media masters

WORK PACKAGE № 20
CONFERENCE
"THE IMPACT OF FAKE NEWS ON EUROPEAN DEMOCRACIES"

Presented by

Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski"

Faculty of Journalism and Mass Communication

SOFIA UNIVERSITY
"ST. KLIMENT OHRIDSKI"
FACULTY OF JOURNALISM
AND MASS COMMUNICATION

Document identification:

Full name of the project:	Media Masters: Improving Media Literacy
Project Acronym:	MEDMAS
Grant Agreement Number:	**101148165**
CERV Program:	CERV-2023-CITIZENS-CIV - Citizen Engagement and Participation
Distribution level:	Public
Work package:	20
Responsible partner (Legal name and short name):	Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski" Sofia University
PIC number:	999887641
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EVENT DESCRIPTION	
Event number:	Conference 2
Event name:	The impact of fake news on European democracies
Type:	Conference
In situ/online:	in situ
Location:	Bulgaria, Sofia
Date(s):	03. 12.2025
Website(s) (if any):	https://fjmc.uni-sofia.bg/news/fzhmk-provede-vtora-konferenciya-po-proekta-media-masters-posvetena-na-dezinformaciyata-i https://www.uni-sofia.bg/index.php/bul/novini/novini_i_s_bitiya/fzhmk_provede_vtora_konferenciya_po_proekta_media_masters_posvetena_na_dezinformaciyata_i_medijnata_gramotnost

Participants			
Female:	78		
Male:	32		
Non-binary:	-		
From country 1 [Bulgaria]:	107		
From country 2 [North Macedonia]:	1		
From country 3 [Moldova]:	2		
Total number of participants:	110	**Total number of participants:**	110

Description
Provide a brief description of the event and its activities.

1. Conference Summary

The second conference under the project "Media Masters: Enhancing Media Literacy" was held on December 3, 2025 in the Aula Magna of the Faculty of Journalism and Mass Communication of Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski". The event was dedicated to disinformation and media literacy and built on the highlights of the first conference, held in

April 2025, by placing an even stronger focus on recognizing manipulative narratives and on practical tools for working with young people.

The conference brought together 110 participants – mostly students (93) , as well as lecturers and representatives of the media and civil society sectors working on topics related to disinformation and the challenges of digital communication. Participants were from three countries – the majority from Bulgaria, but also from North Macedonia and Moldova – international students of the Sofia University. Participants had a diverse profile: future journalists, communication specialists in the field of public relations and communication management, representatives of non-governmental organizations and media practitioners. This combination ensured a rich exchange of views and highlighted the intersectoral nature of the fight against disinformation by increasing media literacy.

The project is led by Prof. Dr. Vesselina Valkanova - an distinguished scholar and Dean of the Faculty of Journalism and Mass Communication. She shared on the occasion of the second conference on the project that it proves how important cooperation between universities, schools, media and civil society organizations is in building public resilience against disinformation . According to her, media literacy can no longer be considered as a peripheral skill or a short training module, but as a key component of modern democratic culture. Prof. Valkanova noted that young people, pupils and students, who form the most active part of the digital audience, need not only knowledge, but also practical tools to help them decipher the complex information environment and protect themselves from manipulation, misleading narratives and psychological pressure online.

Prof. Valkanova emphasized that the Media Masters project succeeds in transforming abstract concepts of media and information literacy into experiences that engage, provoke reflection and build critical thinking. According to Prof. Valkanova, the game approach embedded in the the board game version and digital versions of the tool provides an opportunity for participants to explore information flows in an interactive way, formulate their own counter-strategies and understand the mechanisms behind manipulative content. She emphasized that skills such as analytical thinking, source evaluation, recognizing manipulation, and making informed decisions are fundamental to any democratic society that seeks to safeguard freedom of expression, pluralism, and public trust.

Prof. Valkanova highlighted that the conference, like the other activities of the project, serves as a bridge between academic research and the practical needs of society. According to her, the efforts of the international consortium, supported by the European Union's Citizens, Equality, Rights and Values program, show that effective counteraction to disinformation requires joint actions and a long-term strategic vision. She expressed confidence that the project will continue to make a real contribution to the development of informed, thoughtful and active citizens and that the second conference is further evidence of the need to expand and strengthen such initiatives at the national and European levels.

The event was opened by Prof. Nikolay Mihaylov, Deputy Dean of the Faculty of Journalism and Mass Communication, who described fake news as a persistent communicative phenomenon - not only as entirely false statements but also as deliberately distorted or decontextualized information capable of influencing public opinion and behavior. He underscored the connection between disinformation and conspiracy theories and highlighted the need for the academic community to cultivate in students the skills of analysis, fact-checking, and critical thinking.

In the introductory panel, Assoc. Prof. Dr. Svetlana Stankova, Deputy Dean of the Faculty of Journalism and Mass Communication, added that fake news is not a new phenomenon, but today's digital environment and social media algorithms amplify the speed at which it spreads. Emotional content and polarizing narratives receive particularly high visibility, making it difficult to distinguish verified information from manipulative suggestions. Stankova emphasized that a sustainable response to disinformation requires systemic efforts - from education and the media to regulatory bodies and civil society organizations.

Assoc. Prof. Dr. Mila Serafimova presented the main directions of the "Media Masters" project, implemented by partners in nine European Union countries. She explained that the initiative is aimed at developing media literacy through a practical approach in which pupils, students, teachers and journalists participate in simulated situations close to the real digital environment. The project includes a series of demonstration events and trainings, within which participants work with specific examples of disinformation, analyze mechanisms of manipulation and seek effective counter-strategies.

This time, a special emphasis was placed on the game approach and on the way in which the Media Masters tools - the board game and the online version, can be integrated into formal and non-formal educational formats.

Senior Assistant Professor Dr. Yordan Karapenchev presented the online version of the game , available free of charge to students and teachers, and outlined the possibilities for its use in classrooms, university exercises and youth initiatives.

An important part of the program were also the speeches of practitioners - Ivo Todorov, Director of the Digital Programs Directorate at the Bulgarian National Radio, and journalist Vladimir Yonchev, Editor-in-Chief of OFFNews. They presented case studies from practice that show how disinformation "enters" the daily news flow, how the context of facts changes and why sometimes completely reliable content can be used for misleading interpretations. Thus, the conference combined scientific, educational and professional experience and showed that media literacy is a common responsibility of the academy, the media and civil society.

The second conference of the project "Media Masters: Improving Media Literacy", dedicated to disinformation and its impact on European democracies, once again emphasized the importance of media literacy as a fundamental element of modern civic culture. Held on December 3, 2025, the conference was distinguished by an even wider participation - over 110 students, teachers, journalists and representatives of the civil

sector, which shows the growing public attention to the topic. The atmosphere of the event combined intensive discussions, practical demonstrations and exchange of experience between different professional groups, for whom the problem of disinformation is an everyday reality.

From the very beginning, the conference emphasized that media literacy can no longer be considered only as a theoretical concept, but requires concrete actions. In a dynamic digital environment, in which artificial intelligence accelerates the production of manipulative content, the skills of critical analysis, fact-checking and recognition of misleading narratives become a tool for protecting democratic processes. The event clearly demonstrated how the joint efforts of the scientific community, the media and civil society organizations can create adequate mechanisms for responding to these challenges.

At the same time, the conference allowed to present the progress of the Media Masters project over the past year, including the improved versions of the board game and the online platform, developed for more effective training of schoolchildren and students. These tools, already tested in a real educational context, are designed to recreate authentic communication situations in which participants must recognize manipulations, assess the credibility of sources and make informed decisions. Improvements in the second version of the game include expanded scenarios, additional types of fake news and greater interactivity, bringing the gaming experience "closer" to the real dynamics of social networks.

Special emphasis was placed on how these tools can be integrated into curricula and university courses, as well as into the work of journalistic teams and fact-checking organizations. Examples of practical use of the online platform were shared, both in seminars and in trainings for youth leaders and volunteers working on topics such as digital security and civic engagement.

The conference reinforced the impression that sustainable counteraction to disinformation requires both scientific analysis, practical training and coordinated efforts from multiple institutions. Participants expressed a common belief that the development of media literacy is a key factor in strengthening democratic values and preparing young people to recognize manipulation, think critically and be active and responsible citizens.

The event concluded with a clear message that initiatives like Media Masters have a long-term impact not only on the individual participants, but also on the wider educational and societal environment. They show that through innovation, play and interdisciplinarity, it is possible to build a sustainable culture of information and analysis – a foundation without which modern democracies can hardly withstand the onslaught of disinformation.

In conclusion, the second conference confirmed that the Media Masters project successfully transformed media literacy from an abstract concept into a concrete set of knowledge, skills and attitudes that can be developed through play, dialogue and collaborative learning. The event enabled participants to identify real communication risks,

discuss possible solutions and learn about practical resources that will remain in use after the end of the project.

2. Conference Program

For greater clarity and context regarding the structure of the Media Masters conference, the following section presents the full event program. It outlines the sequence of activities and presentations held throughout the day, providing insight into the thematic progression of the event – from expert discussions to practical demonstrations.

13:30 – 14:00 – Participant registration

Foyer in front of the "Aula Magna" hall at the Faculty of Journalism and Mass Communication

14:00 – 14:15 – Opening of the conference

Welcoming speech on behalf of Prof. Dr. Vesselina Valkanova – Dean of the Faculty of Journalism and Mass Communication at Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski" and head of the project "Media Masters: Improving Media Literacy" (CERV-2023-CITIZENS-CIV-01148165), funded by the European Union's "Citizens, Equality, Rights and Values" program, delivered Prof. Nikolay Mihaylov, Deputy Dean of the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences.

1 4 :15 – 1 6 : 1 5 – Speeches by conference participants

Assoc. Prof. Dr. Svetlana Stankova – Deputy Dean of the Faculty of Journalism and Mass Communication for Academic Affairs

The place of media literacy in curricula and the need for sustainable partnerships between universities, schools, media and civil society organizations.

Assoc. Prof. Dr. Mila Serafimova – lecturer at the Faculty of Media and Communication and coordinator of the project "Media Masters: Improving Media Literacy" (CERV-2023-CITIZENS-CIV-01148165)

Presentation of the project "Media Masters: Increasing Media Literacy"

Assoc. Prof. Dr. Mila Serafimova presented the objectives, the structured consortium of nine countries and the key target groups – pupils, students, teachers, journalists and experts from the civil sector;

The main modules, the methodology of the game approach and the importance of the test sessions, webinars and the research part of the project, which the FJMK conducts with Bulgarian students, were outlined.

Ivo Todorov – Director of the Digital Programs Directorate, Bulgarian National Radio (BNR) and Head of the BNR Fact-Checking Team - https://bnrnews.bg/main/list/proverkanafakti

Vladimir Yonchev, journalist and Editor-in-chief of the news website Offnews.bg https://offnews.bg/

1 6 : 3 0 – 1 7 :15 – Roundtable: "The Impact of Fake News on European Democracies"

Panel participants : Assoc. Prof. Dr. Svetlana Stankova, Assoc. Prof. Dr. Mila Serafimova, Ivo Todorov, Vladimir Yonchev, Dr. Yordan Karapenchev.

17:15 – 1 7 : 3 0 – Question and Answer Session

17:30 – 18:30 – Presentation of the board game and mobile application "Media Masters", developed within the project

Senior Assistant Professor Dr. Yordan Karapenchev – Faculty of Journalism and Mass Communication, Sofia University

Presentation by Senior Assistant Professor Dr. Yordan Karapenchev on the logic, scenario and technical implementation of the desktop and online versions of the game;

Demo game session

Demonstration of the online version and guidance on free access options through the official project website;

Discussion of examples of integrating the game into practice - in university courses, school classes, trainings for youth leaders, etc. For example, in 93 secondary schools with a "Journalism" profile and integrating the game into classes, proposed by the teacher at the school in the "Journalism" profile, Dr. Iskra Mileva.

Final discussion and summary

Discussion of impressions from the conference;

Feedback from students and faculty on the applicability of the tools;

Identifying next steps – ongoing demonstration events, local initiatives in schools, and future research on the effectiveness of the game-based approach.

3. Key highlights from the presentations

The panelists presented their views on the impact of fake news on European democracies in a series of speeches. The main takeaways from each speech included the following:

Highlights from the speech of Prof. Nikolay Mihaylov

Prof. Mihaylov emphasized that fake news is a persistent phenomenon that is not limited to outright fabrications, but also encompasses distorted, taken out of context, or deliberately managed interpretations of otherwise true facts. He pointed out that such practices directly influence public opinion, electoral behavior, and trust in institutions.

According to him, one of the key tasks of university education is to prepare students who are not just information consumers, but are able to analyze it, check sources and recognize manipulative strategies. He emphasizes the need for the media and the academic community to work together to build standards for professional and ethical communication.

Highlights from the speech of Assoc. Prof. Dr. Svetlana Stankova

Assoc. Prof. Stankova put disinformation in historical perspective, noting that propaganda and misleading messages have existed for a long time, but today they are amplified by digital infrastructure. Social media algorithms that reward content with high emotional value create a favorable environment for polarizing and manipulative narratives.

She emphasized that critical thinking cannot be developed through one-off campaigns or individual lessons alone. A systematic approach is needed – with integrated training modules, practices, exercises and cross-curricular connections in which media literacy is sustainably present.

Highlights from the speech of Assoc. Prof. Dr. Mila Serafimova

Assoc. Prof. Dr. Mila Serafimova presented the in-depth conceptual foundations of the Media Masters project , placing the connection between game methods, cultural development and contemporary challenges of the digital environment at the center of the conversation. She emphasized that the project is based on a solid theoretical tradition, but at the same time offers innovative, practical and accessible learning tools, tailored to the way young people perceive information today. Her speech presented the structure and logic of the project , but also provided a framework for understanding its cultural, educational and social meaning.

Assoc. Prof. Serafimova first situated the project's developments within a historical and theoretical perspective by recalling the views of the Dutch cultural theorist Johan Huizinga and his concept of Homo Ludens—"the playing human." She noted that as early as 1938 Huizinga formulated the idea of play as a fundamental human activity through which people not only entertain themselves but also create culture, symbols, meanings, and social norms. He defines play as a space in which action transcends the immediate necessities of life and allows individuals to construct models through which they interpret and understand the world.

In this context, Assoc. Prof. Serafimova noted that in the modern digital age, the role of the game is becoming even more visible. Under the influence of technology, social networks and mass gaming, the game is becoming a dominant cultural format for young generations. This is precisely why Media Masters uses game mechanics as a strategic learning tool: through them, abstract concepts such as disinformation, manipulative narratives, algorithmic amplification and fact-checking are translated into concrete

situations that provoke reasoning, choice and argumentation. This allows learners to experience, not just study, phenomena that otherwise remain difficult to perceive.

In her presentation, she also included fragments of the content of the board game and the mobile app, which function as complementary tools. The board version, designed to engage group interaction, includes 80 original game cards. Each card contains a scenario inspired by real news, social or cultural situations. QR codes on these cards activate additional variants and storylines in the mobile app, which significantly increases the variability and sustainability of the games. This systematic interweaving between physical and digital environments provides a rich, multidimensional learning process that speaks the language of the so-called digital generations.

Assoc. Prof. Serafimova emphasized that the task of the players is not simply to "guess the correct answer", but to reason, analyze, compare sources and make decisions based on arguments. The application provides instant feedback, but not in the form of a rating, but as an analytical commentary that explains the logic behind a given decision, signals of manipulation in the content and verification methods. Thus, the player does not just advance on the playing field, but acquires the ability to think critically in situations close to the real information environment.

She also drew attention to the interaction between the game process and group dynamics. The game creates conditions for collective discussion, which allows participants to compare their media competence with that of others, to defend positions and to learn to recognize persuasion strategies. Many of the discussions that arise naturally in the game sessions move on to broader topics such as gender equality, social causes, environmental problems, global conflicts, popular culture and educational policies. This wide thematic range, as she emphasized, demonstrates the universality of the project and its ability to serve as a tool for mediation between different public issues.

In her presentation, Assoc. Prof. Serafimova paid special attention to the role of the Faculty of Journalism and Mass Communication of Sofia University, which acts as a key research partner in the project. The faculty has expertise in the field of media, communication sciences, educational methods and empirical research, which makes it a central unit in the processes of testing, analysis and improvement of the game. She described in detail the way in which the Faculty of Journalism and Mass Communication organizes pilot sessions and workshops with students and pupils - the main target groups of the project. The workshops conducted under the project serve as an important indicator of the effectiveness of the game scenarios, their ability to engage young people and the extent to which they succeed in supporting the understanding of complex media phenomena.

The feedback collected from the workshops reveals that participants respond positively to the game format, as it combines fun with solving real communication challenges. From a research methodology perspective, this feedback represents a valuable empirical resource

through which the team manages to refine the game mechanics, adapt the content to different age groups, and develop scenarios with a higher degree of complexity and realism.

One of the key points in the speech was the emphasis on the interdisciplinary nature of the project. „Media Masters" combines knowledge from areas such as media studies, psychology, pedagogy, game design and communication technologies. According to Assoc. Prof. Dr. Serafimova, it is this interweaving that guarantees its effectiveness, since media literacy training must take into account not only the content aspects, but also the motivational mechanisms, the way of perceiving visual information, the dynamics of group interaction and the cultural context of young people.

She also emphasized that the project does not aim to be a one-off intervention, but to build a sustainable educational ecosystem , in which the game serves as an entry point for deeper discussions, training and civic engagement. Gamification attracts attention, but the real transformation happens through the exchange of ideas, the sharing of personal experiences and the development of a community of young people capable of being critical readers and creators of media content.

In conclusion, Assoc. Prof. Serafimova noted that "Media Masters" demonstrates how combining game methods, academic analysis and feedback from real participants can lead to profound changes in the way young people perceive and process information. The project creates not just learning materials, but a cultural tool that develops habits, attitudes and skills that democratic societies need. She emphasized that the game and the application are just the beginning, their value manifesting itself in the dialogue, understanding and active participation they stimulate in young people, and the conference is a vivid example of how such initiatives can be a catalyst for change.

Highlights from Ivo Todorov's speech

Ivo Todorov's speech and expert presentations on the topic of disinformation and media literacy offered an in-depth look at the work of public media in the modern digital ecosystem. According to Todorov, it is marked by constant information noise and competing interpretations of events. He highlighted the challenges journalists face, especially in a context where fake news and manipulative content often spread faster than verified, professionally produced information. This is due both to the emotional charge inherent in misleading messages and to algorithms that reinforce content that attracts quick reactions.

Todorov emphasized that the task of public media is significantly more complex than simply refuting unverified claims. It includes providing context, checking primary sources, assessing the reliability of data, and constantly working to build and maintain trust. He noted that in the modern environment, trust is the most valuable resource for a public institution, and because of this, editorial teams must work with a high degree of transparency and consistency.

The role of the Bulgarian National Radio in combating fake news and online disinformation: the "Fact-Checking" section

During his speech, Todorov also presented the work of the specialized section of the web site of the Bulgarian National Radio "Fact Check" - an initiative that aims to offer the audience a reliable tool for orientation in the dynamic information environment. The section systematically analyzes widely circulated claims, controversial publications, media posts and signals submitted by citizens.

The BNR's Fact Check section pays particular attention to fake news related to the processes in the European Union and to hybrid threats that undermine trust in democratic institutions. The team systematically refutes manipulative claims about key European policies, including widespread disinformation materials about the adoption of the euro in Bulgaria. Examples of fake news and narratives related to speculation about automatic price increases, loss of national sovereignty or an impending financial crisis were given. By publishing verified data and clearly explained context, the column helps citizens distinguish facts from speculation and understand the real dimensions of European decisions.

Ivo Todorov introduced the conference participants to the methodology applied in the "Fact Check" section:

➢ verification of primary sources;
➢ tracking the chronology of a given statement;
➢ search for official documents, public registers and expert assessments;
➢ analysis of whether the facts are presented correctly or taken out of context;
➢ clear indication of the verified results so that the user understands how the conclusion was reached.

This approach makes the column an important element of the public media's strategies for countering disinformation. By publishing evidence, sources, and explanations, the BNR team not only refutes false claims, but also provides a model for how the audience can conduct their own checks.

Todorov emphasized that it is precisely this type of journalism - working with data, tracing the origin of information and revealing manipulations - that is necessary to adequately respond to the dynamics of today's information environment.

The connection between Media Masters and journalistic fact-checking practices

According to him, it is particularly important that educational initiatives prepare young people for real-life media practices. In this sense, the Media Masters project and the BNR's "Fact Check" section have complementary functions.

Media Masters provides a game-based simulation in which learners experience the process of analyzing and verifying information.

The Bulgarian National Radio demonstrates the same mechanisms, but in a real, professional environment. And the students of the Faculty of Journalism and Communication will very soon enter the profession as journalists and experts in public communication, public relations and communication management.

Todorov noted that when young people see how knowledge acquired through play finds a parallel in the real work of journalists, it increases their trust in the media and strengthens their motivation to develop their own critical analysis skills.

He stressed that journalism and education must work in sync: the media must be transparent in fact-checking, and schools and universities must teach young people to understand these processes. This two-way connection is key to building a sustainable media culture.

The educational importance of editorial transparency

Another important aspect of Todorov's speech was the role of editorial openness as a tool for media literacy. When public media shows how it verifies information and why a certain claim is inaccurate, it is not just debunking a specific news story, but educating the audience.

Ivo Todorov drew attention to the daily work of public media in conditions of constant information noise. He noted that fake news often takes advantage of fears, insecurity and strong emotions and therefore spreads much faster than verified information.

Todorov stressed that the task of journalists in public media is not only to refute false claims, but also to offer context, track sources, and build trust through transparency and consistency. He pointed out that initiatives like Media Masters are important because they "direct the conversation" towards how people themselves can build resilience to manipulative messages from school and university age.

Presentation of the new digital channels of the Bulgarian National Radio as tools for media literacy and countering disinformation

In his speech, Ivo Todorov also presented the strategic digital transformation of the Bulgarian National Radio, which expands the role of public media in the fight against disinformation and in supporting media literacy among young audiences. He presented the new digital channels of the Bulgarian National Radio, which operate since December 1, 2025.

He emphasizes the need for the Bulgarian National Radio to be not only a traditional radio operator, but also an active participant in the digital ecosystem, where new models of information consumption are being formed. In the conditions of ultra-short attention spans, when the time to hold the gaze on digital content is already measured in one second, the public media must offer accurate, visually adapted and easily accessible materials that can compete with the manipulative and sensational publications dominating social platforms.

In this context, Todorov presented the nine new digital channels of the Bulgarian National Radio, created on the occasion of the 90th anniversary of the media and aimed at modernizing communication with audiences of different age groups . Among them, the news portal bnrnews.bg occupies a central place, which offers up-to-date, verified and editorially guaranteed information in real time. The portal is structured to facilitate quick access to the leading news, and the adapted visual content such as short texts, videos, graphics, allows the audience to navigate the key topics in seconds. This is especially important for young people, who often look for a quick but reliable source of information to counteract the manipulative publications that spread like wildfire on social networks.

Particular attention was paid to the renewed multifunctional mobile application of the Bulgarian National Radio, which, in the words of Todorov, functions as "four platforms in one." The structure of the application makes the application a valuable tool for media literacy, as it provides content tailored to the age, interests and media habits of different groups of users.

Todorov also introduced the audience to other innovative digital projects of the Bulgarian National Radio, which combine journalism, education and elements of investigation.

In conclusion, Ivo Todorov emphasized that the modernized digital platforms of the Bulgarian National Radio are not just a technical update, but a strategic tool for countering disinformation. Through them, the public media provides accessible, verified and visually adapted information that competes with manipulative messages on social networks and creates a basis for developing media literacy among young people.

Highlights from Vladimir Yonchev's speech

Vladimir Yonchev focused on narratives – the way facts are arranged into stories, and the power of that arrangement to change meaning. He noted that effective propaganda rarely uses pure fabrications – it more often uses perfectly true facts, but combined and framed in a way that leads the audience to a certain suggestion.

He gave examples from the current public environment, in which authentic images, videos or quotes become a tool for manipulation simply by changing the context. Yonchev emphasized that future journalists must develop a sense not only for "whether something is true", but also for what meaning is constructed through the way it is presented.

Highlights from the presentation of Senior Assistant Professor Dr. Yordan Karapenchev

Senior Assistant Professor Dr. Karapenchev presented the online version of the game Media Masters, available free of charge for use by students and teachers. He demonstrated the main game mechanics, the types of scenarios and sample cases in which participants must analyze information sources, identify manipulations and make decisions on how to respond.

Karapenchev emphasized that the game has no commercial purpose and that it was created specifically as a resource for educational use – both in formal and informal settings. He outlined the possibilities for adapting the tasks to different groups – from high school students to university students and young professionals.

4. Guided sessions with a game format

Senior Assistant Professor Dr. Yordan Karapenchev presented the mobile game Media Masters through a practical demonstration.

The game component of the project was presented primarily through the demonstration of the online version of Media Masters, focused on how digital tools can support media literacy training. During the session, Senior Assistant Professor Dr. Karapenchev went through different types of case studies included in the game – fake news, quotes taken out of context, misleading headlines, manipulated images, etc.

The demonstration showed how a game can simulate the real dynamics of the information environment: participants are placed in situations where they have to react to "news" under the pressure of time, emotions and group opinion. Thus, they not only learn theoretical principles, but also experience typical traps that users fall into on social networks.

In the discussion after the presentation, teachers and students commented on the possibilities for the game to be used in:

- ➢ seminar exercises in university courses;
- ➢ workshops with students;
- ➢ trainings for young leaders and activists in the civil sector;
- ➢ community awareness campaigns.

Participants expressed interest in the possibilities of the desktop and online versions of the game, so as to achieve a balance between the live "face-to-face" discussion and the convenience of the digital environment.

5. Generate feedback and discussions

The final stage of the conference was dedicated to the systematic collection and analysis of feedback from participants, as well as an in-depth discussion on the challenges and future prospects for developing media literacy in Bulgaria. This part of the program became a natural continuation of the theoretical and practical modules presented earlier in the day, and allowed to outline the trends, attitudes and expectations of the different target groups.

The feedback gathering was not a formal element, but a purposefully structured activity, integrated in a way that allowed the participants – students, teachers, journalists and civil society representatives – to articulate their experiences, difficulties, findings and recommendations. This turned the discussion session into a valuable source of qualitative

data that will serve to further develop the Media Masters project and plan future training initiatives.

5.1. Attitudes and general impressions of the participants

A common trend emerged from the very beginning of the exchange: participants were highly engaged, demonstrated strong interest in the topic, and actively expressed their arguments, observations, and personal experiences. For many students, the discussion represented a first opportunity to share their own cases of misleading information they had encountered on social media, in the learning process, or in everyday communication with peers.

Their statements confirmed a key characteristic of today's information environment: disinformation is not just an external threat, but a part of everyday media consumption, so normalized that it often goes unnoticed. The participants emphasized that it is this "hidden," continuous nature of misleading messages that makes the topic of media literacy so important.

Students participating in the conference emphasized the difficulty of navigating the huge flow of content on social networks and the lack of sufficient tools for news analysis. Some shared that classes should pay attention to verifying information and the mechanisms through which misleading narratives are created. This reinforced the importance of the practical tools developed under the project and showed the need for more systematic media education in schools.

5.2. Positive assessment of the game approach and its pedagogical potential

One of the most pronounced trends in the feedback was the high appreciation of the game model underlying "Media Masters". Participants, both young people and educators, shared that the game transforms complex concepts such as disinformation, manipulation, hidden messages, narrative control and source verification into understandable and easily understandable practical situations.

Many students noted that the interactive format made them think more deeply about their own reactions when confronted with unconfirmed information. In game settings, decisions are often made under pressure – time, competition, uncertainty, which closely mimics the natural way people react to news in a real online environment.

Teachers and university professors emphasized that the game provides a universal tool that can be applied across disciplines – from civics, through philosophy and history, to information technology and journalism. This wide range of applications demonstrates the potential of the developed tools to be integrated into a broader educational framework.

5.3. Interest in long-term participation and institutional implementation

A significant number of participants expressed a desire to continue participating in future Media Masters-related activities. There was a particularly strong interest in the possibilities for the game to be:

- ➢ included in university courses
- ➢ included in school subjects such as Bulgarian language and literature, philosophy, history, information technologies, etc.;
- ➢ used in extracurricular clubs;
- ➢ integrated into critical thinking training;
- ➢ used as part of digital citizenship campaigns.

This shows that the event does not just inform, but generates real intentions for action, which is one of the key dimensions of sustainable impact.

Teachers shared that the project could serve as a basis for developing new media literacy courses that would include a combination of theory, game practices, and analysis of real cases.

5.4. Media literacy as part of a national educational reform

An interesting direction of the discussion was the development of the topic in the context of the proposed changes in the curricula of the Ministry of Education and Science to include media literacy in the curricula of secondary education in Bulgaria, published on December 1, 2025 by the Ministry of Education and Science for public discussion. The participants in the discussion agreed that this is a particularly important moment for Bulgaria, as for the first time media literacy is being consistently integrated into school education at the national level.

According to the proposed changes in nine subjects, including Bulgarian language and literature, philosophy, information technologies, history and civilizations, geography and economics, it is planned to introduce new elements aimed at:

- ➢ fake news detection;
- ➢ source analysis;
- ➢ assessment of the reliability of information;
- ➢ critical thinking and argumentation;
- ➢ basic fact-checking skills;
- ➢ orientation in the digital environment and online communication.

announced by the Ministry of Education and Science in early December 2025 was perceived by the conference participants as a strong signal that the system is aware of the need to react to the growing disinformation. Many teachers noted that Media Masters could become a natural addition to the new curricula, as it offers a structured and proven effective toolkit that facilitates teachers in the real application of the new learning objectives. Tatyana Predova, a state expert from the Inclusive Education Directorate of the Ministry of Education and Science, is familiar with the project.

5.5. Participants' recommendations for future events and project development

At the end of the discussion, the participants formulated specific recommendations, including:

- ➢ organizing national student tournaments with Media Masters;
- ➢ creating training modules for teachers to use the game;
- ➢ adapting the content for primary education;
- ➢ developing a special version aimed at verifying visual content (deepfakes, manipulated images);
- ➢ expanding partnerships with media to promote the initiative.

5.6. Several clear trends emerged:

High level of engagement – students actively participated in the discussions, asked questions to the lecturers, and shared their observations about disinformation on social media and in the daily news stream;

Positive assessment of the game approach – participants indicated that the game makes complex topics more understandable and closer to their real experience, especially for the younger audience;

Interest in continued participation – educators and civil society representatives expressed a desire to use Media Masters tools in their future initiatives and to be included in subsequent demonstration events.

The conference reinforced the impression that media literacy can be developed most successfully when theory is combined with practical work, and participants have the opportunity to discuss real-life cases together with experts, educators, and journalists.

On December 1st The Ministry of Education and Science has proposed changes to the school curricula in 9 subjects for public discussion. The emphasis is on recognizing disinformation, with students learning how to spot fake news, analyze sources, and think critically. This is a key element in the new concept of Bulgarian language and literature.

The topics of media literacy and digital safety are also included in the programs of philosophy, information technologies, history, geography and others. The changes have been published for public discussion on the website of the Ministry of Education and Science, and proposals can be sent until the end of February - https://www.mon.bg/project-document/konczepcziya-za-promy a_na-na-uchebnite-programi-po-filosofiya/ . This is the period in which parents, teachers and students can really influence the final programs.

5.7. Media literacy as a collective responsibility

Section 5 clearly shows that the closing discussion of the conference was not just a formality, but a key moment of the event. The participants' statements outlined media literacy as a systemic, interdisciplinary and long-term task that requires:

- ➢ commitment of institutions,
- ➢ active participation of the media,
- ➢ support from the civil sector,
- ➢ and most importantly – involving young people themselves.

The second conference "The Impact of Fake News on European Democracies" within the framework of the project "Media Masters: Improving Media Literacy", held on 3 December 2025, demonstrated the need for an integrated and cross-sectoral approach to the development of media literacy as a key component of modern democratic culture. The presented analyses and discussions outlined the strategic dimensions of the Media Masters project, which positions itself as a sustainable tool to support educational, media and public structures in addressing the challenges of the disinformation environment. The recommendations formulated by the participants emphasize that the initiative has the potential to be upgraded and adapted to different target groups, thus contributing to the building of a critically thinking and informed civil society.

HISTORY OF CHANGES		
VERSION	PUBLICATION DATE	CHANGE
1.0	09.12.2025	Initial version