"New Media and Vulnerable Groups" – A relation worth looking upon.

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"The definition of vulnerability may change, but the responsibility of Media stays same."

Critical issues regarding various aspects around the notion of vulnerable groups were tackled during **the two-day conference of the ERMIScom project, entitled "New Media and Vulnerable Groups".**

Prominent academics, researchers and stakeholders from Turkey, Bulgaria, Finland, Belgium, Cyprus, and Greece gathered in Athens on the 6th and 7th of February and presented their findings during an event titled "*Common curricula for diversity: education in media and integration of vulnerable groups*" that was hosted by the Department of Communication and Media Studies of the National and Kapodistrian University of Athens (NKUA).

The subjects addressed were social integration of vulnerable groups, skills gap and mismatches in Journalism and social media, disinformation and fake news in Media coverage, EU funding landscape and policies to ensure equal integration opportunities of specific vulnerable groups.

To disseminate the work done, the participants were asked to answer three questions regarding their books, namely the subject of book and what urged them to cope with it, the country's experience and how this issue is presented in the social media plus a personal experience/example.

Sami Huohvanainen, a senior lecturer at Degree Programme in Film and Television at the Metropolia University of Applied Sciences, was one of the authors and editors in the book titled: "Intellectual Output 7, Transformative Methodological Approach: teaching, training, learning: Teaching, Training, Learning".

He said "The overall topics of ERMIScom (education in Media and integration of vulnerable groups) resonate well within our degree program and our part was to research and develop the learning, teaching, and training capacity. The pedagogical aspect of our work as a Media lecturer has been one of the most interesting parts of the profession and that is the main reason, we took the project under way".

As for Finland's experience, he says that the country has a good reputation as one of the leading nations in learning, pedagogy, vocational training, and research. What he stresses is that "One of distinctive characteristic of Finnish higher education is that every lecturer employed in University of Applied Sciences (focusing on the practical side of education) have to complete and have qualification of Vocational Teacher Education".

Sami Huohvanainen says that during this project he has gained many good examples of how colleagues from the network of institutions have collaborated in workshops and meetings and have shown interest in pedagogy. "I was personally very happy to see in particular the participating students from partner universities having very fresh and innovative ideas for teaching and learning in modern higher education environment", he concludes.

Dr. Michalis Tastsoglou, adjunct lecturer at the Department of Communication & Media Studies, NKUA, is also a contributing writer. As he says, what made him work in the specific subjects was the fact that they deal with a contemporary and sociologically major issue, whereas they create new realities, whether we want it or not. Handling crises and distorted news are issues that we must learn to live with. "They won't be solved magically, we have to be active and energetic citizens, form a co-understanding and fight the moral panics that create side-crises and don't contribute to the solution of the problem". Dr. Michalis Tastsoglou says that in Greece, even though all crises were presented by the neoliberal block as opportunities, that was not the case with the refugee crisis. He makes a reference to the Olympic Games of 2004 in Athens, were many Albanian immigrants living in Greece worked, though they were heavily treated with racism. He also cites the ongoing *propaganda* against Roma population, the push backs of refugees and how little they are being presented in the mainstream Media as well as the presentation of the earthquake in Turkey that sparked some negative, comments against the Turkish people.

As for the personal example, Dr. Michalis Tastsoglou refers to a case that has shaken Greece: the murder of Zak Kostopoulos. He was on the agenda of Media though he represented a vulnerable group that was not usually given space. He sparked a movement and opened a discussion, demanding law reforms and equal treatment. "Zak Kostopoulos is one of the heroes of this city. Unfortunately, the price he had to had been high: his murder".

Stella Angova, Associate Professor in the Department of Media and Public Communications at the University of National and World Economy, in Bulgaria, coordinated the book under the title "Fake news and hate speech – Representation of vulnerable groups in the media". The book explores the representation of vulnerable social groups in the media, and how fake news and hate speech are used to target these groups. It examines the impact of these forms of communication on vulnerable social groups and provides strategies for challenging them. It also looks at how the Media can be used to empower vulnerable social groups, and how to create a more inclusive and equitable media landscape. "We wanted to place the Media's responsibility in covering vulnerable groups, which are often represented in a negative context due to stereotypes, hate speech and misinformation" she says.

Professor Angova reveals that Bulgaria is part of an information war now on such topics like "the war in Ukraine", vaccination, migrants, politics, etc. The disinformation level is very high. "I would say that the level of hate speech is very high too" she says and stresses that it is very important that Bulgaria builds government reforms regarding about Media literacy to develop and educate responsibility and knowledge.

She says that nowadays it is very difficult to be oriented in the entire flow of information, even for communication experts and researchers. "I have seen many examples of how smart and educated people were misled by the news and/or information on social media. And I have also seen how some influential people disseminate fake news on purpose; especially for political reasons".

Ivan Valchanov Assistant Professor, and academic secretary at the Department of Media and Public Communications, UNWE, was also a contributor and says that Fake News and Hate Speech are among the most important topics in media communication, especially in the digital environment. Their research, understanding and inclusion in higher education curriculums are of key importance for the better functioning of contemporary media. As far as the country's experience and how this issue is presented in the social media of Bulgaria, he states that Bulgaria has some experience in fighting fake news, like fact-checking platforms and specialized sections in news websites for exposing fake news. Regarding hate speech and vulnerable groups, there are social media initiatives and such as "No offence, but...", "Not just words" and "Look at the refugees with different eyes" for the rights of the mistreated and social integration. He talks about his personal experience since he lives in a neighborhood with many people from various cultural, religious, and ethnic backgrounds. "I know from personal experience that once you open yourself to others, it is easy to become a community and that the boundaries between people are only based on prejudices".

Bart Leyen, Ph.D. student and Research Assistant at the Vrije Universiteit Brussel was the co-author of a book titled "Social Entrepreneurship and Vulnerable Social Groups", about how social entrepreneurs use creative business models to resolve social and environmental challenges. By doing so, they develop much-needed innovations for contemporary societies, positively impacting vulnerable social groups. In this context, entrepreneurial solutions to vulnerable groups generate

valuable social impact, and therefore "our book embraces both topics of social entrepreneurship and vulnerable social groups".

As far as his country's experience and how this issue is presented in the social media of Belgium, he says that the VUB Chair of Social Entrepreneurship is a center of excellence for social entrepreneurship. "Our Chair brings together both academia and business in search of sustainable business models of social entrepreneurship. We present ourselves in the media as an intermediary that would like to support social entrepreneurs by developing an interdisciplinary network".

As a personal example professor Nikolay Denchev of the same university, presented ELANET, a platform that aims at connecting social entrepreneurs and support organizations, to create a robust network that upholds and inspires. "The ELANET platform has the ambition to reinforce the support of social entrepreneurs. To achieve this goal, we have joined forces in a consortium of 17 partners and 35 associated partners from various organizations and Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) in Europe (Belgium, Bulgaria, Austria, and Italy) and Latin America (Bolivia, Colombia, Ecuador, and Peru)".

Tirse Erbaysal Filibeli, Associate Professor at Bahcesehir University in the faculty of Communication was part of the team edited the book entitled Stereotypes & Prejudice: Xenophobia & Racism. "Our team members' research interests focus on topics such as hate speech, media representation of vulnerable and marginalized groups, peace studies, media pluralism, diversity, dissemination of 'fake news' and fact-checking, etc.". She says that Turkey is a country that holds many minority populations and different kinds of vulnerable groups, also as one of the countries with the highest number of refugee populations, has always been a center for academicians and researchers who focus on those topics. "With this project, as a part of the Ermis Team, we tried to do our best within the limit of the project and organized a Learning Teaching Training activity in Istanbul to make students who were coming from different countries, aware of common problems that we have in different countries on vulnerable groups and all together with the purpose of defending their rights via representing them in media, we tried to develop future projects".

Professor Filibeli says that on the last day of the meeting in Athens, she witnessed protests in front of the national theatre. There were a group of students, who were protesting the Greece Government's decision on their university diplomas. She

remembers who they met with some students who can speak Turkish, and they said, "welcome to Greece, it happens all the time." "And we said we are familiar with these kinds of issues since we are coming from Turkey". As she stresses, the definition of vulnerability may change from time to time, from country to country, from one group to another group, however the ways media represent the rights of people, and how media become the voice of people is very important. "After the earthquake that caused a huge disaster, one more time our experiences showed us the importance of having a healthy information sphere is a must for having a well-functioning democracy. When we met these students, we thought that the media should give place to these people to defend their rights. Here, in Turkey right now, we need to see what happened to these people and why people lost their lives to defend their rights. The definition of vulnerability may change, but the responsibility of media stays the same.

The emeritus professor Dimitris Charalambis from the Communication and Media department of the University of Athens made reference to the book "Social policies for Vulnerable Groups and the Media" and he underlines the importance of the historical evolution of the European social model and the provisions for specific vulnerable groups as the children, the refugee population, the young unemployed and the most deprived, the women, the elderly and the effects created by the economic and health crises.

Professor George Pleios underlined the experience of participating in and coordinating such a European project. He concludes on how important transnationality and the cooperation between universities are when dealing with contemporary social issues. Vulnerability in different social groups and the way it is represented in the Media could solve problems or in the contrary can contribute to the strengthening of inequalities and to the widening of the disparities between the citizens.

Ms. Tsolakidou, the coordinator of the project said that the seven e - books created in the framework of the implementation of "The ERMIScom project" via the National Agency - IKY, financed by the ERASMUS+ European programme, will be a source of knowledge on the inclusive and sustainable management of vulnerable social groups. They may contribute to changing mindsets and have a more positive attitude by strengthening the social integration of vulnerable groups.