(IN)FORMING CONFLICT PREVENTION, RESPONSE AND RESOLUTION:

INFO CORE

THE ROLE OF MEDIA IN VIOLENT CONFLICT

INFOCORE Newsletter No. 1

February 2016

Stakeholders' Opening Seminar, 9 October 2015

Media Professionals, Academics, Policy Makers and NGO personnel from around the world gathered for the INFOCORE Stakeholders' Seminars

Our project's first Stakeholders' Seminars took place in Brussels, on October 9th and 10th 2015. In a series of workshops, the researchers came together to share findings from the first analytic stages with INFOCORE's main stakeholder groups policy-makers, academics, NGOs, and media. The aim of the meeting was to shape policy debate and to test findings in their respective fields based on feedback from the stakeholders.

This feedback enables the Work Package leaders to advance their particular research to the next stage.

The INFOCORE Project

Welcome to the 1st issue of the INFOCORE project newsletter. This is the first issue of a series of newsletters that will keep you informed about our three year project. INFOCORE is funded under the 7th European Framework Program of the European Commission (Theme SSH.2013.4.2-1 "Media in conflicts and peace building". It brings together eleven principal investigators, representing nine research institutions from seven countries. In total, the INFOCORE team comprises more than 30 researchers.

Our research on the role of media and strategic communication in violent conflict has started in January 2014. It aims to analyse the dynamics of conflict news content and production over time and to identify recurrent patterns of information diffusion.

We understand this newsletter as a means of keeping in touch with you, our target groups. Together with our *facebook* site, the newsletter can become a platform for the exchange with you. We have been also developing an online presence for INFOCORE — besides our website, we also provide newsworthy information at our *facebook* site. I invite you to join us there in case that you haven't already done so. Please browse our website, where you can find information about the structure of our research project, its impressing stakeholder network, its theoretical foundation and a lot more.

Please feel free to encourage other stakeholders or interested parties to subscribe to this newsletter, and get in touch whenever you feel it would be appropriate to point us to new topics, developments or complementary initiatives.

It remains for me to hope that this newsletter provides you with interesting information about the progress and current state of INFOCORE, and to look forward to the next stages of our project.

Prof. Romy Fröhlich
Project Coordinator

WP1: JOURNALISTIC NEWS PRODUCTION IN MEDIA

The panel of experts was interested in understanding the extent and characterisation of the influences applied on journalists reporting on conflicts (e.g. location, type of conflict, type of media), and what can be generalised about such influences. Attention has also been raised in relation to journalists' safety and the freedom of expression. The discussion also focused on the recommendation to develop clear definitions of journalist-related concepts (e.g. peace journalist). Stakeholders' suggestions included considering the financial and ownership structure, disseminating INFOCORE's research results to the management of top media organisations, and to develop practical recommendations on the necessary training of conflict journalists.
Mission Statement of WP1.

WP2: POLITICAL INTERACTION WITH CONFLICT NEWS PRODUCTION

The discussions focused on the greater influence of negative/violent news rather than positive/ peace oriented news coverage. In particular, the policymakers among stakeholders were interested in using INFOCORE's conclusions in order to improve their ability to analyse risks and respond to crises (impact of the "digital age" on policy-making/-implementation). They inspired the researchers to Investigate journalistic news productions' quality to enable policy-makers to differentiate between trust-worthy and unreliable journalistic news.

Stakeholder workshop, Day 1

Further concrete suggestions included analysing the ethical role of media in conflicts, the issues of media freedom, the challenge of socially responsible journalism, and the use of traditional and social media by political leaders.
Mission Statement of WP2.

WP3: MEDIA & LAY PUBLICS

The stakeholders complimented INFOCORE on the inclusion of the question on how lay publics feel they are a part of the media, how they think they can be active in current events and how lay publics interact with the media in the context of conflict. Further topics dealt with the question of how lay publics use the media and how they perceive them. The experts also expressed their expectation to learn from INFOCORE about the way lay publics relate to the media, the way they can actually contribute to media content ("media active lay publics") and how trust in the media develops. The stakeholders' suggestions focused on the consideration of specific criteria (e.g. ethnic integration) of lay publics and a deeper investigation on lay publics influ-

ence on the mechanisms of escalation and de-escalation.
Mission Statement of WP3.

WP4: NGOS AND EXPERTS INTERACTION WITH CONFLICT NEWS

The topics dealt with here centered on the relationship between NGOs and policy-makers, the reliability of NGO-provided information, and NGOs' influence on conflict news and political bodies. In addition, the issues of the NGOs' perception of their own success and strategy in influencing the media were raised as well as the transition of NGOs to media-like actors. The stakeholders suggested to strongly differentiate between various types and domains of NGOs in the analysis and between news and communication in NGOs' content production. The NGOs' and media's vulnerability to political pressure were extensively debated. The stakeholders' suggestions included mapping the different NGOs depending on their ideologies, mandates, and activities, and incorporating donors into this mapping by investigating donors' interests and their influence on NGOs' activity.
Mission Statement of WP4

WP5: INTERACTION AND DISSEMINATION OF NEWS IN SOCIAL MEDIA

Researchers and stakeholders discussed several issues that relate to the problems of collecting social media content for big data analysis (including ethical issues in scraping data from social networks), and possible manipulation of online media content (genuine contributions vs. replications or fakes). The experts favorably looked upon the aim to research the direction of influence between traditional and social media, how media websites use social media content, the role of negativity and hate in social media discourse and the potential of the use of social media as pre-conflict and post-conflict tool (e.g. watchdog platform; alternative real-time source of information). It was also suggested to add targeted interviews about the specific social media use of different individual journalists and examining comments on social media and how media websites use data from social networks.

WP6: STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION OF NEWS AND PUBLIC RELATIONS

The stakeholders have been interested in the question of how to use strategic communication and PR as a reliable tool in policy-cycles and the institutional structures beyond the message's content a criterion of effectiveness of communication. Moreover, the stakeholders and researchers discussed additional options to analyse also less traditional forms and models of PR. The experts favorably looked upon the aim to research factors that make strategic communications develop into media discourse about conflict and to investigate on particular conditions of strategic communication's success. The stakeholders also discussed with the researchers INFOCORE's pragmatic and financial restrictions, which do not allow for an analysis of visual material, and which also limit the access of non-text based sources of PR and propaganda. The stakeholders suggested to focus on how exactly the researchers will identifying PR-strategies to prevent conflict and support resolution.
Mission Statement of WP6.

WP7: JOURNALISTIC TRANSFORMATION

The stakeholders' discussions for this work package concentrated on the centrality of the escalation and de-escalation processes and the question of how media influences public opinion (a question addressed in conjunction with WP4). They favorably looked upon the aim of this WP to (1) analyse the relation between various media and their particular patterns of attention, to (2) determine potential means of predicting media coverage to some extent, and (3) to detect media's "hidden agendas". Finally, the different methods of analysis based on texts in radio-media and visual-media based societies were debated. Concrete stakeholders' suggestions included determining potential means of predicting media coverage to some extent, changing criteria in selecting media outlets to get a fuller view of the conflict, and assessing differences in linguistic levels between different broadcasts. Some stakeholders offered their support in getting access to additional and alternative media archives (in particular TV transcripts).
Mission Statement of WP7.

Stakeholder workshop, Day 2

Stakeholder workshop, Day 2

WP8: RECEPTION OF NEWS CONTENTS IN POLITICAL DEBATES

Most of the stakeholder discussions centered on the role of ideological affiliation and gender in news contents' reception in political debates, and the difficult determination of the direction of the influence between media and politics. Furthermore, the methods of data aggregation and stratification, the lobbyists' influence on institutions and news media were among the issues that were repeatedly brought up by the participants.

The stakeholders' suggestions focused on tackling the gender approach question, analysing parliamentary debates on topics not related to conflict for comparison and relevance of the conclusions. Moreover, they proposed focusing on political officials' "media awareness" and its variation depending on individuals' level or affiliations,

and investigating why some conflicts make it to the political or media stage why others' don't.
Mission Statement of WP8

THE NEXT STEPS

As it has been stated, based on the input from each Stakeholder group the Work Package leaders will advance to the next stage of the project. Moreover, a final Policy Synthesis Seminar, will bring all the stakeholders back together in Brussels, on November 16th, 2016.

During this seminar, INFOCORE researchers will present policy options to the stakeholders based on (1) a comparative summary of analyses of the four stakeholder seminars, (2) the fieldwork and analysis of the INFOCORE research results, and (3) the experiences of testing the INFOCORE results at the field level through the local dissemination workshops, and ask their feedback in order to create policy recommendations into targeted policy briefs.

Joint INFOCORE-MECODEM Workshop: Media, elections and conflicts in Africa
University of Oxford / Université Libre de Bruxelles
Oxford, UK – 16 November 2015

The workshop gathered researchers working on the interaction between media and politics in Africa. It aimed at building bridges between Francophone and Anglophone researchers exploring the role of the media in different cultural regions of the continent, as the media systems, journalists' practices or the economy of the sector show some striking contrasts, from one place to the other. More specifically, the workshop provided an opportunity for researchers involved in INFOCORE to meet and exchange views and ideas with colleagues working on the MECODEM project (also funded by the EU), especially the ones also working on African cases.

The discussions focused on key issues around the role of the media in elections, which constitute often a time of political tension and potential violence in African countries. Contemporary papers and analyses were mixed with more historical approaches. Participants looked into historical trajectories and the political ideas and ideologies that have shaped the development of media. Country cases included Ethiopia, the DRC, Zambia, Kenya, South Africa and Burundi.

Presentations were delivered by Marie-Soleil Frère, Marie Fierens and Anke Fiedler (INFOCORE) as well as Katrin Voltmer and Nicole Stremlau (MECODEM).

JOURNALISTS' SAFETY, MEDIA FREEDOM AND PLURALISM IN TIMES OF CONFLICT

Talk delivered by Prof. Christoph Meyer, 15-16 June 2015, Vienna

INFOCORE consortium member Prof. Christoph Meyer was invited to give a talk at a side session of a major conference on "Journalists' Safety, Media Freedom and Pluralism in Times of Conflict", organised by the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media on 15-16 June 2015 in Vienna. The panel discussion was on "Aid effectiveness for Eurasian media in times of crisis: reflecting on lessons learnt, progress and increased coordination" and had been organised by the Global Forum for Media Development.

Most of the debate was on better targeting media assistance appropriately and to move away from a short-term approach to crisis which often leads to ineffective and wasteful activities towards building "quality media" in the longer-term that are trusted by the population. It was emphasised that media assistance needs to be seen as part and parcel of broader and more holistic democratisation, development and conflict prevention policies. One topic for the discussion centred on the potential conflict between such long-term and carefully tailored media assistance and the frequently more short-term concerns of donors often more interested in strategic communication on particular policy issues or indeed their own perception. Coordination between donors was another key topic as was the question of whether one needed media plurality vs. nation-wide inclusive media.

Drawing on the research by Dr. Snezana Trpevska involving particularly the Balkan cases of Kosovo and Macedonia the short 5 minute talk by Professor Meyer made the following points, which are necessarily of preliminary character given that INFOCORE's empirical research is on-going and no final conclusions are available:

First, there is a tendency to overestimate the degree of autonomy that journalists have in these conflict regions and to under-estimate political and economic power, which leads to several direct and indirect restrictions in freedom of speech and effectively narrowing journalism to particular ethnic or political agendas, which tends to be almost inevitably divisive. There are thus key questions around the role of the state in influencing content, but also the considerable concentration of media power in the hands of few owners, posing difficult questions about the relation between freedom of speech, censorship, and outside interference versus local ownership. Are donors and IO paying enough attention to these issues and are tough enough? And can training programmes addressed at individual journalists make much of a difference under these conditions?

Recommendations in terms of media support:

(1) It is not enough to focus the media assistance programs only on developing the media system, but also on the democratization of the wider political context; without structural transformations of the political system, substantial changes in the media system and in the implementation of media policy cannot be expected. It is very difficult to expect for media newsrooms themselves to improve their internal routines and practices in the direction of greater compliance with desirable ethical codes. Even attempts from outside actors might not be accepted by the editorial staff, due to their political affiliations. Internal changes would not happen if the overall political context is not transformed.

(2) It is of importance to establish regular monitoring systems to the independence of the key institutions that can safeguard the independence of media and promote freedom of expression: the regulatory authorities in the (audiovisual) media field, the anti-corruption commissions, the commissions for access to public information.

(3) Funds coming from donors are often allocated to NGOs, partly because donors feel they have more control and face less risk. However, this can lead to a shortage in direct support for local media to produce independent and unbiased information. Local media that are independent and critical are financially exhausted and have no resources, their motivation to resist the political pressures is often at the low levels. Many do not believe any more in training and education, but need direct intervention and support to survive on a long-term basis.

(4) Established self-regulatory systems at the level of the entire media sector (Press Councils) should be further strengthened. Also, the independent media organizations should be encouraged to introduce internal mechanisms of self-regulation (ombudsmen, editors for dealing with citizens' complaints etc.). These internal mechanisms can be developed in cooperation with media assistance NGOs.

(5) Another important area that needs support from media developments funds is to strengthen the unions of the journalists and to encourage them to work on the protection of labor rights and the economic position of the journalists.

INFOCORE Coordinator Prof. Romy Fröhlich on the gender-sensitive perspective of the project

The INFOCORE consortium theoretically and empirically understands gender as an analytical category. We define gender as "a socially imposed and internalized lens through which individuals perceive and respond to the world"; as a result, we assume that "the pervasiveness of gendered meanings shapes concepts, practice and institutions in identifiable gendered ways" (Peterson, 1992, p. 194). We act on the assumption that "(...) gender is a system of symbolic meaning that creates social hierarchies based on perceived associations with masculine and feminine characteristics" (Sjoberg, 2010, p. 3). And with Sjoberg (2010) we assume that organisations and states as well as political, social, economic, ecological and even technological dimensions of war and violent conflict are or can become gendered.

GENDER-SENSITIVE DIMENSIONS OF RESEARCH

The INFOCORE consortium conducts gender-sensitive research – however, its scientific interest, research questions and approaches are not gender-specific. Throughout our research, we constantly ask: (1) What knowledge exists on the roles and effects of gender and which parts of this knowledge need to be considered why and in what manner for the theoretical foundation of our research and the respective work packages? (2) How exactly do we need to link the gender-sensitive character of our theoretical foundation to an appropriate empirical design? In doing so, we address gender aspects throughout all the project's work packages (including management and dissemination!) rather than addressing gender aspects in a specific work package or as a task within a work package. Our project is distinct in this regard.

BACKGROUND OF OUR PROJECT'S GENDER-SENSITIVE PERSPECTIVE

In accordance with traditional social perceptions of gender, media coverage on war tends to construct men as active participants in wars and conflicts (fighters, aggressors, offenders, active defenders, warrantors of security); men (in particular the military) are also even considered as promoters of war (Fröhlich, 2010). In contrast, women are perceived (not only by the media) as a "pacifying influence" (Sjoberg et al., 2007, p. 2) – as if they naturally oppose war, are peace-loving and resistant to violence, suffer from violence, need protection, etc. However, to date, nothing is available on gender bias in the material/messages of the political actors, military public relations, intelligence and other sources of media/journalist reporting on wars and conflicts. Furthermore, we know little about gender bias in the lay public discourse on war and conflict. In general, most of the numerous empirical studies on the media coverage of wars and violent conflicts do not provide empirical gender-sensitive data. Despite there being very little empirical evidence, some researchers conclude that the media are largely used to promote wars and to obtain public support for military interventions, in particular by conveying stereotypical pleas for military intervention to protect and/or free innocent women and children and to re-establish security. For instance, Young (2003, p. 2) argues "that an exposition of the gendered logic of the masculine role of protector in relation to women and children illuminates the meaning and effective appeal of a security state that wages war abroad and expects obedience and loyalty at home". Brownmiller (1994, p. 38) argues that the transformation of women's bodies by national actors into a symbolic battlefield of virtual conflicts is a crucial prerequisite for such a process.

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THE EXCLUSION OF WOMEN'S EXPERIENCES IS THE NORM

Other authors argue that, especially during armed conflicts or other violent crises and conflicts, female actors leave the public (= media) stage – a place where they are underrepresented even under normal circumstances. They all come to the same conclusion: the exclusion of women's experiences in/through war coverage is the norm instead of the exception.

Taken together, it seems plausible to assume that media coverage of wars, conflicts, defence policy, and security is full of gender stereotypes. However, to date, the empirical evidence is missing. This is why our project applies a gender-sensitive approach. With its potential to analyse large data sets generated in an international context, it will, for the first time, provide quantitative empirical data on the actual gender-stereotypical character of war coverage (content analytical work packages 5 to 8). Furthermore, we have the opportunity to also apply a gender-sensitive approach to our surveys on journalists, political actors, intelligence, and lay publics (work packages 1 to 4). It is one of the declared project goals to link the content analyses to the surveys, and vice versa. In doing so, we will also be able to generate new and more profound empirical results on the question why and how gender stereotypes (if at all) are to be found in war coverage, where they derive from (whether they are promoted by strategic communicators, for instance, and for which purposes), whether communicating actors as well as lay publics are aware of gender stereotypes in discourse on wars and violent conflicts, and so on.

INFOCORE uses the following procedures to guarantee gender sensitivity in research

• Fostering awareness of subtle gender bias throughout the consortium, for instance, by providing a list of available evidence/scientific sources and findings about sex and gender as analytical categories of research in the social sciences and humanities.

• Fostering awareness that gender is considered a "key analytical and explanatory variable in research. If relevant gender issues are missed or poorly addressed, research results will be partial and potentially biased. Gender can thus be an important factor in research excellence" (Directorate-General for Research, 2009, part 1.4).

• Developing and fostering constant awareness for the following question: Where, when and why do we explicitly and implicitly apply (or not apply) theoretical and empirical assumptions or interpretations about sex and gender (including research questions), and what are the consequences for our research process and findings?

• Fostering efforts to generate gender-related or gender-relevant findings and to present/publish these in high-ranking publications and at international conferences. In particular, we will:

► formulate gender-sensitive research questions and/or hypotheses;

► choose gender-sensitive methodology and design, where appropriate; and

► gather, analyse and report data in gender-sensitive ways;

► use gender-impartial language in research material (e.g. in questionnaires), in ethics material (e.g. informed consent templates) and in reports and dissemination material. For people who are interested in more background on gender-sensitive research, Romy Fröhlich provides a [reading list](#).

INTERESTING LINKS TO NGOs AND INITIATIVES

www.womenpeacesecurity.org

www.womenwarpeace.org

www.nojobforawoman.com

http://www.iamcr.org/system/files/media_and_gender.pdf

http://www.yellowwindow.be/genderinresearch/downloads/YW2009_GenderToolKit_Module1.pdf

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LEGAL NOTICE

The views expressed here are the sole responsibility of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the European Commission.

INFOCORE at International Conferences

March 2016

ISA International Convention, Atlanta, Georgia - USA
Panel convener Christoph Meyer: "The role of the media in violent conflict: Insights from comparative research."
Paper 1: Baden, C. Meyer, C. O., Tenenboim-Weinblatt, K. & Fröhlich, R.: "The INFOCORE approach to media influence on the prevention or escalation of violent conflict."
Paper 2: Franco, C. de.: "Media power in violent conflict: practices of escalation and transformation."
Paper 3: Wolfsfeld, G.: "Leaders, media, and conflict in the digital age: A sceptical assessment."
Paper 4: Althaus, S. L.: "Priming us against them, again and again? The effects of war news on domestic support for American military conflicts across the Post-World War II era."
Paper 5: Meyer, C. O., & Sangar, E.: "In search of the "NGO effect"? An empirically grounded assessment of the evolving role of NGOs in mediated conflict discourse and the construction of conflict knowledge."

June 2016

ICA Conference, Fukuoka Japan
I. Panel convener Marc Jungblut: "Media's impact on key actors in violent conflicts."
Paper 1: Berganza, R., Arcila, C., López Navas, C., Herrero, B., Carratalá, A., Echavarria, P., Lavin, E., & Perelló, S.: "Escalation/pacification of violent conflicts: the role of media on European Parliamentary debates."
Paper 2: Gonen, Y., & Hoxha, A.: "Relations and interactions between journalists from two sides of a conflict."
Paper 3: Jungblut, M.: "Distributed, discussed or discredited? Media reflections in NGO publication."

II. Panel convener: Christian Baden "New approaches to studying conflict news."
Paper 1: Hoxha, A., & Hanitzsch, T.: "How the news comes into being: Researching conflict news production through retrospective reconstruction interviews."
Paper 2: Baden, C., & Tenenboim-Weinblatt, K.: "This means war: Identifying patterns of escalation in conflict news using quantitative discourse analysis and comparative semantic networks."
Paper 3: Dimitrakopoulou, D. & Boukala, S.: "Exploring the Israeli-Palestinian conflict through the lens of social media: A multi-methodical approach."

Individual ICA-Papers:
• Frère, M.-S., & Fiedler, A.: "Balancing plausible lies and false truth: Perception and evaluation of the local and global news coverage of conflicts in Burundi and the DRC."
• Baden, C., & Tenenboim, K.: "Evolving alignments: A longitudinal comparative study of inter-media similarity & diversity in the coverage of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict."
• Baden, C., & Tenenboim, K.: "Journalistic transformation: How source texts are turned into news stories."
• Jungblut, M., & Zakareviciute, I.: "Do pictures tell a different story? A multimodal frame analysis of the 2014 Israel-Gaza conflict."
• Jungblut, M., & Ohlinger, U.: "Journalism culture and its impact on the contextualization of reality – A qualitative narrative- and framing-analysis of the political foreign news in German and British newspapers."
• Stalpouskaya, K., Communication Research Methods Preconference, Paper: "Extracting Agendas for Action from News Coverage Using Machine Learning Techniques."

INFOCORE's Calendar

June 2016: Global Media Forum, Bonn
July 2016: Dissemination Workshop, Macedonia
July 2016: Dissemination Workshop, Cyprus
November 2016: Policy Synthesis Seminar, Belgium

INFOCORE Consortium: •**Belgium:** Global Governance Institute & Université Libre Bruxelles • **Germany:** Ludwig Maximilian University Munich (Coordination) • **Greece:** The Hellenic Foundation for European and Foreign Policy • **Israel:** The Hebrew University of Jerusalem & Interdisciplinary Center Herzliya • **FYRO- Macedonia:** School of Journalism and Public Relations • **Spain:** University Rey Juan Carlos • **United Kingdom:** King's College London