(IN)FORMING CONFLICT PREVENTION, RESPONSE AND RESOLUTION:

# INFO CORE

THE ROLE OF MEDIA IN VIOLENT CONFLICT

# INFOCORE Definitions

## "Mediator"

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## Definition: "Mediator"

In democratic political systems journalists and media hold a mediation role between the two other elements of political communication, namely political actors/organizations and citizens/public. The journalist acts as a mediator and stands between the citizens and the political actors, "the former's representative before power, who ensures that the voice of the public is heard" (McNair, 2009: 239). New technologies set a challenge to the role of journalists as mediators and to the mediated communication and information process. Due to the interactive and empowering qualities of social media and networks and as citizens become more direct and active information seekers, the exclusive power of journalists on the gatekeeping function is questioned while the need for mediation by media professionals is decreased.

The concept of mediators in conflicts refer to third-party actors who play "a central role in keeping communication channels open, ongoing and undistorted between mistrusting parties who attempt to settle a conflict" (Jönsson and Aggestam, 2009: 38) and they engage into "a form of third-party assistance that requires an outsider to the dispute who lacks the power to make decisions for the parties" (Singer, 1990: 20). A mediator gets active in gathering necessary information and serves as a regime surrogate in disputes where institutionalization is impractical (Princen, 1992) and is distinguished by neutrality and impartiality (Folberg and Taylor, 1984, Moore, 1986). Following the taxonomy of mediator behavior adopted by Bercovitch (2009), we identify three fundamental mediator strategies ranging from low to high intervention, namely: a. communication-facilitation, b. procedural and c. directive.

Journalists can also function as independent actors involved in the initiation and facilitation of negotiations helping primarily to transmit messages between the involved sides (Arno, 1984, Larson, 1988, Gurevitch, 1991, Graber, 2002, Gilboa, 2005). Primarily this function is pursued by journalists when they temporarily become mediators and help parties begin official negotiation (Bercovitch, 2009). However, considering the role of journalists as mediators in conflicts, "the active participation of journalists in the events they presumably 'cover' is often achieved at the cost of sacrificing traditional journalistic norms, such as editorial control" (Gurevitch, 1991: 187). As Siebert (2000) describes the role of media in the different phases of the conflict, a. in many conflict cases, the media can become the sole medium of communication between conflicting parties when formal or informal negotiation processes are absent, b. the media becomes a channel for opinion and information sharing during the negotiations process and c. the media function as a critical part of monitoring during the post-agreement phase.

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