

Conference Press Release

Combating Misinformation through Media Literacy

June 7 & 8, 2019

The two-day conference entitled “**Combating Misinformation Through Media Literacy**” has successfully concluded. The event was co-organized by the Cyprus University of Technology, the Horizon 2020 European project Co-Inform, the Cyprus Pedagogical Institute of the Ministry of Education and Culture, and the US Embassy in Cyprus. The event took place on June 7 and 8, at the Cyprus University of Technology in Limassol, Cyprus.

The conference aimed to raise the awareness of different stakeholder groups (students, youth, teachers, policymakers, and journalists) on misinformation, and discuss methods and tools in which misinformation can be addressed to nurture critical thinking and a better use of social media.

The conference included two public panel discussions comprised of distinguished speakers, and experiential workshops that aimed to develop the participants’ skills in addressing misinformation. During the first day of the conference (Friday, 7 June 2019), elementary school students participated in interactive workshops focused on online information; they engaged with a variety of information sources and through teamwork discussed media messages, who to trust, and how they can make an impact online by creating positive online content.

The first panel discussion began with a welcoming address by Professor Georgios Panigyraakis, Dean of the School of Communication and Media Studies at the Cyprus University of Technology. The panel discussion was titled “**What can we do as citizens to limit the spread of misinformation online?**” and was moderated by Nicholas Karides, Director, Ampersand Public Affairs. The panelists included: Geysa Gonzalez, Deputy Director, Atlantic Council’s Eurasia Center; Allan Leonard, Co-founder and editor-in-chief, FactCheckNI; Gemma Pinyol-Jiménez, RECI-Spanish Network of Intercultural Cities Coordinator; and Michael Bossetta, Political and Data Scientist, University of Copenhagen.

The second day of the conference (Saturday, 8 June 2019) opened with welcome addresses by the Rector of the Cyprus University of Technology, Professor Andreas Anayiotos, the US Ambassador in Cyprus, Judith G. Garber, the Director of the Cyprus Pedagogical Institute, Dr Athena Michaelidou-Evripidou, and the Government Spokesman, Prodromos Prodromou. The welcome addresses concluded with two video messages by the European Commissioner for Digital Economy and Society, Mariya Gabriel, and Themis Christofidou, Director-General for Education, Youth, Sport, Culture of the European Commission.

The second panel discussion was entitled: “**Combating misinformation through media literacy: The role of society and the state**” which was moderated by Sophie A. Michaelides, Director, Press and Information Office. The panelists included: Lara Orlandi, Policy Officer, DG CONNECT, Audiovisual & Media Services Policy Unit, European Commission; George

Komodromos, Director, Department of Electronic Communications, Government of Cyprus; Dr Antigoni Themistokleous, Officer, Cyprus Radio Television Authority; Dr Vasilis Koulolias, Stockholm University, Executive Director, eGovlab and project coordinator for the Co-Inform project; and Jules Darmanin, Reporter, FactcheckEU Project Coordinator.

The second day concluded with parallel workshops for teachers, journalists and policymakers. The teachers' workshop provided information on the topic of misinformation and the role of educators in addressing the phenomenon. Participants were introduced to online lesson plan repositories, digital validation tools, fact-checking resources and were provided with educational material that can be customized and implemented in their own classes. Journalists were introduced to fact-checking sources and image verification techniques and practiced with existing online applications to debunk false news stories. Policymakers discussed the topic of misinformation and connected their own professional experiences with policies that can be created to address this complex issue.

The organization of the conference was coordinated by Dr Eleni A. Kyza, Associate Professor at the Department of Communication and Internet Studies of the Cyprus University of Technology, and Anastasia Economou, Head of the Educational Technology Department of the Cyprus Pedagogical Institute. The conference's organizing committee was comprised of: Andria Agesilaou, Spyros Charitou, Panayiota Hadjittofi, Theodora Kakouri, Nikolas Kanaris, Melina Karageorgiou, Evangelos Karapanos, Loukas Konstantinou, Iolie Nicolaidou, Dionysis Panos, Christos Roushias, Markos Souropetsis, Anna Tsiarta, and Christiana Varda.

The proliferation of misinformation on online media poses a considerable social threat that permeates all aspects of our reality. "Fake news" and misleading narratives are challenges that require constant monitoring and conscious vigilance. The conference is one of the first in Cyprus to advocate a multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary approach to address the issue of misinformation, highlighting the importance of cooperation among various interest groups in combating misinformation. Follow-up actions, which will include a call for cross-sectoral project proposals focusing on actions that combat misinformation will be announced by late summer.

More information about the conference, including the videos of the two panel discussions and photos from the event, can be found at the conference web page at <http://medialiteracy.cut.ac.cy>.