# Conference Report

sef:

**sef: session at the Deutsche Welle Global Media Forum**

# Countering Populism via Media Literacy?
## Eastern European Approaches

**Rafael Bohlen**

**At this year's sef: session at the Deutsche Welle (DW) Global Media Forum, we discussed Eastern European approaches to media literacy. Our speakers were Laima Venclauskienė, Senior Analyst at Debunk.org and Viktor Pichuhin, Ukrainian journalist and founder of the organization „Nakipelo". The session was moderated by Kristin Zeier (Head of Content Pool, DW).**

The one-hour session „Countering Populism via Media Literacy? Eastern European Approaches" at the DW Global Media Forum 2024 offered valuable insights into the current challenges and innovative approaches to promoting media literacy in Ukraine and Lithuania. The panelists from Debunk.org and Nakipelo shared their experiences and strategies to combat disinformation and populism and to strengthen media literacy in their respective countries. Both panellists particularly emphasized the threat posed by Russian disinformation campaigns. Laima Venclauskienė explained that these campaigns often aim to create political instability and undermine trust in democratic institutions. Viktor Pichuhin added that this disinformation is not only particularly intense in Ukraine, but is also constantly changing and taking on new, sometimes increasingly convincing and credible forms. Both organizations are working intensively to uncover these disinformation campaigns, educate the public and train media literacy. Although there are a number of initiatives and projects in the area of media literacy, according to Laima Venklauskiene, and the Lithuanian population's ability to recognize fake news is politically assessed as good, empirical surveys show massive gaps in dealing with fake news. People need to be made more aware of the issue and creative approaches to promote media literacy are therefore particularly needed.

Chair Kristin Zeier (Head of Content Pool, DW) with panelists Viktor Pichuhin (Ukrainian journalist and founder of the organization „Nakipelo") and Laima Venclauskienė (Senior Analyst at Debunk.org)

Laima Venclauskienė and Viktor Pichuhin presented their projects in the field of media literacy in detail. These include workshops and online courses aimed at training teachers and students in media literacy, but also innovative methods such as the „Bad News Game", in which the players have the task of gaining as many followers as possible by spreading fake news in such a clever way that it appears appealing and credible. These programs are designed to teach practical skills in a playful manner that are useful in the daily use of media. Viktor Pichuhin introduced the work of Nakipelo, which trains citizen journalists who contribute their own stories and perspectives to promote a more diverse media landscape. He stated that this also goes hand in hand with the need

to make better and more strategic use of multiplier effects in the area of media literacy. Utilizing multiplicators could, from his experience, help with solving another issue in media literacy projects: that it is often counterproductive for educators to directly label fake news, as this could put off the audience accusing the educator to be part of a conspiracy himself. Instead, both speakers advocated a step-by-step and well thought-out education that relies above all on the participants themselves recognizing fake news as such.

Panellist Laima Venclauskienė on the threat posed by russian disinformation campaigns to political stability in the context of the Russian war of agression against Ukraine.

During the discussion, there were also transfers to other regions of the world, with one participant from Indonesia asking about strategies for dealing with „humorous“ but autocratic populists who gain attention and popularity through popular content. The panellists emphasized that humorous and seemingly harmless content often has a deeper, manipulative agenda. To counter this, they recommended raising public awareness of the manipulation techniques used. It is important to question the context and the possible intentions of these populists and to offer alternative, equally entertaining but informative content. This could be done through satire, parodies and creative educational campaigns that also use humorous means to convey positive and educational messages.

The session underlined that the promotion of media literacy in Eastern Europe is a decisive factor in countering the growing threat of disinformation. The dissemination and further development of creative and interactive approaches, such as digital offerings, play an important role in reaching and sensitizing different target groups. Through educational initiatives, community engagement and extensive research work, both Debunk.org and Nakipelo contribute significantly to strengthening media literacy and combating disinformation.

The panelists engaging in a lively discussion with the audience about strategies and lessons learned in dealing with the growing threat of disinformation in different regions of the world.

The Development and Peace Foundation (sef:) was founded in 1986 on the initiative of Willy Brandt. As a cross-party and non-profit-making organisation, the sef: provides an international high-level forum for shared thinking on urgent peace and development issues.

The reports on the conferences and events of the Development and Peace Foundation (sef:) provide information about the discussions and results in a compact form.

**Published by**
Development and Peace Foundation (sef:)/
Stiftung Entwicklung und Frieden (sef:)
Dechenstr. 2 : 53115 Bonn : Germany
Phone +49 (0)228 959 25-0 : Fax -99
sef@sef-bonn.org : @sefbonn
www.sef-bonn.org

**Editor**
Rafael Bohlen

**Basic Design Concept**
Pitch Black Graphic Design
Berlin/Rotterdam

**Layout**
Davina Albrecht

Contents do not necessarily reflect the views of the publisher.

© sef: 2024