POSITION PAPER

ON MIL POLICIES AND STRATEGIES IN SERBIA

I.   What is MIL

This documents refers to the Media and information literacy (MIL) as the composite concept, including all media and information sources, promotes the individual's rights and takes multi-stakeholder approach.   This concept, integrates all notions of information and media competencies (knowledge, skills and attitude) important for the evaluation of information and media content. This includes competencies in relation new media or digital environments. While policy and strategy in Serbia often makes distinction and focuses on either media literacy, information literacy or digital literacy etc., this document takes broader approach, applying the composite concept of MIL.

II.   MIL background in Serbia

Media and information literacy entered into focus of public debates in Serbia in the last five years, mainly in the context of the EU accession process. In that context, the concept of media literacy is widely recognized as a part of the harmonization with European regulatory framework. Digital literacy and information literacy are recognized and developed in Serbia through main strategic documents related to education and digital environment.

Although Serbia does not have a comprehensive MIL policy and strategy, it can be said that *Serbia is currently in the phase of designing comprehensive MIL framework* for its further development. Some aspects of MIL and concepts of various literacies are recognized in different policy and strategic documents. Various stakeholders are taking roles in the processes of MIL development,

mainly relevant government ministries in charge of education, culture, information and telecommunication, and also media, culture, CSOs in cooperation with representatives of the international community such as EU, OSCE, USAID, UNESCO and others. Practice shows that these incentives and activities need *national coordination within comprehensive MIL framework that encourages a multi-stakeholder approach.*

Important event that brought together all interested, governmental and non-governmental, stakeholders in 2017 were the National Consultations on MIL Policy and Strategy, held in March 9th 2017 within the framework of the EC-UNESCO project "Building trust in media in SEE and Turkey", organized by Media Education Centre and co-organized with relevant government ministries in Serbia. The participants generally agreed with the recommendations submitted to them together with the Background document on national MIL policies and strategies in Serbia.

The concept of media literacy entered official government policy document with the Paragraphs 6 and 9 of the *Strategy for the Development of the Public Information System in the Republic of Serbia until 2016* (Media Strategy). This Strategy was an important step in the process of EU accession and an important element of the political criteria which was noted in the *Commission Opinion on Serbia's application for membership of the European Union.* With paragraph 12 of the Strategy, Ministry of Culture and Information committed to permanently support the field of media literacy and encourage the development of content related to media literacy. In the new set of media laws, adopted in 2014 media literacy have been recognized as an important issue of a public interest[1]. New Media Strategy is in the preparation phase.

In educational sector MIL is framed within the *Education Development Strategy in the Republic of Serbia until 2020* (Education Strategy, adopted in 2012). This Strategy is focused on the development of eight competences defined within the EU framework of a lifelong learning process and the development of literacies in 21st century[2] where *media literacy is* implicitly assumed as

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[1]In the Paragraph II, Article 15 of the Law on Public Information and Media (2014). In the Paragraph II, Article 7 of the Law on Public Service Broadcasting (PSB) (2014) media literacy is only mentioned as one of the objectives of PSB relating to the public interest. Media literacy is not mentioned in the Law on electronic media (2014).

[2]European Union and the European Commission defined eight competences as a set of necessary 'knowledge, skills and attitudes' for life in a knowledge-based society are: communicating in a mother tongue, communicating in a foreign language, mathematical, scientific and technological competence, digital competence, learning to learn, social and civic competences, sense of initiative and entrepreneurship, cultural awareness and expression. See more at http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=URISERV:c11090.

an outcome of these competences. It stresses the role of *information literacy* and school libraries as study areas and resource centers for implementation of media literacy. One year after the adoption of the Education Strategy, both media and information literacy were identified in the *Guidelines for improving the role of information and communication technologies in education,* adopted by the National Education Council of the Republic of Serbia as two of eight different literacies important in new media environment. MIL skills are recognized also in three laws adopted in 2013: *The Law on the Foundations of the Education System* (Article 4), *The Law on Adult Education* (Article 43) and *The Law on Elementary Education* (Article 21).

Within IT sector strong emphasis on the ICT was given through the *Digital agenda* for Serbia, specifically with the *Strategy of Development of Information Society in the Republic of Serbia until 2020* (adopted in 2010). This Strategy prioritizes implementation of ICT in educational programs, development of digital libraries and promotion of digital literacy. In June 2016, at the proposal of the Ministry of Trade, Tourism and Telecommunications, *The Decree on safety and protection of children in the use of ICT* was adopted and *The National Contact Center for Child Security on the Internet* (BIT) is established. The Law on the Library and Information Service (2011) addresses development of librarian networks, international cooperation, digitalisation of library, information materials and resources, but it missed to address the importance of libraries and librarians in information literacy development within librarian networks and delivering information literacies to general public.

National Youth Strategy 2015-2025 stresses the importance of equal access to ICT and of the development of digital and informatics literacy. Local Action plans for youth present an opportunity to involve youth into projects that are related to MIL through the network of youth offices (Kancelarije za mlade) established across the country. *The National Strategy for Gender Equality (2016-2020)* and *Strategy for Prevention and Protection against Discrimination (2013-2018)* take into account the important role of the media in building the culture of tolerance and respect toward women and members of vulnerable and disadvantaged groups, but both of them do not include explicitly MIL as tool for achieving equality goals.

III.   Guiding/fundamental principles (or policies)

Guiding principles of this document are embedded in *democratic values* which include development of knowledge that increases democratic attitudes and communication values based on protection of freedom of information (FOI) and freedom of expression (FOE). It places citizen at the centre of MIL policies and strategy. Following UNESCO's framework this paper offers a shift from protectionism to empowerment rooted in human rights, open knowledge societies, cultural diversity, social inclusion and gender equality. With multi-stakeholder approach it emphasizes cooperation and identification of economic benefits. It takes into account already existing (and emerging) media and information technologies, infrastructures and stakeholders in exploiting their full potential as well as in creating new ones for efficient MIL development for all citizens.

IV.   Overall Position Statement

Following research results in MIL policies and practice in Serbia, this document suggest defining one comprehensive MIL Strategy in order to provide needed systemic and systematic approach to MIL - with clear definitions, values, desirable development directions and the role of different actors. There are various activities on MIL in Serbia. CSOs, academic researchers and journalists' associations foster MIL "bottom-up" through research on various MIL related issues and trainings. The leaders within the governmental institutions in MIL projects are the Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development, the Ministry of Culture and Information as well as the Telecommunication sector. Their joint effort shape necessary framework for introducing MIL in all social spheres, especially educational ones. As it is shown different actions of various actors are still insufficiently linked among themselves and with the official educational institutions. But there is both readiness and space, both in policies and strategies, to connect these actors to a more systematic way with clear mechanisms for their sustainable cooperation and knowledge sharing.

V.   Strategic directions and specific positions this document is proposing on MIL

- **Policy harmonization for media and information literate citizens** implies harmonization of media literacy, information, and digital literacy as a composite concept (MIL) which includes harmonization of definitions in policies and strategies in order to take systemic and systematic approach to MIL for all citizens though different measures and Action plans.

- **Harmonization and improvement of formal education sector with MIL objectives** highlights importance of revision of primary, secondary school, and higher education curricula in order to implement MIL in schools in a more systematic way.
- **Raising awareness among policy makers and researchers** is important as they are one of the key stakeholders in providing favorable environment for promotion and development of MIL for all citizens.
- **Development of MIL for adults in non-formal and continuing education context** refers to creating a favorable environment for delivering MIL to citizens that are not in the schools anymore or that are in continuing education process – by engaging different stakeholders (i.e. public libraries, cultural centres, local community, etc.) through various courses, trainings and workshops.
- **Engaging different stakeholders in MIL development** refers to enhancement of MIL awareness among media and information professionals, development of MIL resource base, empowerment of children and youth through MIL programmes, fostering gender equality and reducing discrimination on any grounds in cooperation with organizations and associations with specific local and thematic focus.

VI.   Key recommendations from the National Consultations on MIL Policy and Strategy, 2017.

1. Alignment of terminology and the clear definition of concepts relating to MIL in all policies.
2. Raising the capacity of the education system to meet not only market demands but also raise civic competences for the 21st century.
3. Utilization of already existing infrastructure, which includes support for already existing institutions, organizations and projects involved in MIL
4. Identification and support for stakeholders that could help to overcome digital divide based on territorial affiliation, age, income, education, membership of minority and vulnerable groups, etc.
5. Defining mechanisms for delivering MIL for adults and elders.
6. MIL trainings for employees in the public and government institutions which includes PBS.
7. MIL trainings for the National minority councils and minority media.
8. Reducing the digital gap between urban and rural environments.
9. Development of mechanisms for intergenerational learning and cross-generational support.

VII.   Statements from Government Representatives

At the National Consultations all participants accepted recommendations delivered with the Background paper. They have also participated in formulating recommendations which are included in this document. Government representatives have demonstrated commitment to the MIL development within their sectors as well as for the inter-sectoral cooperation and multi-stakeholder approach.

State Secretary for Media and Information within the Ministry of Culture and Information, Nino Brajović said that the development of media literacy is significant for the development of media freedom and that the Ministry of Culture will support its development as well as the development of critical thinking.

Snežana Marković, the ICT Minister's Advisor within the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology stressed that media and digital literacy are recognized as one of the key competences for lifelong learning in the Draft of the new Law on Fundamentals of Education and Training. She also pointed out that the Framework of the National Curriculum was adopted in 2015, which the Minister signed and proposed to the Government for adoption: "This document recognizes the importance and influence of the media, but also implies that contemporary competences, including digital ones and media literacy, are embedded in the National curriculum, daily school practice and teacher training." She underlined that traditional approach to teaching needs to be changed and supplemented by development of critical, responsible and efficient use of information, media and technology, both by teachers and students.

Snezana Klašnja, Assistant Minister at the Ministry of Youth and Sports, stressed that one of the nine goals of the Youth Strategy is development of "better information for young people and better knowledge about youth" and that, in the line with these goals, the MIL should be developed in a way that meets youth interests and needs.

The Secretary of State at the Ministry of Trade, Tourism and Telecommunications, Tatjana Matić, said that one of the priorities of this Ministry is the development of digital schools and the use of ICT in education. Accordingly, this Ministry supports the non-governmental sector in financing the information society development projects and internet security.

VIII.   Conclusion

This initiative shows that literacies related to the MIL concept are recognized among different stakeholders in Serbia, governmental and non-governmental. There is a need for efficient cooperation between them. One of the first recommendations from the National consultation refers to alignment of terminology and the clear definition of concepts, by focusing on key competencies or learning outcomes of MIL. The other is related to systematic development and finding the most effective mechanisms for multi stakeholder approach and inclusion of all currently "marginalized" parts of society. That means strengthening already existing infrastructures and networks with MIL competencies, linking systemic education to alternative education programmes and approaches as well as empowerment of public and school libraries. It is crucial that all new competences needed for life and work in the 21st century are accessible to all citizens and all interested parties.