanaliaj, Albanian Journalist, winner of "Best Poster for Media Education and Information" by the Albanian Media Institute



Ms. Inva Hasanaliaj, a journalist, talked about the first time she saw the open call from the Albanian Media Institute to develop a poster to raise awareness of disinformation. Hasanaliaj aimed not only to raise awareness about disinformation but to encourage young people to be involved in fact-checking the information. Her work includes raising the level of inclusivity in the fact-checking process. Hasanaliaj recommended that everyone who consumes the news, not just young people, should be tomorrow's self-checkers and rely on their honed critical thinking learned either in schools or through different media training online. Hasanaliaj

continues her work as a media literacy trainer in Albania by working with local nongovernmental organizations (NGOs). She considers Albania to still be in the earlier stages of these initiatives and acknowledged it would take years to assess the full long-term effects of these trainings. Nonetheless, she notices an increase in interest from young people who want to understand how to distinguish between legitimate and fake news sources.

WORKSHOP I: Empowering youth in combating disinformation

The “Empowering youth in combating disinformation” workshop focused on the vulnerability of youth to disinformation campaigns, and possibilities to engage them in combating information disorders and maintaining the integrity of information. NDI Serbia country director, Mr. Marko Ivkovic, presented the main findings of research on information integrity in Serbia and the Western Balkans. Ivkovic highlighted that citizens all over the Balkans want a fully functioning democracy; however, they also prefer strong leaders, which can make them vulnerable to disinformation. During the discussion with participants, Ivkovic noted the importance of social media influencers in combating disinformation to change online narratives and empower young people to become influencers among their peers.



Key takeaways:

- The importance of raising awareness with youth to install a mentality that disinformation is harmful and should not be underestimated;

- The need to establish cooperation with social media influencers to raise awareness on disinformation. Social influencers can play a vital role in identifying and categorizing the groups in which we have to raise awareness; and
- The need to operate in “prevention mode” to combat information disorders; and that
- Working with society to maintain democracy is crucial to sustaining democratic values that combat hate speech, misogyny and inflammatory language.

DAY 2: ARPIL 14, 2022

OPENING REMARKS

Ambassador Thomas Kolly, Ambassador of Switzerland to Kosovo



“Nobody is immune to fake news and misinformation.”

Ambassador Thomas Kolly underscored that reliable information is one of the pillars of a democratic system. Ambassador Kolly spoke about the importance of recognizing the rights of citizens, as information is one of the means to hold their governments accountable. While noting the EU Progress Report on Kosovo labeled the media environment in Kosovo as lively and pluralistic, Ambassador Kolly emphasized that even Kosovo, a country that holds democratic principles, is not immune to disinformation. Ambassador Kolly recognized that increasing the capacities of producers and consumers of information is crucial for defending and strengthening democracy. Efforts to combat disinformation and maintain information integrity must involve all actors, including the media, technology companies, political parties, civil society organizations, and the wider public. Ambassador Kolly highlighted that the DISICON is one step in that direction.

Key takeaways:

- The need to consult with different and multiple sources of information when consuming news; and
- The necessity of collaboration among stakeholders to combat disinformation.

KEYNOTE SPEAKER: CNN Chief Correspondent Christiane Amanpour



“Everyone should be fully committed to fighting the battle against disinformation, because the way we weigh that battle with whatever tool we have - in my case the tool of journalism - then we will only have ourselves to blame if it fails and if we become the victims of those with a stronger political will.”

During keynote remarks, CNN Chief Correspondent Christiane Amanpour remembered the commitment and conviction of Secretary Madeleine Albright and the central role she played in ensuring democracy all around the world, including in Kosovo. Amanpour drew from her experience as a war reporter in the Balkans, starting in Bosnia and Herzegovina and then in Kosovo. Her time in the Balkans taught her that a responsible journalist must define the role of a journalist and be objective while placing what they are reporting on into the larger situational context.

Amanpour highlighted that objectivity does not mean treating all sides equally nor drawing false or moral equivalences. While journalists should cover all sides, it does not require an even-handedness of both sides. She spoke about how through experience as a war reporter in the Balkans, she learned the importance of distinguishing between the aggressors and victims.

Amanpour described the situation in Ukraine as the worst violation of humanitarian and international law since World War II, even worse than the atrocities and genocides committed in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosovo. Amanpour hopes that the evidence collected by journalists, NGOs, forensic experts and prosecutors will help provide the necessary evidence to prosecute war crimes, crimes against humanity and potentially genocide. Amanpour closed her speech by emphasizing the role of accountability in democracy, as well as the importance of a strong journalistic practice – the profession that upholds and underpins the concept of democracy in our era. Amanpour noted that the aggressors will continue to use fake news and propaganda, as they did for a long time in the Balkans, notably in Bosnia and Herzegovina, which in turn ensured it took the international public a long time to distinguish between the aggressor and the victim. Prior to the current situation in Ukraine, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosovo stand as the most important examples of how strong reactions in every forum are needed to ensure that this kind of aggression does not triumph. In conclusion, Amanpour noted that DISICON is of utmost importance right now as we witness the fight for the survival of democracy, truth vs. dictatorship, and against propaganda and fake news on the battlefields in Ukraine.

Key takeaways:

- The importance of reporting objectively and reporting on all sides, bringing all sides to the table and telling the story of all sides;

- The need to draw lessons from history, such as Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosovo, and now in Ukraine learning to distinguish between the aggressor and the victim; and
- The significance of supporting journalists, prosecutors, NGOs and forensic experts in their fight to collect evidence against the perpetrators and holding them accountable in the future.

DISCUSSION: “Foreign interference: undermining democracy”

Filip Stojanovski, Director of Partnership and Resource Development, Metamorphosis Foundation, North Macedonia

Moderated by Adea Beqai, Program Officer, NDI Kosovo:



The discussion focused on the interconnection between information integrity and electoral processes. Mr. Filip Stojanovski believes that information integrity is a prerequisite for democracy, especially during elections, since the citizens need to make an informed decision when electing their officials. Stojanovski explained that throughout the Balkans, domestic and foreign actors aim to exploit cleavages in our societies and undermine democracy and the entire post-World War II international system. The threats to information integrity exist worldwide, not only in the Western Balkans region. The

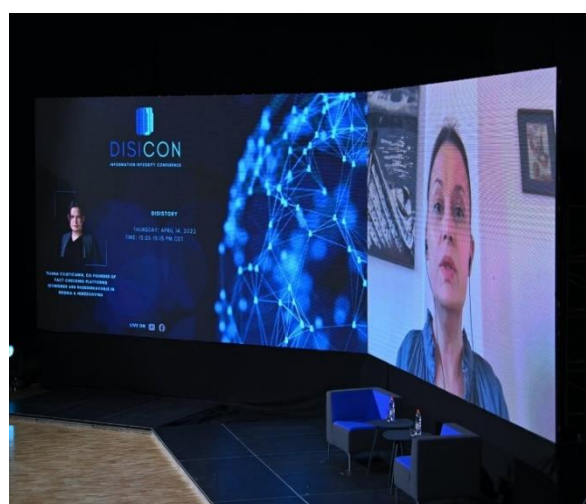
discussion also touched on the recent forces attempting to undermine the functioning of democratic processes, such as populism and other forces supporting dictatorship. Stojanovski also highlighted that the forces of populism and authoritarianism use disinformation as their weapon to undermine the foundation of democracy.

Key takeaways:

- The need to provide political fact-checking statements from politicians, especially during elections;
- The salience of introducing media literacy earlier in schools; and
- The importance of networking is important in fighting disinformation; creating partnership among NGOs and institutions in the Western Balkans to tackle disinformation together.

DISI-STORY III: Tijana Cvjeticanin, Co-founder of fact-checking platforms Istinomer and Raskrinkavanje in Bosnia & Herzegovina

Ms. Tijana Cvjeticanin shared her experience as a fact-checker in Bosnia and Herzegovina. She explained the work of Istinomer, a fact-checking platform based in Sarajevo that works on transparency and seeks to hold elected officials accountable. Cvjeticanin noted the rise of emotionally engaging conspiracy theories during the pandemic to induce fear among the population. Cvjeticanin and her colleagues became targets of hate speech, harassment and threats when they tried to debunk such narratives. She hopes that women working on debunking conspiracy theories will soon be targets of attacks less often and people will distinguish fake news from the truth.



PANEL DISCUSSION: “Technology Innovations: Defending Democracy” Moderated by Rezarta Krasniqi, Executive Director, Democracy for Development (D4D):



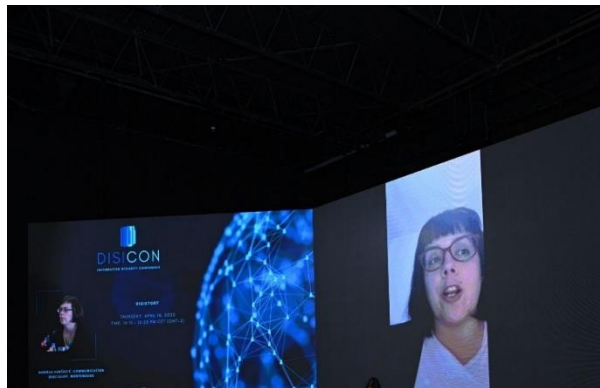
The panel focused on the outcome of the recent data monitoring of elections and disinformation phenomena during elections in the Western Balkans. The panelists discussed regional practices and technological solutions to help maintain information integrity. In the first part of the discussion, panelists shared how disinformation and external influence threatened electoral integrity, while the second part focused on how journalists, media and civil society can help maintain the integrity of election processes. This panel offered best practices from the region and the United States.

Key takeaways:

- The need for a comprehensive guide to programs and other interventions for countering disinformation and promoting information integrity;
- The importance of reviewing practices for addressing disinformation that targets women and marginalized groups, with approaches to inclusion;
- The necessity of resources and information for all kinds of programming; and
- The need to support efforts to promote a stronger community response and societal resilience to disinformation and misinformation, including digital literacy.

DISI-STORY IV: Daniela Vukcevic, Communications Specialist, Montenegro

Ms. Daniela Vukcevic shared her 15+ years of experience dunking fake news narratives in Montenegro with the country’s media community. Vukcevic acknowledged that the process is slow and demanding and requires high journalistic standards and practices. Unfortunately, Montenegro faces high nationalistic tensions, with division and polarization among supporters and opponents of the government. Vukcevic argued these tensions offer a great opportunity for external actors’ disinformation campaigns to impact the election processes and public opinion on contentious issues.



Workshop II: Countering disinformation during electoral processes



The countering disinformation during electoral processes workshop focused on information integrity disorders during electoral processes, journalists’ role in political communication and best practices for strengthening the election coverage. Adea Beqaj, Program Officer at NDI Kosovo, presented NDI’s main findings from media monitoring and public opinion research. She highlighted the presence of information disorders during electoral processes, especially on online and social media platforms. Beqaj noted that harsh language and violence against women in politics (VAW-P) is a particular challenge. The discussion with the participants began by acknowledging that hate speech and online VAW-P in Kosovo threaten to decrease women’s participation in politics. The discussion touched on the importance of all citizens, not only young people, to hone their abilities to detect disinformation in their news.

Key takeaways:

- The importance of increasing journalists’ capacities in detecting disinformation, especially by fact-checking;

- The need to establish a safer online environment and encourage more representation of women in the media, as well as establish journalistic practices that are not discriminatory;
- The significance of developing political parties' norms and standards on combating disinformation, hate speech and sexist language; and
- The need to establish a regulatory mechanism that would allow for financial transparency in elections.

CLOSING REMARKS:

Barrie Freeman – Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary General at UNMIK, Kosovo



“Disinformation, the proliferation of online speech and the withdrawal into social echo chambers, will continue to undermine social cohesion and reduce trust in science, institutions, and in each other, as we seek to recover from the pandemic, we must learn to better curtail harmful use digital technology and to better unleash its power as an enabler of good.”

Ms. Barrie Freeman, Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary General at UNMIK, said that information integrity is a high priority for the United Nations, with a growing emphasis on cross-cutting support for efforts to combat hate speech and disinformation, which we must view as threats to peace and security everywhere. Disinformation, misinformation, hate speech and sexist language in the media and social media environment, especially during political campaigns, pose challenges for Kosovo’s society, the region and beyond. She noted that NDI’s research in the region shows that false and skewed narratives impact public perception. Freeman emphasized that democratic societies bear responsibility to address the challenges of today’s complex and fractious media environment. Freeman ended her remarks quoting UN Secretary Antonio Guterres speaking in 2021 on addressing misinformation surrounding the pandemic:

Key takeaways:

- The importance of increasing awareness when information is manipulated for political purposes, especially during electoral campaigns;
- The fact that society bears a collective responsibility at an organizational, institutional and individual level to address the challenges of today’s media environment; and
- The fact that the functioning of democracies is fundamentally related to accessing accurate information.

CLOSING REMARKS:

Ambassador Nancy Soderberg – Senior Country Director, NDI Kosovo

In closing remarks, Ambassador Nancy Soderberg recounted the important discussions and recommendations over the two-day event. Since NDI Kosovo launched the first DISICON in 2019, the conference has become an important regional platform to discuss the main challenges that the media faces and solutions to improve the integrity of information. Ambassador Soderberg noted that disinformation and external influences are a global challenge that require greater awareness, media literacy, and the sharing of best practices to protect societies against disinformation.



Ambassador Soderberg emphasized that during the conference, colleagues from Ukraine shared their insight on how they're battling disinformation on the frontline, and participants looked at the youth and information integrity challenges. The goals of the discussions were to better understand and learn from the best regional practices and technical solutions to help maintain information integrity and fight disinformation and foreign malign influence. Furthermore, this DISICON discussed the need to tackle misogyny, improve cybersecurity, and increase media literacy. To maintain information integrity, we must critically assess and evaluate information and responsibly create and share information online. DISICON also highlighted the important role of journalists in political communications and learned about new skills and tools available to them as they strengthen electoral coverage. From various experts, participants learned of the impact of foreign influence on electoral processes and election outcomes. Ambassador Soderberg also called attention to the misogyny women face on social media. She emphasized that it can hinder women's participation in the political arena and undermine societies by impeding the participation of half of the population in crucial decision-making processes. Hopefully, these discussions will serve as an alarm bell for leaders and political parties to acknowledge the urgent need to address information campaigns and refrain from harsh and misogynistic language.

In her closing remarks, Ambassador Soderberg recognized the lasting contribution of Madeleine Albright:

“Democracy had no stronger defender than NDI’s chairwoman and Secretary of State Madeleine Albright. She understood that society must have information integrity in order to defend human rights and democracy. In her 2018 book ‘Fascism: A warning,’ she said that ‘The real question is who has the responsibility to uphold human rights? And the answer to that is everyone.’ Let us take that message to recognize that we all have a responsibility to maintain information integrity which, again, is a key requirement of any democracy.”

The Information Integrity Conference DISICON in Kosovo was organized by NDI Kosovo in partnership with local and regional partners that are working in the field of information integrity. This conference summary and the National Democratic Institute's (NDI) Information Integrity Conference - DISICON - in Kosovo are made possible through the support of the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). DISICON 2022 was also made possible in partnership with UNMIK in Kosovo, Swiss Embassy in Kosovo, Metamorphosis Foundation from North Macedonia and NDI in Serbia. The opinions expressed herein are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of USAID, United States Government, or any of the aforementioned organizations.

Copyright © National Democratic Institute 2022. All rights reserved. Portions of this work may be reproduced and/or translated for non-commercial purposes provided NDI is acknowledged as the source of the material and is provided copies of any translation.



USAID
NGA POPULLI AMERIKAN
OD AMERIČKOG NARODA



Schweizerische Eidgenossenschaft
Confédération suisse
Confederazione Svizzera
Confederaziun svizra

Federal Department of Foreign Affairs FDFA



UNMIK

