(IN)FORMING CONFLICT PREVENTION, RESPONSE AND RESOLUTION:

INFO CORE

THE ROLE OF MEDIA IN VIOLENT CONFLICT

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D9.6 Brussels Final Dissemination Conference Proceedings
(EXECUTIVE SUMMARY)

The Brussels Final Dissemination Conference had as its aim to allow researchers from different work packages of INFOCORE to present their findings and conclusions as well as suggest policy recommendations. The conference took place at the Brussels Press Club on November 17th 2016. A total of twelve researchers presented their studies to a mixed audience of around 80 journalists, Non-Governmental Organization (NGO) representatives, policy makers, scholars and students.

These proceedings consist of summaries of all the presentations as well as the discussions that ensued. All the research projects revolved around INFOCORE's main aim which is to seek a deeper understanding of news creation in conflict areas and more specifically in Israel and Palestine, Syria, Kosovo, F.Y.R.O. Macedonia, Burundi and the DRC. Some of the major topics addressed were the role of NGOs in conflict news reporting, the role of new media in conflict-related news, how the general public views the media in war zones, the impact of gender on conflict news and its coverage, and specific policy implications of INFOCORE's research.

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INTRODUCTION

Romy Fröhlich, Ludwig-Maximilians-University Munich, introduced INFOCORE in a presentation titled **Comparative, Diachronic and Holistic: Conceptualising a new Approach for the Analysis of Conflict News Coverage and Public Discourse on Armed Conflicts.** The INFOCORE consortium, made up of nine research institutions, ventures to provide a better understanding of the process of conflict news production and dissemination. The majority of previous research on the latter topics is case-based and focuses on single conflicts in single media contexts and on single aspects and steps during what one might call 'snapshot moments.' This leads to a limited understanding of the actually very complex processes of conflict news production in the cycle of conflict and peace building. In addition, the global media landscape is being transformed through the interplay of a range of factors: social media, other new communication technologies, new non-Western transnational broadcasting, cutbacks to foreign correspondents and the outsourcing of production, NGOs and not-for-profit media trying to fill the gap, etc. Furthermore, the nature of violent conflict itself is changing as new issues are being contested by new actors with new strategies and tactics. To fully understand these current challenges and to make full use of these new opportunities, a comprehensive research strategy is needed to update answers to old questions and to ask new ones.

To this end, INFOCORE adopts a **holistic** perspective and combines it with a **comparative** approach. Since the media play multiple roles in conflict, INFOCORE researchers apply a comparative approach across local, national, and transnational media of different formats (print, audiovisual, online), different journalistic styles (e.g., investigative journalism, peace journalism, local styles), inside and outside conflict areas, and in different kinds of conflicts. The media studied were analysed over time (in some cases for up to seven years). This approach enables INFOCORE to investigate escalation and de-escalation dynamics as well as temporal dynamics of both conflict and news, and to link diachronic events to occurrences on the ground.

Both conflict and media production are shaped by complex social interactions that develop in constant reference to their own past and can develop powerful inherent dynamics. Thus, INFOCORE focuses on the social processes underlying the production of conflict news, and the inherent dynamics of conflict news contents and public discourse. For this purpose, the INFOCORE team identified two sets of elements. First, they identified the **main contextual factors** that influence the roles media play in conflict and peace building. Specifically, they assessed: the roles of individual agendas and resources, professional norms and cultures, media organizations and systems, political systems, and the characteristics of each conflict situation. Second, INFOCORE identified the key interactions between media, sources, and audiences that shape the roles of media in conflict. Specifically, the researchers focused on interactions between four key kinds of actors who play an active role in shaping media coverage: professional journalists (in various kinds of media), political actors (e.g., public authorities and the military), experts/NGOs (in intelligence, peacekeeping, conflict prevention/resolution, and media assistance), and lay publics (individuals and groups, including economic actors). Since they followed a holistic and

comparative approach, INCOFORE researchers analysed these actors' different roles as sources/advocates, mediators, and users/audiences in the production of professional news media, social media, and semi-public intelligence/expert analysis. The media analysed were print broadsheets and tabloids as well as their online outlets, TV and radio (national and transnational ones), Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and selected opinion-leading blogs, and media of intelligence-oriented Think Tanks and (transnational) NGOs specializing in media and conflict/peace building.

In accordance with its holistic and comparative approach, INFOCORE aimed to carry out **longitudinal analyses** the dynamics of conflict news content. The researchers identified recurrent patterns of information diffusion and the polarization/consolidation of specific frames. Specifically, INFOCORE focused on the following frames: (1) What information is provided by sources and eyewitnesses or advocated by strategic communicators? (2) What information is taken up, contextualized, elaborated, and disseminated by the media? (3) What information is received by key media audiences and influences their conflict perceptions?

Furthermore, INFOCORE implemented a **gender-sensitive perspective** throughout the whole project. This as an important theoretical and empirical aspect of the project's holistic and comparative approach. Since the INFOCORE team is convinced that the media's role in conflicts cannot be understood adequately from a nationally-oriented look at single practitioners, products, or cases alone, the researchers compared the workings of conflict news coverage and production across different cases. Since polarization and escalation, as well as reconciliation and conflict resolution, cannot be analysed as snapshots moment but should be understood as long-term processes that must be analysed in a time-dependent fashion, the cases selected include contemporary conflicts that experienced different conflict phases and cycles of escalation and de-escalation in the recent past (including non-violent phases and cycles). What is more, the cases had to be different enough for the specific influence of the range of contextual factors considered to be determined. To ensure that they could control for patterns that are specific to a single conflict, INFOCORE researchers sampled conflict cases that involve different countries with different political and media systems shaping the role of the media, that have experienced phases of escalation and de-escalation relatively recently, and that have seen some positive or negative impact of the media on the evolution of the conflict.

Respecting these criteria, the following cases were selected: the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the current conflict in Syria, the Kosovo conflict, the inter-ethnic conflict in F.Y.R.O. Macedonia, the conflict in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), and the conflict in Burundi. These conflict cases enable INFOCORE to assess the roles of cultural differences, geostrategic embedding, international involvement, and conflict asymmetry.

INFOCORE took a modular approach and divided the work required for this complex research structure into several work packages (WPs):

- **WP1** focused on **professional journalists** and their characteristic role as gatekeepers in the news media.

- **WP2** focused on **political actors and officials** in their double role as sources/advocates and audiences/users.
- **WP3** focused on **lay publics**, primarily in their function as news media audiences. This WP included the reception of evidential claims, frames, and agendas by lay publics.
- **WP4** focused on the critical role of **NGOs** as news sources/mediators and actors in media assistance.
- **WP5** focused on **social media** and their characteristic de-differentiation of specific actor roles and types. This WP included the verbalization, transformation, and reception of evidential claims, frames, and agendas on social media.
- **WP6** focused on the **verbalization/strategic communication** of evidential claims, frames, and agendas.
- **WP7** focused on the **transformation/dissemination** of evidential claims, frames, and agendas in the media.
- **WP8** focused on the **reception** of evidential claims, frames, and agendas **by political elites.**

Within this modular structure, INFOCORE combined interviewing and content analysis, quantitative and qualitative methodologies, and inductive and deductive approaches. This approach aimed to present a major innovation beyond the present state of research because this project: (1) went beyond most current, case-based research, pursuing a systematically comparative approach, (2) focused on the process character of news production, rather than single aspects and outcomes of conflict news, and (3) went beyond existing static or phase-wise studies by providing a direct analysis of the temporal dynamics of the role of media in conflict.

THE INFORMATION ENVIRONMENT OF CONFLICT NEWS PRODUCTION

Christian Baden, Hebrew University of Jerusalem, presented the research and findings of **Evolving Ends: How Syrian Rebels' Changing Narratives Shape the Domestic and International Debate in the News, Social Media, and in Politics.** This study analysed how conflicting groups legitimized conflict by advancing specific goals (or '**finalities'**) they aimed to reach through war. The motivation that drives a group to fight another has a direct impact on the strategy of the conflict, and on the conditions under which a group is likely to accept a cessation of hostilities. Once a party feels it has reached its aim, the conflict can end. There are three classes of 'finalities' for wars. These finalities are listed below in order of increasing ambition. The first one is modest, the second is ambitious, and the third is very ambitious.

- **Restorative finality**: going back to a previous situation (i.e. defending oneself against a threat);
- **Constructive finality**: becoming more like other groups (i.e. using violence to reach liberation);
- **Revolutionary finality**: reaching a state that has been pre-ordained (i.e. rebelling against the current system and purging it to create an ideal society).

The aim of this study was to identify which of these finalities were used by the National Coordination Body for Democratic Change (a coalition of groups opposing the Bashar Al-Assad regime in Syria).

Another aim was to analyse how these finalities for the Syrian war compared to those found in parliamentary debates, in national and international media outlets, and in social media. If multiple groups could agree on a finality for the conflict, there would be a higher chance of those groups collaborating.

Christian Baden and Keren Tenenboim-Weinblatt compared the finalities expressed on Twitter and in texts published by Syrian and international actors between 2011 and the end of 2014. Some of the **Syrian actors** analysed were the National Coordination Body (NCB), the Syrian government, the main Kurdish party, the Islamic State, traditional Syrian broadsheet media (e.g., *Tishreen*), media produced in the wake of the revolution (e.g., Enab Baladi), and the Syrian state news agency (SANA). The **international actors** analysed included the BBC, the *Guardian*, CNN, *The New York Times*, Al Jazeera, and parliamentary debates (in the European Parliament, in Syria, and in the UK). To compare the similarities between these texts, the researchers used an automated text analysis system using a dictionary of about 3,800 concepts in Arabic and English. The researchers then identified whether messages formulating finalities made connections between the same kinds of concepts. It is important to note that this research method constrained the analysis to the written word. Videos and radio programs were thus not included unless transcripts were published.

Key research findings:

- The Syrian government was by far the most active in constructing finalities, followed by the NCB and the Islamic State. Most mainstream media (aside from CNN International and Al Jazeera) rarely referred to finalities. Twitter debates almost never did.

- The evolution in the NCB's finalities
    - o In late 2011 (when the NCB started publishing texts) it emphasized the idea of a country-wide democracy for all Syrians.
    - o Then the discourse emphasized the need for the international community to help resolve the conflict.
    - o Right before the 2014 Geneva talks, the concept of a nation-wide democracy hinged upon the hoped-for mediation by the international community.
    - o After the Geneva talks, the NCB became disillusioned with the international community's capacity to restore order. The NCB's main focus shifted to ending the war and protecting Syrians.

- Comparing the NCB's discourse with others
    - o *Tishreen*, a conservative Syrian newspaper, referred to the NCB's finality of having a nation-wide democracy. But when the NCB started focusing more on the need for the international community to interfere in Syria, *Tishreen* and the NCB no longer referred to the same concepts. The same pattern was also found for Al Jazeera.
    - o The Islamic State and the Kurds' discourses differed greatly from that of the NCB.
    - o Bashar Al-Assad and the NCB tended to refer to similar concepts because they both had a desire to keep the country together and restore democracy in Syria.

o   The different parliaments did not pay close attention to the NCB's discourse except when a Syria-related policy process was in its final stages. In these cases, the NCB was quoted but its views were not central.

Research conclusions:

- There was a downscale in the ambition of the NCB's finalities. Their discourse moved from a constructive finality (creating a democracy which involves everyone) to a restorative finality (focusing on bringing an end to the conflict). There was also a shift from a focus on finalities, to a focus on means, to a loss of finalities altogether. The actors no longer believed that they could solve the problem.

- Discourses of specific rebel groups (even those who were represented within the NCB) did not automatically coincide with the NCB's statements.

- There was a **destructive alignment**: the demands of the NCB coincided exactly with the threats constructed by the Bashar Al-Assad regime. Both parties' ends reinforced the other party's depicted threats.

- There was a general disconnect between the different parties. In international media and in different parliaments, there was no systematic regard for the NCB's propositions of what a post-war Syria might look like. That made it much more difficult to create a common solution.

DISCUSSIONS:

One attendee suggested that other sources could have been used to analyse which finalities were held by different groups in Syria. He stated that the sources used (such as *Souriatna* and Enab Baladi) did not have a very wide reach and therefore did not have a strong influence on the Syrian population. He stated that sources such as Orient TV and Aleppo Today could be more interesting to analyse. Another attendee suggested analysing which finalities are mentioned in the new Geneva process.

Within the temporal and methodological constraints mentioned above, the researchers endeavoured to select sources from different parts of the ideological spectrum, from outlets that were pro-government (e.g., SANA), to those written by revolutionaries (e.g., Enab Baladi). Including the sources mentioned by the participant would be interesting but, as some are TV stations, transcripts would have to be available. To analyse the new Geneva process, the study's temporal limits would have to be extended to the present. This would require much more time and resources.

The significance of the findings was also discussed. One attendee asked how co-occurrence was defined. Baden explained that, within this study, two concepts were considered to co-occur if they were within 30 words of each other. This changed when there were paragraph breaks between concepts or when the concepts were used in titles, etc. Another attendee asked whether there was a significant correlation between NCB documents and other individual documents. Baden answered that all findings presented were significant at a 95% confidence level. Thus, it was clear that there were similarities between the documents but it was difficult to say why. Were they quoting each other or simply discussing similar topics at the same time?

Abit Hoxha, Ludwig-Maximilians-University Munich, presented the research and findings of **Researching Conflict News: The Story Comes First.** The research for this project is still ongoing. The main research question for this study is: How do journalistic professional values and routines, the interaction between journalists and sources, audiences and other actors, and various production factors shape the production of conflict-related news? The numerous INFOCORE researchers involved in this study aim to answer this research question by conducting reconstructive, retrospective interviews with journalists from agenda-setting media reporting on conflicts in Syria, Israel, Palestine, Kosovo, F.Y.R.O. Macedonia, and the DRC. At the time of this presentation, the sample was made up of 220 interviews and 325 reconstructions. In addition to interviewing the journalists, the researchers also surveyed them with quantified questions. The findings presented in this presentation were just a fragment of the results.

Key research findings:

- Journalists thought that their primary task was to report facts as objectively as possible (to stay neutral between conflicting parties, to reveal the suffering of victims, and to draw international attention to conflicts).

- Most journalists were not very interested in showing which side of the conflict was wrong and in promoting peace building solutions (except in Burundi, the DRC and Palestine).

- Journalists almost always constructed stories before the facts appeared. They planned their stories in advance by screening social media, consuming content produced by NGOs, etc. Journalists then looked for sources that supported their version of the story. The stories that journalists published were personal versions of reality told through the facts that they collected.

- Journalists working for European media relied heavily on content provided by news agencies and other media (including social media). They had little or no access to local culture to understand the conflict. This was even truer for 'parachute journalists' who went into conflict zones for a specific assignment and produced their stories in a few hours or days.

- Local journalists in conflict areas started their daily ideation of stories by digesting information from primarily non-governmental outlets. The pro-active mode of story ideation started with scanning the social media accounts of conflicting parties. Local journalists had a sense of conflict development in their own environments.

- Journalists interacted on both sides of the conflict. They used other colleagues as sources because they did not have access to other people on the opposing side. What is more, they wanted to reach the enemy's audience: they wanted to be published in the antagonist's media outlets.

Research conclusions:

- The Internet has become a major influencer in news production.

- In conflict-struck countries, journalists cannot be fully neutral because they are placed in the conflict.

- Journalists' stories were primed by frames they had in mind before they started their research.

DISCUSSIONS:

One participant, a journalist himself, found the presentation provocative. He argued that the findings were generalizations downgrading the work of journalists in conflict zones. He stated that journalists went to conflict zones to inform the public and disseminate facts rather than pre-constructed stories. He went on to say that news stories arose as journalists observed what was happening on the ground; that if a reporter went to cover a political event and drove on a landmine, *this incident* would become the story. These statements triggered more reactions among audience members.

One participant said that in some regions, it is very difficult to get localized information. Journalists therefore have to rely on pre-established frames. Another participant said that journalists had multiple types of stories in mind when they went out into the field. What happened on the ground then greatly influenced which story was emphasized. This participant also stated that it was important for researchers to find a way to explain this fact in a balanced way.

Other participants suggested ways in which the research could be further refined in order to avoid a semblance of generalizations. One person said that there were two ways of producing news: (1) doing research beforehand and then writing the story, and (2) reporting news as it happened. Each technique results in a different outcome. Another audience member stated that different types of journalists (freelance correspondents, hired journalists, etc.) behaved differently. Yet another person reminded the audience that printed news was often written by people who were not in the field, that other journalists received information from people on the ground and wrote stories based on that. This participant suggested that more research be done on these editorial mechanisms which taint the news people read. Someone else recommended that more research be done on how journalists' environments influenced the articles they published. Lastly, an audience member stated that academics often strayed away from reality because they were so focused on their methodology and their specific research. It would therefore be judicious to clearly state that the conclusions reached stemmed out of research from a particular sample.

THE CONTRIBUTION OF NGOS & POLITICAL ADVOCATES: INPUT & STRATEGIES

On behalf of Christoph Meyer (WP leader) and Eva Michels, Eric Sangar, University of Namur, presented the research and findings of WP4, **Understanding NGO Communication Strategies and their Impact on the Mediated Coverage of Conflict.**

Key research findings:

This research project made three basic arguments: (1) There is evidence showing an increasing impact of NGOs on media and debates, (2) this observation can be explained by changes to economic and security conditions, (3) the role of NGOs in armed conflict can be evaluated both positively and negatively.

It is obvious that NGOs are increasingly present in media discourse. This can be explained in terms of supply and demand in their relationship with traditional media. There is demand for conflict-related information produced by NGOs because media have fewer resources for independent research and

because access to locations with high-intensity conflict is increasingly difficult. Therefore, NGOs have started to fill the gaps left by traditional media and have gradually become more professional in suppling timely and relevant conflict information. NGOs are increasingly capable of this thanks to several factors: they often have ground presence, they focus their communication strategies on output that is usable by traditional media, they use journalistic standards in the production of reports, and they sometimes even send dedicated researchers to conflict zones (e.g., Amnesty International).

What are the reasons behind NGOs' engagement in media communication? Firstly, providing reliable, evidence-based information increases people's trust in NGOs. Secondly, it helps NGOs create support for their cause. Thirdly, it gives NGOs access to members of the press and policy makers. These actors could then give NGOs support and funding. Fourthly, it reduces the amount of pressure governments can place on those NGOs. If they produce quality information, they are less likely to be seen as being biased or working towards a specific political agenda.

Credibility is an important factor in determining what kinds of NGOs have an important impact on media discourses. There are very few NGOs that play a dominant role in media discourses. Those few NGOs can be called **'influence superpowers'**. They include Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International, the International Red Cross movement, etc. Journalists use information coming from these organizations (especially when they cannot be on the ground themselves). Local NGOs can also build a reputation for being reliable (e.g., Voix des Sans Voix in the DRC, the Syrian Observatory of Human Rights). As journalists use these organizations as sources, other members of the press follow suit, thus creating a cascade of credibility for NGOs.

More generally, the varying degrees to which NGOs can influence conflict discourse depends on a range of organizational factors, including:

- **Mission statements and action strategies**: 'Doing' (humanitarian) NGOs focus on factual reporting, while advocacy and 'thinking' NGOs typically have dedicated research capabilities to produce analytical and normative judgments and sometimes problem-solving recommendations.

- **Organizational cultures** influence the type and target of communicated information. Some NGOs prefer targeting policy makers (e.g., International Crisis Group), while others rely on the public but use very strict SOP on published claims (e.g., Amnesty International).

- **Size and/or fundraising practices** may affect the capability for 'analytical' and problem-solving knowledge output. Some NGOs may adapt their communication based on how their donors may react to the messages conveyed. However, it must be clearly stated that this is not always the case.

- **Operational requirements** may influence the amount of 'factual' knowledge output. Even though NGOs in conflict zones may have very detailed intelligence about what is happening on the ground, they may decide to hold back some information in order to protect their staff, civilians, and other actors.

NGOs' influence differ across conflict contexts. This depends on two factors. The first is **the receptiveness of the local media environment**. Very often, traditional media are increasingly polarized. This means that NGOs will only be used by a few traditional media that agree with their cause. On the other hand, renown international news outlets (e.g., the BBC, etc.) are sometimes more influential than local media in certain countries. These large news networks are more likely to disseminate NGOs' messages. This provides NGOs the opportunity to be widely heard. Interestingly, NGOs are becoming increasingly important sources of funding for journalists.

The second factor that has an impact on NGOs' influence is **the relationship between the political authorities and civil society**. The latter has an effect on whether NGOs can communicate directly to governments and decision makers. Very often, NGOs need to reach the general public to have any effect on political authorities. In some contexts, NGOs act as the oppositional voice to the government.

Research conclusions:

How can one evaluate the implications of NGO involvement in the media?

Potentially positive aspects

- By providing conflict information from the ground, NGOs might fill a gap that journalists are struggling to fill, and that no other actor can fill.
- NGOs provide information about areas that are not covered by other actors due to a lack of attention from political actors and the general public.
- As actors who are close to dynamics in local populations, NGOs can provide 'early warning' knowledge about potential conflict escalation even before traditional media start paying attention.
- NGOs bring media attention to injustice and therefore make it more salient. This can increase the 'costs' of certain practices in violent conflict (e.g., attacks on civilians).

Negative aspects

- NGOs can 'devalue' independent journalistic research by disseminating information that can be published 'as is' my media outlets – this can further threaten the economic status of independent journalism.
- NGOs have their own agendas and can sometimes provide content that seems to respect journalistic standards but may nevertheless be framed according to their own organizational interests and specific normative causes.
- NGOs could disseminate conflict perceptions which are too simplistic or morally charged. They often focus on ethics and moral condemnation, and try to establish these issues as dominant frames. The result can have an impact on conflict resolution: NGOs' audiences will tend to call for the punishment of wrong-doers rather than seek more diplomatic solutions that try to bring actors together at a table, even if that requires ignoring their implications in war crimes.

DISCUSSIONS:

Audience members asked about how NGOs changed the dynamics of communication in conflict area. The answer was that many European-based NGOs have started to hire ex-journalists and refine

their production of social media content. In a way, NGOs are replacing reporters on the ground. What is more, these organizations have started applying media logic to their communication.

Marc Jungblut, Ludwig-Maximilians-University Munich, presented the research and findings of **Political Actors' and NGOs' (Strategic) Communication Activities during Conflicts: Quantity and Quality across Time.** Our perception of reality is dependent on media content and on the sources of media. There are two key actors in this: (1) political communicators, and (2) NGOs. Both of these actors do not only *inform* the general public but also *act* in conflicts. Does their strategic communication follow normative best practices? Previous research indicates that the impact of strategic communication is very much dependent on its quality. A message is more likely to persuade audiences if it contains evidence. Marc Jungblut and Romy Fröhlich aimed to analyse how often political actors and NGOs mentioned the sources from which they drew their evidence and how often they expressed certainty or uncertainty about the information they presented (a.k.a. its **epistemological status**). These aims were turned into <u>two research questions</u>. The first was: Do political actors and NGOs communicate the epistemological status of their evidential claims on war and armed conflict and if so, how? The second research question was: How transparently do NGOs and political actors communicate sources of evidence through references to authors and/or origins of their presented evidential claims on war and armed conflict?

Jungblut and Fröhlich answered both research questions by analysing them first at a general level, then comparing the behaviours of *local* NGOs/political actors to those of *international* NGOs/political actors. Finally, they compared these different behaviours across conflicts.

The researchers analysed 16,262 NGO texts and 18,888 texts from political actors using a computer-assisted content analysis system. The texts were in English, German and French and came from 65 NGOs and 105 political actors across six conflicts. Using the INFOCORE dictionary, the researchers identified how many texts mentioned the level of certainty of the information provided. Secondly, the texts were screened for references to sources with the help of a Python-based script.

Key research findings:
- The overall amount of references to epistemological status was relatively high (77%).
- NGOs referred to epistemological status roughly as often as political actors did.
- Compared to NGOs, political actors were slightly more likely to refer to certainty.
- Compared to NGOs, political actors were slightly less likely to refer to uncertainty.
- Transnational NGOs (82%) referred to epistemological status more than local NGOs (75%).
- International political communicators (74%) referred to epistemological status less than local political communicators (80%).
- When comparing different conflicts, the results were roughly the same. However, there were slightly stronger national differences for NGOs. Additionally, the same international actors used different levels of epistemology for different conflicts. Thus, it seems that the nature of the conflict has an impact on how evidence is communicated.

- Overall, political communicators (60%) mentioned sources more often than NGOs (53%).
- International NGOs/political actors mentioned sources more often than their local counterparts.
- When looking at the overall results for all conflicts, one can see that each conflict has the same ranking for epistemological status and references to sources for both NGOs and political actors. The DRC is the only exception: it is the conflict with the most epistemological statuses and the least references to sources of evidence. The reasons for this are still being investigated.

Research findings:

- NGOs need to further improve their use of references to sources.
- Both NGOs and political communicators emphasized certainty more than uncertainty. This can be seen as an adoption of **media logic** (media logic emphasizes certainty).
- NGOs tended to refer to uncertainty more than political actors. This gives them an **expert role** (the expert role emphasizes uncertainty).
- There are two possible reasons why transnational NGOs mentioned epistemological statuses and sources more often than local NGOs: (1) They have more resources and therefore can afford to investigate, and (2) they need to provide evidence to build their credibility.
- There is still room for more detailed data analysis in this research project in that it only gives a broad picture and does not differentiate different types of NGOs, etc.

Assumptions:

- Local actors referred to epistemology more — possibly because they operate in polarized environments (which could require bold statements to be heard and noticed).
- International actors made more references to sources — possibly because they need to establish expertise.
- The differences across conflicts were presumably not conscious. They were most likely due to the nature of the conflict and whether or not actors had access to the field.
- Final conclusion: Further research needs to be done to dig deeper into the contextual factors (the political context, highly polarized political environment, etc.).

DISCUSSIONS:

The discussion centred on possible ways of refining this study. One participant suggested that the researchers analyse how certainty levels change as one gets further away from the conflict zone. Would NGOs or political actors seeing the conflict first-hand use more indicators of uncertainty than actors reporting from a different country? Another participant mentioned that sometimes uncertainty is expressed with the aim of discrediting another source. Using uncertainty in this context is not a sign of excellence but a propagandistic tool. To avoid mistakenly evaluating such claims of uncertainty as a sign of quality, one would have to analyse the information being shared and compare it with facts. To this comment, Jungblut responded that such research would have to be carried out on a case basis. It would be impossible to analyse and research the arguments made in over several thousand texts.

THE ROLE OF SOCIAL MEDIA: USES, INTERACTIONS & DISCOURSES

Dimitra Dimitrakopoulou, ELIAMEP Athens/Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, presented the research on **Building on an Interdisciplinary Approach for the Study of Social Media during Violent Conflicts.** The broad aim of this study is to gain a holistic understanding of the role of social media in violent conflict. More specifically, through a series of different qualitative and quantitative research methods, this study analyses the evolution of debates on Twitter and Facebook concerning conflicts in Palestine and Israel, F.Y.R.O. Macedonia, and Burundi.

Acknowledging the complex character and the different political, social and historical contexts of each conflict and also the individualities of the various events happening on the ground in each country, the researchers decided to proceed with a multimethodical analysis, incorporating different methodologies, in order to understand the role of social media in violent conflicts in a broader sense. Therefore, the researchers decided to use content and network analysis, discourse analysis and social media ethnography. This synthesis provides a **holistic** study that highlights the role of social media in the new polymedia canvas and contributes to the study of social media from a communication and social science perspective.

Due to the large amount of content published on social media and the technical constraints of collecting this data, the conflict timelines had to be narrowed down to specific time frames. This presentation focused on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and specifically Operation Protective Edge which took place from July 8th to August 27th 2014. The researchers studied the tweets published during the Operation and followed the most popular hashtags in the debate. Additionally, they monitored the social media activity of the most prominent leaders in the debate (i.e. the users who tweeted the most) and the most influential actors (i.e. those who were most often mentioned and referred to during the conflict), and the networks formed by the interactions between different accounts using relevant hashtags. When dealing with individual accounts, it was important to determine whether they were run by real people or by automated bots. Most of the time, the most influential actors in the debate were political, media and institutional actors and NGOs. However, it must be stated that computational propaganda is an increasingly significant element in political communication.

The researchers chose to further focus on peeks in social media activity (which matched important events on the ground). When geolocating the social media activity, the highest amount of activity came from Israel but also the East Coast of the United States.

After having done a broad analysis of social media activity during important events of the conflict, the researchers carried out critical discourse analysis, a systematic and more in-depth methodological approach to understand deeper aspects of the conflict and analyse how major actors responded and acted during the events studied. In this regard, they decided to study how Benjamin Netanyahu, Israeli Prime Minister, used his Twitter account to articulate his political stance. Starting from a quantitative perspective, they could see all tweets posted by the Prime Minister of Israel and identify the peaks in his Twitter discourse. The reason they chose Netanyahu is because he decided to communicate about the

conflict through social media and legitimize through his discourse the political decisions made by his government. He also used social media to support his stance to the international public opinion.

 For the purposes of discourse analysis, the researchers used as a starting point of Netanyahu's address to the UN General Assembly in September 2014. They chose this speech as a starting point to study Netanyahu's Twitter activity during Operation Protective Edge because in it, Netanyahu makes a clear reference in his September speech to this period and to what happened in the country the preceding weeks. In his address, Netanyahu emphasises the importance of security and safety. Through discourse analysis it becomes evident that Netanyahu constructs a dichotomy between Israel and Palestine and legitimizes Israeli tactics against Palestinian terrorism on the basis of securitization. In other words, securitization is based on the discursive construction of a threat, which could lead to the reinforcement of specific political powers with the consent of those to whom the speech act is addressed. He makes references to Islamist terrorism and security issues, and uses the metaphor of terrorism as cancer. This prompted the researchers to emphasise Netanyahu's discourses, especially social media discourses on securitization and terrorism. In his discourse, Netanyahu builds on an analogy between ISIS and Hamas and openly characterizes them as terrorists by utilizing the metonymic nomination 'terrorist tyranny' to present the Palestine regime. Thereafter, he refers to the Israeli government and explains that the members of the government decided to fight Hamas to protect the Israeli citizens and ensure the security and safety of the people of Israel. Hence, he creates through these tweets a discursive dichotomy between 'Us'—the innocent, potential victims of Hamas and 'Them', the inhuman terrorists.

The aim of the researchers is to combine methodological approaches that can complement each other and provide us with the necessary analytical tools to understand the role of social media in the complex conflicts under study. Thus, they synthesize quantitative and qualitative approaches to be able to approach the research material in a more holistic and triangulated way.

Going further with this research, the scholars plan to look into whether social media are means to disseminate information or media that produce content. Secondly, the researchers would like to analyse how social media users create **echo chambers** in which they are never confronted with opinions different from their own. A third aim of the study is to learn about the conflicts themselves by monitoring the social media activity about them.

Gadi Wolfsfeld, Interdisciplinary Center Herzliya, presented the research and findings of **Media and Violent Conflicts in the Digital Age: Some Initial Evidence from Palestinian and Israeli Leaders.** This study aimed to answer two research questions concerning the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The first research question asks: Has the digital age made it easier for the weaker parties in a conflict to compete politically with a more powerful party in asymmetrical conflicts? Normally, political power leads to more power over the media and the question asks whether this has changed at all in the digital age. This is true both domestically and internationally. The second research question asks: Has the digital age decreased the mostly negative role the media play in attempts at peace building and reconciliation? Given the mostly

negative role the traditional media play in such efforts the question asks whether the dawn of the digital age has in any way improved the situation.

   To answer the two research questions, the researchers gathered data from semi-structured interviews with 30 elected and non-elected political leaders from Israel and Palestine.

Key findings of the study:

Answer to the first research question:

- In the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, digital media have made the conflict more symmetrical. One element that has made a significant difference is that when citizens use their phones as cameras, people can record and upload violence carried out by Israeli security forces. Such evidence can start a debate in the national and international public spheres and in some cases leads to the abusers being tried in court.

- Even though the digital age has brought some advantages to the weaker side in asymmetrical confrontations, this may not lead to any significant changes in the course of a conflict. There is little evidence that the changes found have led to any major changes in public opinion in Israel concerning the conflict or in the willingness of the international community to intervene.

- The Israeli military is concerned about losing control of the narrative constructed around the war due to the serious difficulties they face in maintaining control over the flow of information and images. Despite this, it does not mean that military operations will not be carried out because of the negative images they are expected to emerge. If military action is seen as essential, this will take precedence over any concerns about negative coverage. Nevertheless, those in power do assume that the amount of time they have to complete such operations is limited because international decision makers will react to news about what is happening on the ground with increasing pressure to bring about a ceasefire.

Answer to the second research question:

- Both Palestinian and Israeli interviewees agreed that the Internet is more likely to serve as a tool for spreading hate and violence than for peace and reconciliation. Information and images of violence are much more likely to go viral because the old adage "if it bleeds it leads" is just as true for the digital media as it was for traditional news. Thus, the dawn of the digital age may have led to the media playing an even more negative role in conflicts than in the past.

- There is another aspect of the digital age which has important implications for the role of the media in conflicts: authorities around the world find it increasingly difficult to maintain secrecy about their policies and actions. This can have both positive and negative consequences for conflict resolution. On the positive side, an increasing level of transparency is essential for a democratic discourse about conflicts. A more negative consequence is that some level of secrecy is essential for governments to function. Examples include the need to maintain secrecy during sensitive peace negotiations and attempts to combat terrorism.

Research conclusions:

- New media make asymmetrical conflicts more symmetrical because stronger actors no longer have full control over the flow of information. However, this does not necessarily lead to significant changes in the course of a conflict.
- The increasing inability of authorities to maintain control over the flow of information has both positive and negative implications for attempts at conflict resolution. Increasing transparency in a welcome change but the inability of governments to keep secrets can also have negative consequences.

DISCUSSION FOR THE ROLE OF SOCIAL MEDIA

This discussion first revolved mainly around whether it was reasonable to be optimistic about the changes caused by new media or whether one should be more pessimistic. One participant stated that the mere fact that researchers were studying whether new media could contribute to peace was a positive sign. Up until the late twentieth century, media and peace were never mentioned together in academic literature. If academics look more closely at how peace-promoting actors are using new media, they may be able to see if they are more powerful than others. Even though he emphasized the fact that what goes viral on new media is often violence and hate, Wolfsfeld agreed that academia should look more closely at the potential positive aspects of new media. For instance, the fact that military leaders may shorten their operations because they know images could lead to reactions from the international community is a big change that is worth looking into.

Another topic discussed was whether one could generalize findings on social media. In some instances, social media allow weaker actors to be heard, while at other times they reinforce the status quo. In light of this, it was suggested that it is impossible to say whether social media were good or bad for conflicts in general. One participant stated that social media were just tools to communicate and that they therefore could not be blamed for hate or violence. The ones spreading the hate and violence are the *people* using social media. What is more, other participants stated that social media were too complex to be treated as a flat platform. Dimitrakopoulou agreed and added that social media were extremely difficult to study because one single person could use multiple accounts and communicate differently with each one. She stated that it was therefore wise to study specific incidents in depth to fully understand them.

Another question pertained to the type of findings that one could gather by interviewing people about social media. Rather than showing what was actually happening on social media, did it not display people's *attitudes* towards these media?

One participant mentioned that even violent images could call for peace. For example, the image of the little boy washed ashore an Italian beach was not an image of peace but could symbolize a call for peace.

AUDIENCES AND LAY PUBLICS IN TIMES OF CONFLICT: SOURCES OF INFORMATION, PERCEPTIONS, AND INTERACTION WITH THE MEDIA

Snezana Trpevska, School of Journalism and Public Relations, Skopje, and Anke Fiedler, Université Libre de Bruxelles, presented **Comparative Findings from the Three Regions: (1) South-East Balkans (F.Y.R.O. Macedonia and Kosovo); (2) Middle East (Israel/Palestine territories and Syria); (3) Africa (Burundi and DRC).** The presentation was based on the following overall objectives of WP3: (1) to identify patterns in the way media are used in conflict areas, (2) to analyse different views and interpretations about the role of media in conflict, (3) to investigate audiences' beliefs about and perceptions of conflict news coverage, (4) to examine how lay publics and media interact in conflict zones. To reach those goals, the researchers interviewed people in F.Y.R.O. Macedonia, Israel, Palestine, and Syria with standardized questionnaires. They also conducted focus group discussions in F.Y.R.O. Macedonia, Kosovo, Burundi, and the DRC. In the presentation, Trpevska provided a first overview of the data and drew some preliminary conclusions, as the analysis of the data is still ongoing.

In the qualitative phase, the researchers attempted to explore the connection between news coverage and constructive and destructive conflict development (with respect to peoples' behaviour). This part of the research falls into the field of 'qualitative framing studies' and integrates theoretical approaches from both mass communication and conflict studies. According to conflict theory that was used in the cases of F.Y.R.O. Macedonia and Kosovo, there are two types of news framing that lead to potential violent mobilization:

1. **Polarizing the parties**: when journalists tend to frame coverage of inter-ethnic conflicts from their own ethnic group's perspective and promote that group's beliefs, values, attitudes, and actions while delegitimizing those of the other group. This is also known as **ethnocentric framing**.

2. **Zero-sum mind-set**: implies that a conflict can only be resolved if one party wins and the other loses. Very often, news coverage tends to reduce a complex issue or dispute to two competing sides by marginalizing or concealing other voices, actors or aspects of the issue that might be significant to conflict de-escalation or resolution (a.k.a. **issue dualism**). From a conflict theory perspective, this has the potential to encourage destructive escalation by reinforcing divergent interpretations of polarized news audiences.

Key research findings:

Media use patterns in F.Y.R.O. Macedonia and Kosovo

- The media markets in both F.Y.R.O. Macedonia and Kosovo are fragmented. There is a large number of broadcasters, newspapers, and online news outlets. The audience is polarized along ethnic lines and there are language barriers. Media use patterns correlate with ethnic affiliation and language.

- Main sources of information are local TV, word of mouth, and social media.

Findings for the research in F.Y.R.O. Macedonia

- In F.Y.R.O. Macedonia, 12 focus group discussions were conducted (five with Macedonians, five with Albanians and two mixed). Additionally, face-to-face surveys were done with 1028 respondents.
- The two biggest ethic groups in F.Y.R.O. Macedonia are Macedonians and Albanians.
- Different ethnic groups in F.Y.R.O. Macedonia frame news from their own point of view. This polarizes audiences.
- Albanians' perceptions are generally negative about media in the Macedonian language: 80% of them think that these media blame the Albanians for the conflict, 61% think they do not pay attention to peace and 52% think they reinforce the tensions.
- Both ethnic groups agree that politicians misuse media to create tensions in order to divert the public's attention from other issues.
- The researchers asked respondents whether the media's coverage of the clash that happened in Kumanovo, an Albanian populated village, in May 2015 could have jeopardized inter-ethnic tensions in the country. Of the Albanians, 66% agreed that the coverage of the media in the Macedonian language could have jeopardized existing inter-ethnic relations. Of the Macedonians, 46% were critical towards their own media.
- The researchers showed focus group participants two TV supplements: one from the news section in Albanian language of the public broadcaster and one from the private TV station Sitel. Both framed the event in Kumanovo from an ethnocentric perspective. Participants of both ethnic groups constructed frames of ethnic self-victimisation when discussing the news coverage.

Findings for the research in Kosovo

- In Kosovo, 12 focus group discussions were conducted (six with Serbians and six with Albanians).
- The two biggest ethnic groups are Albanians and Serbs.
- Focus group participants (Serbs and Albanians from North Mitrovica) were shown two TV supplements that framed the events of Jarinje Brnjak in an ethnocentric way. Serbian participants tended to develop a self-victimisation frame, while Albanians seemed to show in-group superiority and out-group depreciation.

Findings for the survey in Israel

- In Israel, face-to-face surveys were conducted with 714 respondents.
- TV was the most prominent source of information about domestic events, followed by news websites, radio, and newspapers.
- About 71% of participants strongly or somewhat agreed that Israeli media should defend the interests of the Israelis. About 50% agreed that Israeli media participated in intensifying the conflict and do not deal enough with the possibilities for peaceful resolution.

Findings for the survey in Palestine

- In Palestine, face-to-face surveys were conducted with 886 respondents from the West Bank and Gaza.

- Palestinian TV stations were the main source of information, followed by social networks, word of mouth, and news websites.
- In Palestine, 43.3% of participants recognized that Palestinian coverage was biased, 41.7% stated that Palestinian media intensified the conflict, and 38% thought that they did not open enough possibilities for peace and conflict resolution.

Findings for the research in Syria (Damascus area)

- In Syria, the researchers conducted 601 quantitative face-to-face interviews. As the violent conflict continues, interviewees could not be asked which specific media sources they use, because it could have been dangerous for interviewers and interviewees.
- Media access is surprisingly good despite the war (88% of people have access to media).
- Main sources of information are local TV, Arab satellite TV, social media, and interpersonal communication.
- Pro-government media are more often used than oppositional media channels.
- Variables such as agenda, age, income, etc. did not have an impact on media use patterns. However, internally displaced interviewees had significantly less access.
- Most people were satisfied with the traditional media. About 70% said they felt well-informed by domestic media while only 25% said they trusted social media.
- People said they informed each other about threats through instant messenger or social media. However, political activism remains low on social media (e.g., due to a lack of digital media literacy or fear of surveillance).

Findings for the research in the DRC (Kinshasa area and Eastern DRC) and Burundi

- The researchers conducted 26 focus group discussions with more than 160 individuals.
- Participants who have access to different types of media use all of them (both local and international, but also social media). This is especially true for people who live in the conflict zone as people try to understand what is happening by getting different points of view.
- Lack of trust pushes people to use different sources. There are high levels of criticism towards the media and high levels of critical media literacy skills even among those who have no educational background.
- People would like to have high quality information provided by their own local media rather than only by international outlets.
- When there is an imminent threat, word of mouth, instant messenger, the Internet, and social media gain importance as sources of the latest information.

Comparisons across cases:

- Domestic media are the most relevant sources of information unless they do not meet basic requirements (in which case people use transnational or international media).
- New media play an important role in countries with high internet penetration.

- Information disseminated by word of mouth and social media is crucial in situations of imminent danger. People are more interactive on social media in times of conflict than in times of peace.

- People used media differently in the countries under investigation. In the DRC and Burundi people follow and used to follow media that have different political affiliations in order to compare them. In contrast, people from other countries (e.g., Macedonia, Syria) tend to follow media from one side only. These differences can be explained, among other things, by the small media landscapes of Burundi and the DRC (whereas in Syria, for instance, there are hundreds of satellite channels).

- Level of trust in media is rather low even if people are satisfied. People are aware of media manipulation and bias.

DISCUSSIONS:

The audience was interested in hearing whether NGOs and other media organizations in the countries studied could use the findings of this study to better refine their communication (especially those located in Central Africa because there is not much audience research conducted in that region).

During the discussion, researchers mentioned that many people in the DRC and Burundi did not trust the media but still consumed news to understand how the government viewed certain issues. They could then know what to say in public for example.

One participant asked about media literacy in Burundi and Congo and how it is constructed. One explanation is that people learn about media by talking to others. A focus group made up of housewives showed, for instance, that these women, albeit busy with household and children preventing them from media use, had an idea of media ownership and quality of media channels as they had heard it from their husbands.

The last question was about how people in the DRC perceive the UN-supported radio station Radio Okapi. In fact, though Radio Okapi was viewed as a qualitative radio station for a long time, people started to complain about it because they felt it was too pro-MONUSCO.

THE GENDER DIMENSION

Keren Tenenboim-Weinblatt, Hebrew University of Jerusalem, presented the research and findings of **Conflict News Production: Does Gender Make a Difference?** The main research question for this study was: Does the gender of the journalist matter when writing a story? Preliminary note: The researchers made it clear that they were not saying that men and women act differently necessarily due to biological differences, as there are also numerous gender-related behaviours that are acquired through socialization, or even arise from a rejection of learned behaviours. This study analyses the links between gender, conflict, and journalism. Gender is seen in relation to conflict or in relation to journalism, and journalism is seen in its relation to conflict.

Women tend to be marginalized in conflict news. When they are mentioned, they play the roles of victims or mothers or wives of soldiers. Famous conflict journalists tend to be men. There is a common belief according to which women are more oriented towards peace than men but empirical results are

mixed. In this study, the researchers test this so-called 'women-and-peace' hypothesis. Specifically, this study is about how women and men create conflict news in Israel-Palestine and the DRC.

To answer their research questions, Keren Tenenboim-Weinblatt and Christian Baden used automated content analysis to screen texts for 1974 concepts in four languages. The researchers analysed the coverage of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in 10 major Israeli and international news outlets over a period of almost 10 years, as well as the coverage of the conflict in the DRC in Congolese and international news. They manually mapped all of the news items collected according to the gender of the first author of the text. Palestinian news outlets could not be included in this study because they rarely name authors, so the gender is unknown.

Key research findings:

Authorship of conflict news

- In Israel, 40% of all journalists are women, but only 15% of articles on conflict were written by women.

- About 24% of articles about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict written outside of Israel were authored by women.

- In the DRC, only 6% of articles on conflict were written by women.

- About 33% of articles about the DRC conflict written outside of the DRC were authored by women. This comparatively high share may be explained by the lower 'visibility' and 'prestige' linked to covering this conflict, as opposed to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Patterns in the content of conflict news written by women and men

- No support for the 'women-and-peace' hypothesis, as peace-related concepts are approximately similarly central in texts written by male and female journalists. In fact, men use slightly more peace concepts in their writing than women.

- Women journalists are more people-oriented in their writing, and relate more to scepticism and precision. They raise questions, distance themselves from factual claims (e.g., attributing them to their source), and pay close attention to accuracy.

- In men's texts, there are more references to authority and factualism.

Research conclusion:

- The results of this study tend to show that in journalism, men focus on information provision and women focus on precision (people-oriented professionalism).

DISCUSSIONS: Discussed privately during coffee break.

Rosa Berganza & Beatriz Herrero, Universidad Rey Juan Carlos, Madrid, presented the research and findings of **Gender Issues and Media Impact in EU Parliaments' debates Regarding Burundi and Congo Post-war Scene: Women's Roles and Sexual Violence.**

This study analysed whether European parliaments discussed the issue of sexual violence towards women in Burundi and the DRC. This is especially important because of the current parliamentalisation

of international affairs. Parliaments currently have the responsibility to function as moral tribunes and to ensure the protection of democracy and human rights.

The agendas of parliaments are determined by multiple factors. One of type is external actors (such as media) who pressure governments to pay attention to certain issues. For this study, the researchers used content analysis to examine almost 600 parliamentary documents on Burundi and the DRC in the European Parliament, the United Kingdom's House of Commons, the German Bundestag, and the French Assemblée Nationale. Using the INFOCORE dictionary, the researchers identified whether these texts made reference to international media, African media, and sexual violence.

Key research findings:

- The most cited media in European parliamentary debates are international media.
- African media are most cited in the European Parliament and least cited in the French Assemblée Nationale.
- The media outlet which is most present in parliamentary debates is the BBC. This may be because of the hegemony of English in international communication, because of the BBC's prestige, and because of the existence of an African BBC.
- In international media, women correlated with terms such as 'victims', 'peace-makers', 'negotiators' or 'perpetrators'. The highest level of correlation is with the 'victim' role followed by the 'perpetrator' role. Both have a negative connotation but the first is passive while the second is active. Neither one is helpful in the peace building process. The correlation between women and these terms does not occur in African media.
- Sexual violence is a very relevant topic in European parliamentary debates. Out of the parliaments studied, the British House of Commons is the one that mentions it the most.
- Sexual violence correlates with international media and not at all with African media.

Research conclusions:

- The European Parliament's discussion on post-conflict situations in Burundi and DRC is mainly mediated by the international media and especially by media that are a reference of quality in foreign coverage (e.g., the BBC).
- African media only seem to have some impact on the European Parliament and the debates about the situation in Burundi. Further research is needed to find the reasons for this.
- Sexual violence against women is more debated in some parliaments (e.g., the British House of Commons) than in others. It is more present in debates about DRC and is linked to international media mention.
- Foreign parliaments seem to favour international media when they discuss the gender issue of the Great Lakes region.

DISCUSSIONS: Discussed privately during coffee break.

Romy Fröhlich, Ludwig-Maximilians-University Munich, presented her research and findings of **The Representation of Women in Strategic Communication on War and Violent Conflict.** It seems that media coverage on war tends to construct men as active participants in wars and conflicts and even as promoters of war. In contrast, women are perceived as a 'pacifying influence', as if they naturally opposed war, were resistant to violence but suffered from it, and needed protection. Especially the latter notion is criticised as being a masculine, authoritarian idea, since ─ it is said ─ the appeal for protection and shelter, disseminated by mass media, often serves as a political or humanitarian justification for military intervention and war.

What is missing so far within this context is research on the supposed gendered communication of respective national and international strategic communicators. If the assumption is true that the appeal for protection of women often serves as a political or humanitarian justification for war, one should find those 'justifications' in the strategic communication material of those strategic actors. Thus, Romy Fröhlich conducted a secondary gender-sensitive data analysis on the basis of the existing big-data content-analytical project (WP6). The overarching interest of this analysis on the gendered nature of persuasive strategic communication focuses on the question: Does the communication material of strategic actors contain gendered frames and lines of gendered argumentation and if so, which ones in particular?

This internationally comparative big-data content analysis is the first large-scale study on gender-related content of strategic communication in the field of war and armed conflict. The sample of research material was gathered from the websites and online archives of relevant strategic communicators (e.g., press releases from online press rooms and media-like communication means of organizations like NGOs). The analysis included material in three of INFOCORE's eight languages: English, French, and German. The study gathered 23,246 publicly available strategic texts dealing with six international armed conflicts. These texts originate from about 260 different strategic communicators who belong to one of the following four groups: NGOs, political figures, experts, and individual PR practitioners/experts.

All identified texts were turned into machine-readable data and were analysed with the open access tool JAmCAT and Python scripts. Fröhlich's computer-assisted content analysis relies on the general INFOCORE dictionary that operationalizes around 3,800 different semantic concepts, each expressing semantic ideas such as actors, places, adjectives or actions. Each concept has been connected to expressions that indicate its application in a text. To examine whether and how (different) strategic communication addresses and represents female and male participation and activity, Fröhlich identified 44 particular semantic concepts from INFOCORE's dictionary on the basis of theoretical investigation. In theoretical literature, these 44 concepts (e.g., victim, hero, inequality, rape, etc.) represent gender sensitive semantics.

Fröhlich specifically analysed strategic texts which explicitly represent views of female and male experts and/or explicitly refer to those experts (called **'protagonists'** in this study). These protagonists are well known important male and female professionals in their function as members of organisations or

institutions but also prominent experts, spokespersons, or activists. 'Protagonists' have been nominated by the respective INFOCORE conflict experts a priori for each of the conflicts studied and have been identified within the research material through their individual names. In a first step, Fröhlich analysed the occurrence of the 44 semantic concepts in the different texts and in a second step determined how often they are significantly connected to one another ('co-occurrences').

Key research findings:

- Note: The research findings presented here only pertain to strategic texts of *international* and of *EU* origin about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. This is only a fraction of the results for the whole research project.

<u>Strategic texts of international origin</u>

- Strategic texts of international origin, which supply information and/or meanings stemming from *male* protagonists, exhibit 42 of the overall 44 semantic concepts.
- Texts with *female* protagonists exhibit only 13 of the 44 concepts.
- Texts with *male* protagonists show on average of 21 significant co-occurrences.
- Texts with *female* protagonists show on average only 11 significant co-occurrences.
- Example with the concept 'victim':
  - Texts with *male* protagonists exhibit 30 significant semantic co-occurrences for the concept 'victim'.
  - Texts with *female* protagonists exhibit only 10 significant semantic co-occurrences for the concept 'victim'.
  - Concepts like 'emotional/emotion', 'sad/sadness', 'grief', 'scared/fear', 'humanitarian(ism)' or 'solidarity/compassion' built significant co-occurrences with the concept 'victim' only in texts with *male* protagonists. Texts with *female* protagonists did not contain any of those co-occurrences.
  - In texts with *female* protagonists, both of the highly relevant semantic concepts 'responsibility to protect' and 'intervention(ism)' did not show any significant co-occurences with 'victim' nor with 'emotional/emotion', 'sad/sadness, grief', 'scared/fear', 'humanitarian(ism)' or 'solidarity/compassion'. In the texts with *male* protagonists, these co-occurences can be clearly identified.

<u>Strategic texts of EU origin</u>

- Texts with *male* protagonists contain 43 of the 44 semantic concepts.
- Texts with *female* protagonists contain all 44 semantic concepts.
- Texts with *male* protagonists have an average of 23 co-occurrences per concept, and for *female* protagonists the average is 18.
- The concepts 'responsibility to protect' and 'intervention(ism)' can also be found in the context of *female* protagonists.

Assumptions:

- In texts of international origin, the argumentative framework is more complex and heterogeneous in texts with male protagonists than in those with female protagonists. Texts with male protagonists obviously feature more of a narrative, and texts with female protagonists more of an informative character. Texts with male protagonists, more than those with female ones, obviously are conceived as strategic messages which pursue a persuasive intention ─ possibly a 'pro-intervention' and 'pro-responsibility to protect' intention.
- In texts of EU origin, the strategic orientation of the communication on the conflict case is affected especially by the political self-understanding of political EU actors. This might overlay gender-related differences more so than with strategic texts from other actors and of other origins.

Research conclusions:

- The particularity of a conflict, its geopolitical meaning and significance as well as the origin and the actual function of a strategic communicator, strongly determine the gendered nature of the respective strategic material.
- This study identified *some* gendered frames and stereotypes in *some* of the strategic communication on war and armed conflicts. The results tend to confirm the theoretical assumption that those stereotypes serve the persuasive purpose of arguing in favour of intervention and feature the frame 'Responsibility to Protect'. This applies in particular to texts of international origin with male protagonists. Thus, this picture cannot be generalized for all kinds of strategic communication on war and armed conflict.
- One can assume that the contents of strategic communication are diffused in media coverage when journalists use this material as sources.
- A qualitative analysis would be necessary to eliminate any remaining doubts on interpretations. But due to the enormous amount of texts, this is not possible.
- The next step within INFOCORE will be to run analyses for all conflicts and all geopolitical, national and international proveniences of strategic communication and to link the findings then to the other individual INFOCORE sub-projects.

DISCUSSIONS: Discussed privately during coffee break.

POLICY IMPLICATIONS

Gadi Wolfsfeld, Interdisciplinary Center Herzliya, presented the research and findings of **Political Actors and the Media in Violent Conflicts: Policy Implications for What We Have Learned.**

Policy recommendations:

- Since the intensity of the conflict has a direct impact on the role of the media, any attempt to make the media play a more constructive role has to be integrated into efforts to reduce the intensity of the conflict. It does not make sense to have a media team and another team that deals with the conflict. It should be one single team.

- All organizations should have contingency plans and practice these plans simulating both crisis situations and opportunities for lowering the level of violence (e.g., a potential ceasefire).
- Most citizens are exposed to ethnocentric types of information and images and there is little evidence that this has changed with the advent of the digital age. Creative ways to cross national and linguistic barriers need to be considered and tested. The use of humour is just one example of a technique that might be helpful in this regard.
- The media should be made up of a variety of voices and opinions. In the interviews, many oppositional leaders expressed frustration with not having access to mainstream media. A widespread discussion about conflict issues is essential for reaching a consensus in a peace process. If the opposition is left out of the conversation, peace negotiations are more likely to fail. The international community should pressure all countries to allow for a truly free press.
- The leaders interviewed for this study all agreed that social media, like traditional media, spread more hate than peace. Violence is still more interesting to audiences than peace talks. The only difference between new and traditional media in this regard is that there are fewer gatekeepers for new media. Thus, almost anything can be published. Additionally, because many social media allow for anonymity, people can express hateful views without fear of reprisal. Anonymity on major social media needs to end.
- Authorities are losing control of the flow of communication. This has positive and negative consequences. One disadvantage is that is makes it harder to keep secrecy which is essential during peace negotiations. Therefore, international communities need to come up with recommendations that strike a balance between transparency and secrecy.
- In conclusion, the media have the power to make violent conflicts worse or create favourable conditions for peace negotiations. Even though the changes brought about so far by new media are grim, more research needs to be done to find out how new media can have a positive impact on conflicts.

Igor Micevski, School of Journalism and Public Relations, Skopje, presented WP3 research and findings as the basis for the Policy Brief on **Media Assistance Strategies in Conflict Zones.** This presentation focused on the six conflict cases investigated by INFOCORE (F.Y.R.O. Macedonia, Kosovo, the DRC, Burundi, Israel and Palestine, and Syria). The starting point of this study was the aspiration to build a media assistance strategy by finding out what audiences need to help de-escalate conflicts. To construct a sound media assistance strategy, it is paramount to have a thorough understanding of the political system, the media system, and the societal context. The surveys and focus group discussions conducted in these case studies, revealed interesting insight. Micevski shared three in his presentation:

- Firstly, media and audiences are polarized in conflict zones.
- Secondly, there is a lack of trust in media which increases as conflicts progress.

- Thirdly, INFOCORE found that audiences in these zones believed that political actors manipulated media for the purpose of political gain. In addition, public service broadcasters were thought of as structures that spread pro-government propaganda.

Policy recommendations:

- Local and international media assistance should take into account conflict dynamics and the nature of societal structures in the country (including culture, class divisions, rural-urban divisions, etc.). To find the roots of a conflict, one must keep in mind all contextual factors, and engage in tailor-made rather than ready-made solutions.

- The entire population in the formal system of education should be taught about conflict, media politicization and socio-cultural polarization. Media assistance strategies have often focused on providing this information to journalists rather than to the population at large.

- In cases of ethnic conflict, ethnocentric framing should be deconstructed in mainstream media. This can help people reject ethnocentric myths. However, the deconstruction of such myths must be done in a non-provocative so as not to ignite anger in people who hold ethnocentric beliefs.

- Reconciliation processes have to be openly debated.

- For public service broadcasters (PSB), integrated editorial policies must be constructed and staff must be multi-ethnic.

- Legislation should impede politicians or businessmen from influencing PSBs.

- PSBs should follow a **participatory model**. This means that the editorial policy must promotlaye diversity and include minorities that may have been excluded from the debate in the past. A participatory model turns audiences into **media-active lay publics**. Members of the public who participate in media are the ones who want to change societal issues.

- In order to increase trust in media, internal and external pressure groups should demand institutional transparency. What is more, self-regulation mechanisms should be put in place to prevent an increase in societal antagonisms. Additionally, professional organizations should set and follow guidelines for conflict-sensitive coverage. Furthermore, mixed newsrooms (which include staff from different ethnic groups) can improve trust and reliability.

- To prevent political manipulation of the media, media systems must be changed and media literacy encouraged. Moreover, international pressure should be placed on political elites to prevent them from manipulating the media. Lastly, media organizations should promote universal values to put an end to clientelism.

Romy Fröhlich & Marc Jungblut, Ludwig-Maximilians-University Munich, presented the research and findings for **Effective Communication Strategies and Media Relations during Conflict: Suggestions for NGOs and Political Actors.**

According to INFOCORE's principles, which were negotiated with the European Commission (EC) and set down in INFOCORE's Description of Work document, a particular

part of our contract with the EC, the policy brief of Work Package (WP) 6 This policy brief summarises the first findings from the initial stage of INFOCORE's WP number 6 "Strategic Communication" and presents first recommendations for effective and coherent media related communication of political actors/authorities/institutions and NGOs active in the field of conflict prevention, management and resolution

Research shows that **political actors/authorities** shape the opportunity structures of journalists for war and conflict reporting ─ not infrequently attempting to instrumentalise the media for their own agendas.

The number of **NGOs** has expanded exponentially during the last two decades. This has led to an increasingly fierce competition among NGOs for funding and thus for awareness. This also applies to the group of NGOs in INFOCORE's particular field of conflict prevention, response, and resolution.

The researchers are aware that the present recommendations need to fit two very different communicating entities: NGOs and political actors. This will necessarily produce a bit of haziness.

Key research findings:

- In the mass media analysed, strategic communication deriving from political actors, authorities and entities, always has a higher visibility than NGO communication. And this despite the fact that NGOs typically enjoy greater credibility and trust with journalists than political actors do.

- For all crises, the political actors who were directly involved on the ground have a significantly better media resonance in international and local media than NGOs and other political actors.

- The higher the provision of evidence in an NGO's and political actor's communication texts, the higher the number of references to the respective actor in international media coverage. Local media show a similar correlation.

- For international media, the main predictors of media resonance with NGOs and political actors were the shares of texts that contained evidence. However, while in the case of NGOs the amount and number of texts is no predictor of resonance in international media, it pays off for political communicators to constantly communicate and disseminate messages.

Conclusions and suggestions

- NGOs and political actors need to improve the evidential character of their strategic communication on war and armed conflict when dealing with international media/journalists.

- NGOs and political actors should employ scientific findings (e.g., storytelling; relation building with local media/journalism).

- NGOs and political actors should employ a framework for the continuous sustainable strategic planning of their media relations and communication.

- The researchers advise the implementation of a **'media relations governance' (MRG)**: a sustainable, organisationally-embedded regulatory framework for the strategic management of communication activities for and with media/journalists. Some best practice processes of MRG which appear necessary for strategic communication in the field of conflict prevention, response, and resolution are:

  o **A framework for co-operation, co-ordination and coherency**.

    ▪ The researchers acknowledged that this is difficult for the EU. They therefore recommended that the EU enters into communication partnerships and co-operation communication networks with selected NGOs who have a high degree of credibility per se. As it seems that such partnerships already exist, they should continue and be strengthened.

    ▪ For NGOs, the researchers recommended creating to the greatest extent possible communicative evidence networks by means of external co-operation, co-ordination, and coherency. This should be done firstly with co-operation among NGOs (in particular cooperation between local and transnational NGOs), and secondly with continual involvement and integration of NGOs' local partners and actors in compiling communicative evidence.

  o **A framework that is sensitive to the conflict, the culture and the particular (geopolitical) context.**

  o **A framework that acknowledges the 'stigma of unreliability' and presumed 'natural lack of evidence' for any kind of strategic persuasive communication.** Persuasive communication can always meet resistance and in general is at risk of causing a backlash. It is thus not advisable to deny or relativise the persuasive character of a strategic actor's communication. Journalists are well-aware of this. The researchers recommend developing a general internal awareness of media relations' legitimacy problem. A good media relations governance, based on norms and values, strategically implements, accepts, and anticipates this scepticism problem in all its communicative activities and confronts the problem of legitimacy (e.g., by setting down a corresponding mission statement in the regulatory framework of the respective media relations governance and/or through regular training on this topic for the media relations team/staff).

  o **A framework for the implementation of the 'news desk'/ 'newsroom' concept.** At its core, this concept has a topic-centred approach focused on many channels and stakeholders, and it has replaced the editor-centred approach (also called 'silo approach'). In the news desk concept, content is produced for multiple types of media, which means that (strategic) communicators/actors should also produce their agenda-setting across

multiple media. That also allows media organisations to better link the content of their media relations internally and externally as well as nationally and internationally.

DISCUSSIONS FOR ALL THREE POLICY IMPLICATIONS PRESENTATIONS (WP2, WP4, WP6):

One participant made six points. First, he stated that, though he agrees with the idea, the sustainable approach discussed during the conference (with a combination of a crisis management team and a communication team) never gets any traction or enough endorsement so that it gets implemented. Second, he said that there was a lot of media/technology determinism during the conference. Different technologies have both advantages and disadvantages in different contexts. Additionally, in his opinion, technology is interesting but people matter more. Third, he pointed out that many of the presentations had very complex methodologies often using content analysis. He suggested to integrate more ethnological research. Fourth, he said that as an outsider, INFOCORE's aim was somewhat unclear. Fifth, he stated that 'the participatory model' had been mentioned several times throughout the day but that the term 'participation' was not fully defined or explained. It is as obvious a concept as 'democracy', but what does it really mean? Researchers did not explain in depth what they meant by 'we need more participation'. Sixth, he suggested that there be a stronger focus on advocacy communication.

Another participant shared two comments. The first was that oppositional voices needed to be present in the media. Otherwise, people feel like their views are not being represented in the public sphere and try to make themselves heard by voting for political candidates who are the extremes of the ideological spectrum (just like what happened with the American elections). To this, Romy Fröhlich replied that the same phenomenon is happening in Germany (referring to the right wing AfD and PEGIDA movement). The second point made by the participant was that secret diplomacy is still possible. An example of it were the discussions between the US and Cuba in 2015.

One participant made a last statement on the excellence of INFOCORE and congratulated the whole team for the outstanding and excellent work done during the three years period of research and dissemination.

PROGRAMME

Thursday 17ᵗʰ November

9h00 – 9h05 Welcome Address, Georgios Terzis, Global Governance Institute Brussels

9h05 – 9h30 WP1 Introduction
- "Comparative, Diachronic and Holistic: Conceptualising a new Approach for the Analysis of Conflict News Coverage and Public Discourse on Armed Conflicts" Romy Fröhlich, Ludwig-Maximilians-University Munich

9h30 – 10h30 WP2 The Information Environment of Conflict News Production
- "Evolving Ends: How Syrian Rebels' Changing Narratives Shape the Domestic and International Debate in the News, Social Media, and in Politics" Christian Baden & Keren Tenenboim-Weinblatt, Hebrew University of Jerusalem
- "Researching Conflict News: The Story Comes First" Abit Hoxha, Ludwig-Maximilians-University Munich

10h30 – 11h30 WP3 The Contribution Of NGOs & Political Advocates: Inputs & Strategies
- "Understanding NGO Communication Strategies and their Impact on the Mediated Coverage of Conflict" Christoph Meyer, King's College and Eric Sangar, University of Namur
- "Political Actors' and NGOs' (Strategic) Communication Activities during Conflicts: Quantity and Quality across Time."
  Romy Fröhlich & Marc Jungblut, Ludwig-Maximilians-University Munich

11h30 – 12h00 Coffee Break

12h00 – 13h00 WP4 The Role Of Social Media: Uses, Interactions & Discourses
- "Building on an Interdisciplinary Approach for the Study of Social Media during Violent Conflicts" Dimitra Dimitrakopoulou, Salome Boukala & Sergios Lenis, ELIAMEP Athens / Aristotle University of Thessaloniki
- "Media and Violent Conflicts in the Digital Age: Some Initial Evidence from Palestinian and Israeli Leaders" Gadi Wolfsfeld, Interdisciplinary Center Herzliya

13h00 – 14h00 Lunch

14h00 – 15h30 WP5 Audiences and Lay Publics in Times of Conflict: Sources of Information, Perceptions, Trust and Interaction with the Media
- "Comparative findings about the three regions: (1) Middle East (Syria and Israel/Palestinian territories); (2) Africa (Burundi and DRC); and (3) South-East Balkans (F.Y.R.O. Macedonia and Kosovo)" Snezana Trpevska, School of Journalism and Public Relations, Skopje, Marie-Soleil Frère & Anke Fiedler, Université Libre de Bruxelles

14h45 – 15h30 The Gender Dimension

- "Conflict News Production: Does Gender Make a Difference?" Keren Tenenboim-Weinblatt & Christian Baden, Hebrew University Jerusalem
- "Gender Issues and Media Impact in EU Parliaments' Debates Regarding Burundi and Congo Post-war Scene: Women's Roles and Sexual Violence". Rosa Berganza & Beatriz Herrero, Universidad Rey Juan Carlos, Madrid
- "The Representation of Women in Strategic Communication on War and Violent Conflict" Romy Fröhlich, Ludwig-Maximilians-University Munich

15h30 – 15h45 Coffee Break

15h45 – 16h45 Policy Implications

- "Political Actors and the Media in Violent Conflicts: Policy Implications for What We Have Learned" Gadi Wolfsfeld, Interdisciplinary Center Herzliya
- "Media Assistance Strategies in Conflict Zones" Igor Micevski, School of Journalism and Public Relations, Skopje & Milica Pesic, Media Diversity Institute
- "Effective Communication Strategies and Media Relations during Conflict: Suggestions for NGOs and Political Actors" Romy Fröhlich & Marc Jungblut, Ludwig-Maximilians-University Munich

16h45 – 17h30 Summary

- "INFOCORE's Key Findings to Date" Rosa Berganza & Beatriz.Herrero, Universidad Rey Juan Carlos, Madrid

LIST OF INFOCORE TEAM PARTICIPANTS

No.	Institution Name	Presenters	WP
1	Ludwig-Maximilians-University Munich	Romy Fröhlich Marc Jungbut Abit Hoxha	WP10, WP6, WP1
2	King's College London	Christoph O. Meyer	WP4
3	Interdisciplinary Center Herzliya	Gadi Wolfsfeld	WP2
4	The Hebrew University of Jerusalem	Keren Tenenboim-Weinblatt Christan Baden	WP7
5	Hellenic Foundation for European & Foreign Policy	Dimitra Dimitrakopoulou, Sergios Lenis	WP5
6	Global Governance Institute	Georgios Terzis	WP9
7	Visoka Skola za Novinarstvo i za Odnosi so Javnosta Privatna Ustanova	Snezana Trpevska, Igor Micevski, Zaneta Trajkoska	WP3
8	University Rey Juan Carlos	Rosa Berganza, Beatriz Herrero	WP8
9	Université Libre de Bruxelles	Marie-Soleil Frère, Anke Fiedler	WP3

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