PRESS

THE ROLE OF MEDIA

IN TIMES OF WAR AND TECHNOLOGICAL TRANSFORMATION

Recommendations for Ethical
and Responsible Journalism

The Aspen Institute Kyiv held a series of 3 seminars 'Media and Reality: Dimensions of Responsibility' in Ukraine in 2023–2024 with the support of the OSCE Support Programme for Ukraine. The purpose of these events was to create a space for professional dialogue, discussion and joint search for answers to the current challenges faced by the media. The seminars were attended by 72 people — journalists, editors, media experts, teachers, media lawyers and communications specialists — who focused on the problems of the modern media sphere in the context of war, dynamic changes in society and rapid development of technology.

The seminars were based on a unique methodology developed by the Aspen Institute, which included joint reading and discussion of classical and contemporary texts, group work and creative assignments. Among the texts reviewed were works by J. Habermas, J. S. Mill, M. McLuhan and other leading thinkers, as well as contemporary Ukrainian authors who analysed the specifics of media work during the war, the transformation of professional journalism standards and the new media legislation of Ukraine.

The participants of the seminars worked on a wide range of topics: from the ethics of the journalistic profession in wartime to countering information manipulation, developing media literacy and adapting the media to the impact of new technologies. In addition, the discussions actively raised the issues of media self-regulation, preserving the public function of journalism and the tension between freedom of speech and security in times of war. At the end of the workshops, a survey was also conducted to better identify key challenges and develop recommendations for overcoming them.

This work resulted in recommendations in several areas, which summarise the views expressed during the discussions and post-workshop survey. It is important to emphasise that these recommendations are of a generalised nature and do not claim to be an in-depth, detailed or comprehensive analysis of the situation in the media sector of Ukraine, which is the subject of academic or specialised research. They only outline the most key challenges that were raised during the discussions. The discussions themselves were dynamic and diverse, and the participants had a wide range of views, from similar to diametrically opposed. Therefore, the conclusions presented here are the result of a search for common ground and a generalised summary of the reflections expressed, rather than a reflection of the position of each participant individually. Likewise, these recommendations do not represent the official position of the OSCE Support Programme for Ukraine or The Aspen Institute Kyiv. They are intended primarily as a basis for further dialogue, support for the professional community, and outlining possible areas for improving the functioning of the media in this difficult and extremely important period for Ukrainian society.

1 Ethical principles of work and professional standards of media and journalists in wartime: recommendations

In times of war, the role of the media becomes particularly important, as it shapes public opinion, influences the morale of society and ensures transparency in the work of government agencies. The activities of journalists and the media should be further grounded in ethical principles that take into account the sensitivity of the situation and the security context. Such an ethical approach to media work helps to maintain the trust of the audience, promotes social cohesion and strengthens civic responsibility.

With this in mind, the proposed guidelines are intended to support journalists, editors, managers and media owners in their efforts to respond effectively to contemporary challenges. They are aimed at helping media representatives not only maintain the basic standards of the profession, but also adapt them to the realities of wartime, when every word or piece of information can have a significant impact on society, on the lives and health of citizens. In fulfilling their social function, the media should take care of the objectivity, accuracy and ethical presentation of information. At the same time, the proposed recommendations should help build strategies that will avoid social divisions, ensure safety and minimise risks in the process of covering events.

Truthfulness and accuracy. Journalists should focus on the maximum adherence to fact-checking standards, even when access to information is limited. The publication of data should be accompanied by thorough fact-checking, engaging expert opinions and providing context for a deeper understanding by the audience. An important practice may be to establish or continue cooperation with independent fact-checking organisations, which will increase the credibility of materials. Joint work of editorial offices with fact-checking platforms will also help to avoid the spread of disinformation.

Balance between timeliness and accuracy and depth. In today's media environment, a balance should be found and maintained between immediacy and depth of reporting. Priority should be given to thoroughly verifying information, even if this reduces the speed of reporting (immediacy). This approach helps to build audience trust and prevents the spread of disinformation. The standard of timeliness may be subject to change, as in many cases a delay in time is necessary to release information for security reasons. Establishing internal editorial protocols will help to better address these issues. In addition, newsrooms should consider organising internal

seminars to discuss complex and difficult situations, especially if they may threaten national security or affect the psyche of media consumers or traumatise war victims and their families. When dealing with anonymous sources and information leaks, journalists should avoid haste and publish data only after careful verification. If the information is of critical public importance, it is advisable to add as much context as possible, explaining its importance. The current context should also be taken into account when deciding when to publish content, trying to assess the implications, especially for defence and national security.

Public safety. Publication of materials that could directly harm the country's defence capability should be avoided. Sensitive information should be published only after a thorough analysis of its potential consequences. With regard to security issues, journalists may 'vlogging' faces, interior or landscape elements that could reveal the location or identify people associated with military operations. In addition, journalists should intensify consultations with security experts to assess risks. In some cases, it may be appropriate to refrain from publishing stories until it is safe to do so.

The role of a citizen in the work of a journalist. Journalists, especially in times of war, should be aware that their civic position is an important element of social interaction. In cases where internal editorial meetings in newsrooms come to the conclusion that the publication of certain information may harm the achievement of a common goal, such as victory in the Russian-Ukrainian war (e.g. questionable decisions and orders of military or civilian leadership, behaviour of military personnel, conditions of the negotiation process), it is advisable to consider temporarily refraining from publishing through the decision of the editor-in-chief or relevant persons in the editorial office. At the same time, it is important to document this information for publication at a safe time. Journalists should adhere to the principle of truth, but take into account the context and possible consequences of their actions. In cases where the publication of information may harm the state's interests, help the enemy or influence international decisions to support Ukraine, it is important to take into account the public importance, security, and choose the appropriate time for publication. This will help avoid manipulation by third parties and maintain the trust of the audience.

Criticism of officials and control over the actions of the public authorities. Materials highlighting shortcomings in the work of the authorities should be published in a balanced manner, focusing on opportunities to improve the situation. This will help to maintain trust in the state, which is especially important for foreign partners, and avoid unnecessary polarisation of society. Criticism of the authorities and investigations that highlight problems in the work of state bodies should be conducted with particular care. Excessive emphasis on sensationalism should be avoided and focus should be on proposals for improving the situation. For example, criticism can be accompanied by expert comments on how to solve problems, and examples of positive changes can be added. This helps to balance the impact of the material and prevent polarisation of the audience. Exposing corrupt practices or abuses should be based on thoroughly verified data and take into account the

risks to national unity and security. Legal advice should be sought before publishing such material. Investigations relating to national security or political processes should be conducted with particular care and analysis of the consequences, taking into account the social context. Corruption schemes should be exposed in order to promptly address systemic problems. At the same time, it should be borne in mind that investigations into corruption can reinforce Russia's narrative of Ukraine as a 'failed and corrupt state' and undermine the trust of Western partners. Therefore, the media should be guided by the principle of solving the problem rather than by the popularity that the publication of a particular investigation may generate. When identifying certain problems and abuses of a corrupt nature, especially if they relate to the country's defence capability, it is worth considering first contacting the relevant institutions for a prompt response and elimination of the problem. Publicity should be used in case of ignoring, delaying the solution of problems or attempts to conceal problems and stop the publication of investigations or influence on the journalists or editorial staff by the authorities.

Highlighting problems in the military divisions. It is important not to hush up problems, but to cover them in a way that does not harm the country's defence capability. For example, you can talk about systemic challenges, seeking expert support and adding positive examples for balance. It is also important to consult with legal experts to avoid breaking the law or spreading false information. If the information may undermine the credibility of the AFU, it is advisable to focus on systemic distortions rather than individual cases. Individual cases may illustrate more general problematic trends. Journalists should also pay attention to the systemic nature of certain violations and ask themselves whether they are working with a single isolated case or an element of a whole system of abuses and problems. This will help create a constructive discussion without damaging the reputation of individuals or institutions. It is also important to explain to the audience why the problem has arisen and how it can be solved.

Prioritisation of topics. Military and socially important topics should remain in the spotlight. At the same time, it is important to offer the audience materials on lighter topics that help maintain emotional balance and mental health, such as success stories, cultural or sporting achievements, or mutual aid initiatives.

Avoiding polarisation and divisions in society. Journalists should also pay attention to covering positive changes and achievements that contribute to national unity. Stories about the successes of civic initiatives, the military, state transformation and volunteers can help to maintain the consolidation of society. For example, economic, social and educational issues can become points of common interest even in a polarised society. It is also important to avoid headlines that could provoke conflict or promote disinformation.

Preventing clickbait. Avoiding sensationalism in headlines and focusing on the quality of materials should help build long-term trust. Involving independent experts

and in-depth analysis of topics helps to avoid manipulation and improve the professional level of content. For example, instead of shocking headlines, you should use accurate and informative phrases that help the audience understand the message.

Participation of 'good Russians'. The decision not to invite such people to participate in programmes, stories, expert commentaries, etc. helps protect national interests, reduces the risks of hostile propaganda and supports the development of Ukrainian experts. These approaches should be openly explained to the audience to maintain trust.

Managing sensitive content. Pay special attention to the emotional impact of materials. Avoiding excessive fear-mongering or shocking details helps to maintain trust and respect for the audience. Editors should take into account the psychological state of the audience when dealing with traumatic topics, in particular, avoid excessive emotionalization or traumatization. It is also important to pay attention to how the presentation of traumatic events can affect the public mood in the long run. Editors should carefully regulate the publication of war-related materials, taking into account ethical aspects and journalistic standards. Images of casualties, funerals, or war injuries should be presented in a way that is sensitive to the needs and characteristics of the audience (vomiting, lack of close-ups). By avoiding sensationalism, you can remain true to professional standards. If the information is too sensitive, it can be recorded for publication at a safe time.

Interaction with the audience. The editorial office should introduce and maintain effective mechanisms for audience feedback (comments on the website, social media, online polls, hotlines, meetings and discussions) that will allow identifying and correcting media errors in publications, as well as involving the audience in the search for and production of content. This will help increase trust in the media and improve their performance.

2 Key challenges to the functioning of the media sector in Ukraine and ways to overcome them in wartime

War and restrictions on access to information. Martial law imposes natural restrictions on access to information in order to ensure security and protect national interests. In particular, freedom of speech may be subject to restrictions due to the need to prevent the disclosure of information that could harm military operations or endanger the lives of military and civilians. Journalists often face restrictions on access to the front line, operational information, certain speakers or coverage of certain topics. Very often, the principle of the so-called "time embargo" is applied, when information is published not promptly, but with a delay in time. While such restrictions are natural in times of war and are understood by the journalistic community, they can also pose challenges to objective coverage of events, requiring the media to take a careful approach to gathering and presenting materials. Journalists have to strike a balance between the public's right to the truth and the need to maintain security, avoiding actions that could jeopardize military operations or national security. These circumstances require a special responsibility in covering military realities to maintain the trust of the audience while not harming the overall interests of the country.

Competition. The Unified News telethon plays an extremely important role in disseminating official information during the war, contributing to the unity of the information space and the prompt delivery of key messages. At the same time, its unique format can affect the overall dynamics of the media market, including the access of independent media to a wide audience, and spark discussions about ensuring content diversity. In this context, it is also important to take into account the changing media consumption of society and the adaptation of information policy to new realities. Taking these aspects into account in the future will help strengthen the information environment and maintain a balance between effective communication and media pluralism.

Monetization and lack of financial resources. The shrinking advertising market, the economic crisis, the freezing of some international support programs, the practice of information piracy, and a low culture of paid content consumption are deepening the financial problems of the media. This has a particularly negative impact on regional and small independent media, which have limited capacity for financial and institutional sustainability. Without adequate funding, such media cannot guarantee the quality and independence of their content, which further threatens freedom of speech.

Lack of personnel. One of the key challenges for Ukraine's media sector is an acute shortage of personnel, including technical specialists, journalists, editors and

cameramen. The war has caused a significant outflow of people abroad, especially among young and qualified professionals who were the backbone of many media organizations. Additionally, the mobilization of men led to the fact that many media workers were forced to temporarily leave their professional activities. As a result, newsrooms are dominated by two extremes: either very young professionals with limited experience or older employees who find it difficult to adapt to modern requirements and technologies. In such circumstances, the media are forced to look for new approaches to attracting specialists.

Potential influence on editorial policy. In the context of financial instability, institutional uncertainty, lack of a full-fledged advertising market and weak solidarity among journalists, the risk of media owners and managers influencing editorial policy is significantly increased. The lack of stable funding makes editorial offices depend on the resources of owners who can use the media as a tool to promote their own political or business interests. The absence of clear rules and mechanisms to protect editorial independence, especially in times of crisis, creates fertile ground for manipulation. In addition, weak organization and low levels of solidarity among journalists hinder their ability to withstand pressure, which jeopardizes the quality and objectivity of information.

To overcome these challenges, the following measures are proposed:

Transparency and access to information. It is important to ensure better access of independent media to key information platforms and to develop mechanisms for information exchange between government agencies and journalists. The creation of special information hubs or platforms for journalists can contribute to greater openness.

Ensure equal access. Clear and transparent criteria should be developed for the distribution of airtime and resources that take into account the interests of small and regional media. This will create a more equal environment in the information space.

Support for new formats. Encouraging independent media to create modern multimedia platforms and formats within the framework of new legislative norms should increase the number of audiences and financial viability of the media. The state (subject to transparency and political impartiality), international donor institutions, and civil society organizations should intensify their support for these initiatives through competitions and grants.

Financial support. It is advisable to introduce and strengthen educational initiatives aimed at improving the culture of paid content consumption.

Consideration should also be given to developing a state support program for independent media, including through grants, tax breaks for publishers, and specialized support programs for regional and small media. Such state programs should include powerful independent supervisory boards to ensure transparency, open-

ness and accountability in the distribution of financial resources to avoid corruption schemes, manipulation and abuse of the media for political or business purposes. The Ukrainian Cultural Foundation at the stage of its early operation can serve as a model for such programs.

In particular, for regional and local media, it is proposed to:

- To expand the range of entities eligible for state support to include local and regional media. This will contribute to the sustainable development of local information resources and strengthen the role of media in communities.
- Through the support of independent platforms for assessing the quality of media content and disseminating objective ratings, to create and maintain a map of the so-called "white media" (media that meet ethical and professional standards) in each region to increase transparency and trust in local media. The mapping methodology can become a tool for assessing the quality of content and editorial integrity, as well as a tool for strengthening audience trust and financial viability of the media.
- To recommend that donors direct their support to "white media" that meet ethical standards. This will help to preserve the independence of local media from the influence of large corporations or political structures.
- To introduce joint media products to cover socially important topics by combining the resources of local media. Joint projects can help ensure wider audience coverage and improve the quality of content.
- To develop a unified strategy of support (state, donor, international) for small media operating in regions close to the war zones to ensure equal access to information for all citizens.

Fundamentals of financing

Advertising. Refusing to work with advertisers with reputational risks (Russian footprint, work on the Russian market, betting, etc.) is an important step that can help maintain audience trust. To replace the budget, it would be advisable to look for new partnerships with companies that share ethical principles. It is important to work on diversifying income, in particular through grants, partnerships or crowdfunding. For example, raising funds through audience support can be an alternative to risky advertising deals.

At the same time, the development of crowdfunding and support for independent, collaborative content-sharing platforms can contribute to the financial sustainability of the media.

Antitrust laws should be strengthened to regulate the advertising market. The development of a separate antitrust law to regulate the advertising market could help regulate the specific issues of this sector in more detail. Such an initiative could complement and clarify existing regulations to ensure fair competition and transparency in the media advertising market.

Transparency. Ensuring transparency in advertising agreements and clearly labeling paid content can help build reputation and create trust in the media. It is important to develop internal rules on the acceptability of funding sources. Consideration should be given to developing and signing memorandums with the business community on adherence to the principles of integrity in the choice of media for cooperation, which can help reduce the influence of unfair information resources.

Human resources management

Conscription. Preserving partial salaries for conscripted employees and supporting their families can help maintain team spirit in newsrooms. It is worth analyzing and exploring the possibilities of establishing special conscription rules for media professionals, taking into account their professional status, and ensuring the reservation of key specialists. This will help avoid staff losses in critical areas of the media industry.

Young professionals. It is also important to invest in training young journalists by organizing mentoring programs. For example, involving experienced journalists in mentoring can help maintain the quality of content.

Psychological support. It is essential to take care of the mental health of editorial staff, including by engaging psychologists and creating favourable working conditions. Regular team meetings to discuss challenges and provide support can help foster a positive work environment.

Support for public service broadcasting. Protecting and developing the public service broadcasting system in Ukraine is key to ensuring impartial and high-quality content accessible to all citizens. This requires financial stability, independence from political influence, and investment in modern infrastructure.

In particular, the following measures are proposed:

- To fulfill the requirements of the Law of Ukraine "On Public Media of Ukraine" regarding the funding of the public broadcaster in the amount of 0.2% of the state budget expenditures for the previous year. This will ensure the stability of the public broadcaster's work and the ability to develop high-quality content.
- To conduct advocacy campaigns on non-interference of the state in the editorial policy of the public broadcaster. Such campaigns will help to strengthen the independence of editorial activities and the trust of the audience.
- To focus donor support to cover the costs of content production, given the lack of funding from the state budget. Donor support can be an important source of funding for new programs and projects.
- To promote international support through partnerships with civil society organizations and Western donors. International funding will allow implementing long-term programs and raising broadcasting quality standards.
- To review and strengthen the strategy for creating innovative content that meets modern audience requirements and competitive conditions in the media market.

Censorship and interaction between editorial offices and media owners. Avoiding interference in editorial policy helps to preserve media independence and increases audience trust. It is also important to develop mechanisms to protect editorial independence in the event of external pressure. Media owners should avoid direct interference in editorial policy, while promoting a constructive dialogue between management and the editorial team. In cases of censorship by the owners, journalists should work together to develop reasoned solutions within the newsroom. If a compromise cannot be reached, it is possible to consider submitting the material for publication to other independent media, while maintaining the ethical principles of journalism. It is also worth using the existing mechanisms of self-regulation in the media sphere, such as the Commission on Journalistic Ethics or other instruments. It is proposed to establish independent supervisory boards within media outlets or holdings, including inviting reputable foreign experts. This can help reduce the influence of owners on editorial policy and ensure the independence of journalists, as well as help increase the trust of the audience. The influence of owners on editorial policy should also be constantly monitored, creating conditions for open and transparent operation of media companies.

Support for industry standards and self-regulation. Media owners and managers could promote self-regulation of the media industry by organizing initiatives to share experiences among market participants. This would help to shape professional standards, avoid cartelization, and ensure the stable development of the media industry. Investing in quality standards, organizing joint discussions, and supporting self-regulation are key to the industry's sustainable development. For example, the establishment of ethics committees and the exchange of experience between media outlets will help maintain a high level of professionalism. In particular, it is recommended to promote the establishment of an independent organization to protect the rights of journalists (e.g., institutionalize the Media Movement (Mediarukh) initiative or create a Media Council). Such an organization could play an important role in resolving conflicts between editorial offices and media owners, counteract government pressure on the media, actively promote the media agenda in the world, and help protect Ukraine's information space.

3 Self-regulation in the media sphere: challenges and recommendations

In Ukraine, there are currently some initiatives aimed at supporting ethical standards and self-regulation in the media, such as the Commission on Journalistic Ethics, the Independent Media Council, etc. However, their influence is limited, as the decisions of these bodies are not binding, which creates problems with their implementation and recognition in the media environment. For the first time, the new Law of Ukraine "On Media" provides for a co-regulation mechanism, which envisages a partnership between state regulators and representatives of the media community to harmonize the rules of work, standards and principles of ethics. However, the implementation of this instrument faces a number of challenges, including the lack of clear procedures for interaction, limited trust between the parties, and the risk of excessive influence of certain interest groups.

An additional challenge for the information environment is the influence of unprofessional information platforms, bloggers, influencers, and anonymous channels such as Telegram, which significantly distort the information landscape. These actors often do not adhere to ethical and professional standards of journalism, disseminating unverified, manipulative or distorted information. Often, such sources become a tool of manipulation capable of influencing a large audience, especially in the context of martial law, which poses serious risks to the country's information security and the lives of citizens.

In these conditions, there is an urgent need to create a unified system of self-regulation standards that will not only establish transparent rules of the game, but also ensure the effectiveness of co-regulation, increase confidence in regulatory mechanisms and help minimize the negative impact of destructive information actors.

Therefore, to address the current challenges, in particular, the following is proposed:

- To create a single self-governing institution of self-regulation in the media sphere of Ukraine, which will ensure the establishment and observance of professional standards, resolve conflicts between editorial offices and media owners, and counteract pressure from the authorities. It is proposed that its establishment be initiated through a forum based on a reputable organization (or group of organizations), which will become a platform for determining strategic directions and agreeing on rules of operation. The central body of the institution could be a council of reputable journalists that would set standards for the profession, determine membership in the community, and introduce a single press card. Such an institution would contribute to the formation of

an independent and responsible media environment in Ukraine. In the future, support from international partners should be lobbied for grant funding and development of the newly created organization.

- To develop a regulatory mechanism that defines the criteria for defining and recognizing media. This could provide clarity in defining the responsibilities of media organizations and avoid abuse of the status of journalist. This proposal provides for a legislative differentiation between professional media and other information platforms, which will allow for more effective interaction with different actors in the information landscape.

- To promote the de-anonymization of media platforms through registration by the national regulator, which will increase the transparency and responsibility of media organizations.

- To introduce uniform rules of the game for all media market participants, including ethical standards, transparency of funding, and responsibility for content. This will harmonize approaches to regulation and self-regulation. Also, to introduce a clear algorithm for resolving disputes in accreditation procedures, obtaining/revoking a press card, protecting journalists' rights, access to information, content quality standards, etc. based on transparent rules and accessible appeal mechanisms, which will help reduce conflicts in the media environment.

- To create mechanisms for internal monitoring and reporting within the media, including regular analysis of media content. This approach can help to continuously improve the work of the media and increase their credibility.

- To use artificial intelligence tools to systematically monitor and analyze media content to identify errors or manipulations. This can increase the effectiveness of analytical tools and initiatives and improve the quality of media content.

- To take into account the differences between journalists, bloggers, and influencers and introduce a single press card tool and clear rights it provides, as well as rules for obtaining it, to avoid confusion in definitions and procedures.

- Together with government agencies, to develop a mechanism to ensure access to official information and accreditation exclusively for holders of a single press card. This will help minimize information manipulation and the influence of unqualified agents in the information space.

- To create a nationwide platform for the exchange of experience and harmonization of standards between professional journalists and media organizations (possibly on the basis of a newly created self-governing organization). Such a platform would further improve the quality of journalistic materials.

4 (Self)regulation of the media sphere in the context of the use of new technologies and the impact of information platforms

In today's media environment, the rapid development of new technologies, including artificial intelligence (AI), and the influence of information platforms such as Telegram, Meta, X (formerly Twitter), YouTube, and TikTok, pose numerous challenges for the regulation and self-regulation of the media sector. These **challenges** require in-depth analysis and a systematic approach to overcoming them. The main problematic aspects are as follows:

Growing influence of technological platforms. Technological platforms are increasingly influencing the formation of public opinion, in fact becoming the main sources of information for many citizens. At the same time, their algorithms that determine the visibility of content often operate as a black box, making it impossible to assess their neutrality and transparency. The lack of effective mechanisms for controlling content on these platforms contributes to the spread of disinformation, hate speech, and manipulative materials.

The speed of technological change. The pace of AI development far outstrips the capabilities of existing legal and ethical regulatory mechanisms. Innovations, such as generative AI models, allow for the rapid creation of realistic content (images, video, text), which creates new threats to the media sphere:

- automated AI tools facilitate the mass production of fake news and misleading materials;
- thanks to technological platforms, disinformation can instantly reach wide audiences.

Lack of understanding of AI among the population. The low level of public awareness of the principles of AI functioning contributes to the spread of fears, myths, and misunderstanding of its capabilities and limitations. Lack of critical thinking and skills in recognizing AI-generated content make it difficult to combat manipulation and disinformation.

Threats to the journalism profession. The development of AI calls into question the future of many traditional journalistic practices:

- reducing the need for journalists to perform routine tasks;
- the risk of automating content creation without proper human control, which may reduce its quality;
- the need for new technical competencies among journalists who need to work effectively with AI.

Ethical challenges. The use of AI in content creation needs to be clearly regulated to avoid violating ethical standards. The main issues include:

- confidentiality and protection of personal data;
- transparency in the use of AI in journalism and copyright issues;
- ensuring ethics in automated processing and creation of information.

These challenges demonstrate the complexity and multifaceted nature of issues related to the self-regulation of the media sphere in the context of technological progress.

To overcome these challenges, the following measures are proposed:

Interaction with technology platforms

- To develop a code of ethics for working with technology platforms, including the use of generative AI. This can reduce the impact of harmful content and improve the quality of information disseminated through these platforms.
- To strengthen the local presence of technology companies by establishing their representative offices. This can contribute to a better understanding of local contexts and more effective interaction with local media.
- To include elements of co-regulation aimed at harmonizing actions between the state, media and platforms to create a more transparent content regulation policy.
- To develop a differentiated approach to regulating platforms depending on their transparency, ownership, and content quality. This can help avoid over-regulation while ensuring an appropriate level of standards.

Creating mechanisms for regulating the use of AI

- To develop internationally agreed standards for the use of AI in journalism, including the labeling of content created by automated systems.
- To introduce mandatory verification of AI-generated content before its publication to prevent the spread of misinformation.
- To ensure control over the use of AI through cooperation with technology companies and fact-checking organizations.

Development of technological literacy

- To organize training programs for journalists so that they can use AI as a tool for data analysis, fact-checking, and storytelling.
- To conduct regular trainings for citizens on recognizing fakes and manipulations created by AI.
- To introduce information campaigns that explain the opportunities and risks of using AI in the media to reduce fears and misunderstandings.

Supporting the quality of journalism

- To encourage the use of AI to perform routine tasks, allowing journalists to focus on analytics and investigations.
- To invest in creating platforms for cooperation between journalists and developers of AI technologies.
- To create a system of grants and funding for independent media that use AI to improve the quality of content.

Developing tools to counter fake news

- To create open platforms for detecting fake news using AI that can be used by both journalists and ordinary citizens.
- To develop AI algorithms to verify information sources and determine their reliability.
- To introduce educational programs that teach the audience how to interact with fact-checking tools.

5 Countering external information manipulation and interference and developing media literacy

The modern information space is a battleground of active confrontation between hostile propaganda and efforts to protect society from manipulation and disinformation. In the context of globalization, the development of digital technologies, and the growing influence of social networks, countering information threats has become one of the key challenges for the state, civil society, and the media. The **main aspects of this issue include**:

The prevalence of hostile propaganda content. Hostile propaganda aimed at destabilizing society utilizes a wide range of channels, primarily social networks and messaging apps. Manipulative content contributes to **societal disorientation** by spreading distrust in state institutions, civil society, and the media, fuelling internal conflicts, and creating an atmosphere of uncertainty. Propaganda campaigns, leveraging **emotional influence**, often rely on distorted facts, fear-mongering, emotional appeals, and biases, making them effective even for audiences with basic media literacy skills. **The challenge in combating such campaigns** arises from the fact that organized propaganda networks operate swiftly and adaptively, using advanced technologies to create and disseminate disinformation.

Lack of critical thinking among the population. A low level of critical thinking among citizens creates a favourable environment for manipulation, including vulnerability to fake news and limited media literacy. The lack of skills in analysing information sources and understanding manipulation techniques makes it difficult to identify false or misleading messages. A significant portion of the population remains unaware of the scale and consequences of information influence, increasing the risk of uncritical acceptance of harmful propaganda.

Insufficient responsiveness to information threats. The system for countering information threats is often too slow and uncoordinated. The absence of sufficient technological and human resources delays the identification and debunking of fake news. A lack of cooperation between government agencies, the media, and civil society complicates the formation of an effective response strategy. In most cases, fact-checking efforts fail to reach the necessary audience or lack the persuasive power needed to counteract manipulations.

These challenges illustrate the complexity of countering external information interference and manipulation. Moreover, they highlight the need for a systematic approach to developing media literacy as a key tool for protecting society from information space threats.

To address these challenges, the following measures are proposed:

- To explore the creation of a unified aggregated platform for real-time monitoring, detection, and debunking of fake news. This platform should include automated information analysis tools and involve fact-checking experts while being accessible to journalists, government agencies, and analysts.
- To support fact-checking organizations to expand and intensify their activities.
- To integrate media literacy courses into preschool, school, and university curricula, focusing on developing critical thinking.
- To conduct large-scale awareness campaigns through television, radio, and social networks to improve media literacy among different age groups.
- To develop mass information projects that explain the mechanisms of propaganda and its impact on society.
- To engage well-known public figures to promote media literacy among the population.
- To attract investments in the creation of high-quality content based on facts and objectivity.
- To provide training for journalists on methods to combat disinformation and propaganda.
- To update the national information security strategy in accordance with current conditions and challenges, uniting the efforts of the media, government, and civil society in countering information threats.
- To coordinate efforts with international partners to adapt successful practices in combating propaganda.

In conclusion, it is important to emphasize that these recommendations are the result of seminars held during 2023-2024 and a post-seminar survey conducted in December 2024, reflecting the key challenges outlined by the participants. They do not claim to provide an in-depth or exhaustive analysis of Ukraine's media environment but rather systematize the most pressing issues that generated the greatest resonance. It is also essential to consider that the discussions took place within a broad circle of experts with diverse, and sometimes opposing, viewpoints. Therefore, these conclusions should be seen as an attempt to find common ground rather than a reflection of each participant's opinion. The primary goal of this document is to stimulate further professional dialogue, support the development of the expert community, and offer guidelines for strengthening the media environment in the face of complex challenges for Ukrainian society. The recommendations have been prepared with the support of the OSCE Secretariat Extra-budgetary Support Programme for Ukraine. The views, opinions, conclusions and other information expressed in this document are not given nor necessarily endorsed by the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) or/and the Aspen Institute Kyiv.