

INFOCORE Newsletter No. 2

March 2017



Balkans Stakeholders' Workshop, Ohrid F.Y.R.O. Macedonia 2-3 July, 2016

Years of research, conferences, and discussions

In 2016, the INFOCORE team worked relentlessly on its trans-continental and longitudinal research project. It has carried out research in the Balkans, the Middle East and Africa. Part of the consortium's mission was to disseminate its findings to the broader public. It was also tasked with working hand-in-hand with groups and organisations that could suggest improvements to INFOCORE's research and benefit from recommendations given by the scholars. To this end, the team organised one stakeholders' workshops in each of the three regions studied. Highlights from each event can be found in this newsletter.

The INFOCORE Project

INFOCORE ceased in December 2016. For a period of three years, the project investigated the conditions that bring about different role of media and other actors in the cycle of conflict and peace-building. Its unique approach addressed both the socially interactive production process behind the creation of conflict coverage, and the inherent dynamics of information and meaning disseminated via the media.

Actually, I shouldn't write in past tense: On the basis of our big-data approach, we gathered so much information that we will all be busy for the next 10 years. The complex theoretical and methodological foundations, the manifold field work which brought us from the Western Balkans and Africa to the Middle East, and the intense work on interesting deliverables are the reasons why we have so far revealed only the tip of our data-iceberg. Now, we are all looking forward to immerse ourselves in the depth of our data-sets. So, please [follow us](#) on Facebook.

Thank you all very much for your wonderful support. We'll stay in contact and keep you informed (as we are doing in the present newsletter).

Prof. Romy Fröhlich
Project Coordinator

Balkans Stakeholders' Workshop, Ohrid
F.Y.R.O. Macedonia 2-3 July, 2016

On 2-3 July 2016, INFOCORE held a "testing" conference in Ohrid, where different stakeholders, media actors, members of civil society, communications educators, and policy makers from the Balkans shared their experiences in relation to conflict reporting. A lively debate, which centred on the topic of journalists' role in preventing, reporting, and resolving conflict, indicated why projects such as INFOCORE are necessary. Sharing the findings of this project will help media personnel when choosing whom to interview, what stories to report upon, and how they are portrayed in the media. INFOCORE's findings can also help develop curricula and improve inclusive journalism in conflict reporting in the region.

**THEME 1: HOW THE NEWS
COMES INTO BEING:
RESEARCHING CONFLICT NEWS
PRODUCTION IN KOSOVO &
F.Y.R.O. MACEDONIA**

This presentation by Abit Hoxha raised the issues of how journalistic professional values and routines, journalists' interactions with sources, audiences, and other actors, and various contextual factors shape the production of conflict-related news. It also addressed questions relating to epistemological challenges, advantages of retrospective reconstruction (making journalists aware of inconsistencies between their own answers and their practices on the ground), narration (what stories journalists want to



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tell about a given event), and presentation (decisions on source selection, information and links). Research concluded that while journalists produced accurate accounts of conflicts for the most part, conflict coverage is highly contingent on what journalists decide to convey to audiences. All audiences must be made aware of this as they turn to media for information. The research focused on a three-step process (ideation, narration, and presentation) while using a comprehensive international and national media sampling, interviews with journalist, and article reconstruction. It was said that reporters do not simply tell facts, but rather construct narratives around what they wish to tell audiences.

**THEME 2: POLITICAL LEADERS,
ASYMMETRICAL CONFLICTS, &
THE MEDIA: THE CASE OF
F.Y.R.O. MACEDONIA**

In this presentation, Dr. Gadi Wolfsfeld proposed that variations in political environments are the most important factors leading to differences in media systems and practices. However, news media do not merely reflect the nature of the political environment but also make an independent contribution to the process in the ways they transform political events into news. Three indicators of media's control are: (1) the ability of the more powerful antagonist to generate a consensus among the political elites in support of their policies, (2) the ability to take control over conflict events, and (3) the ability to take control over information flow. Research also showed that less government control over the political environment leads to more oppositional views being heard and allows third parties (e.g., the EU, the UN, NATO) to enter into the conflict. Overall, it was argued that political success/failure leads to media success/failure.

THEME 3: THE ROLE OF PUBLICS IN SHAPING MEDIATED COMMUNICATION IN DIFFERENT CONFLICT CONTEXTS

The objective of this research, presented by Dr. Snezana Trpevska, was manifold. First, it sought to identify patterns of use of conflict news. Second, it attempted to examine audiences' views and interpretations of conflict itself, the media, and particular news coverage. The third goal of this research was to examine the types of interaction between lay publics and different types of media. And fourth, it aimed to examine the general perceptions and beliefs of the broader public about conflict-related coverage.

Two types of news framing are especially relevant when analysing its destructive role: the zero-sum mind set, and the polarizing of parties. This research showed that audiences in F.Y.R.O. Macedonia think that ethnically and politically

polarized media may lead to destructive conflict escalation. For Syrians, Arab satellite TVs are a more trusted source than the local TV channels. The research also showed that if there is access, audiences in both countries prefer to engage with alternative channels of communication rather than traditional media because the latter is viewed as politically manipulated.

THEME 4: UNDERSTANDING NGO ROLES & INFLUENCE ON MEDIA COVERAGE OF CONFLICT: THE CASES OF KOSOVO & F.Y.R.O. MACEDONIA

Dr. Christoph Meyer showed that growing organizational resources, expertise, local presence, professionalization of communication, source credibility, cheaper communication technology and the rise of social media have led to a decreasing importance of "traditional" news

providers, a reduced presence of Western diplomats and security restrictions, and rising costs of conflict coverage. Dr. Meyer also discussed how NGOs' influence in conflict was affected by factors linked to supply and demand, politics, and the conflict itself.

THEME 5: INTERACTIONS & DISSEMINATION OF NEWS IN SOCIAL MEDIA

This research, presented by Dr. Dimitra Dimitrakopoulou, demonstrated limitations and challenges posed by social media, as well as their importance in different countries and across different conflict cases. The researchers highlighted the complex character of social media and networks as terrains of study, and stressed the importance of studying deeper meanings behind tweets and Facebook posts connected to ideological, political and sociocultural factors. In their analysis of Twitter activity in the Balkan and the African conflict cases, the researchers produced an overview of the structure of specific networks focusing on emergent clusters, communities, and key participants, while combining their quantitative approach (content & network analysis) with qualitative discourse analysis.

THEME 6: STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION & PR

This presentation, given by Marc Jungblut, focused on the connection between "facts" and the use of "evidence" in NGOs' strategic communication on war and armed conflict. The contribution was sparked by the



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claim that NGOs play a key role in conflicts, as they are significant actors in conflict-related discourses. The results and recommendations presented were based on a comparison of several types of NGOs in six international armed conflicts. The main research question was “How well is NGOs’ strategic communication/PR on war and armed conflict adopting discursive strategies of ‘truth’ by providing evidence, and how do respective truths allow for conclusions on the quality of NGO’s communication?” The study aimed to answer these questions by first examining if and how NGOs communicate the epistemological status of information on war and armed conflict, and secondly analysing how transparently NGOs communicate the sources of their evidential claims.

THEME 7: JOURNALISTIC TRANSFORMATION: CONFLICT NEWS NARRATIVES ON KOSOVO & MACEDONIA

Dr. Keren Tenenboim-Weinblatt and Dr. Christian Baden gave a presentation covering questions such as: What is the journalistic contribution to the conflict news narrative? What does the news report on? How does the news narrate the conflict? How does coverage depend on who covers what/where and when, and for what outlet? When tracing news contents and constructions, the researchers looked at distance and professionalism; topics, issues and frames; group identities and rally-round-the-flag; diversity, dialogue and mediation.

THEME 8: RECEPTION OF NEWS CONTENTS IN POLITICAL DEBATES

In this presentation, Dr. Rosa Berganza and Dr. Valeriano Piñeiro-Naval explained the impact of media on members of parliament as a clear sign of the ongoing mediatization of politics. The researchers’ project was focused on parliaments’ attention to traditional media, ICTs/digital/social media, and NGOs; salience of issues concerning F.Y.R.O. Macedonia, Kosovo, and Serbia in the different European parliaments; presence of tensions between Greece and F.Y.R.O. Macedonia due to the name of the country in European and Balkan Parliaments; and state building in F.Y.R.O. Macedonia. Through this research, they were able to describe European Balkan parliamentary reality.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Many recommendations were made after hearing the various presentations and work plans. All stakeholders were asked to use the findings presented to start new dialogues amongst themselves and

their colleagues. The data should also be used to help **journalists** form a broader network of sources and learn new techniques to better report on conflict.

Editors are also encouraged to use the information to help organize training programmes for journalists and other staff. The information shared at the conference will help establish a more inclusive vocabulary, and aid in avoiding biased reporting linked to common stereotypes and prejudices.

The INFOCORE team firmly hopes that its research will help establish new and enhance existing curricula on conflict reporting. In addition, **Civil Society Organizations** can use INFOCORE material when advocating transferability of media across borders and cultures, developing sustainability strategies, and exploring new network and partnership opportunities.

Policy makers, in turn, can use the information when recruiting support within the media and developing long term funding opportunities, when disseminating information, and when supporting networking projects and platforms.



Balkans Stakeholders’ Workshop, Ohrid F.Y.R.O. Macedonia 2-3 July, 2016

Middle East Stakeholders' Workshop, Larnaca
Cyprus 24-25 July, 2016

On 24-25 July 2016 in Cyprus, the INFOCORE team met with media practitioners, representatives from NGOs and Think Tanks, and political actors. During the conference, the INFOCORE team shared the results and findings from over two years' worth of research conducted on the media's role in the emergence, preservation, escalation, de-escalation, management, resolution, and reconciliation of violent conflicts. These analyses primarily focused on the Israeli-Palestinian and Syrian conflicts. The following section provides a summary of the presentations and subsequent discussions, as well as recommendations for the researchers.

**THEME 1: THE ROLE OF
JOURNALISTS: IDENTITIES,
GENDER, & PROFESSIONAL
PRACTICES**

The first presentation, given by Keren Tenenboim-Weinblatt, focused on whether gender makes a difference in conflict coverage, specifically in Israel and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). The INFOCORE study showed that, in Israeli media, only 15% of content about the Israel-Palestine conflict is authored by female journalists, even though they represent 40% of all journalists in Israel. In Congolese media, no more than 6% of articles written about the DRC conflict were written by women. The share is notably higher in the foreign media. Women thus remain underrepresented in the heavily male-dominated beat of conflict

coverage, all the more so the higher the covered conflict ranks in the journalistic hierarchy.

The next presentation was given by Abit Hoxha and Yonatan Gonen. It discussed the interactions and interpersonal relationships between journalists across conflict lines. The researchers also analysed the self-perception of roles that journalists play in covering conflict situations. The presentation especially focused on the pattern of collaboration among journalists across conflict lines and on the collaboration in news production and the usage of sources from the other side to make the news for journalists at home.

**THEME 2: THE CONTRIBUTION
OF NGOS AND POLITICAL
ADVOCATES: INPUTS,
STRATEGIES, & COVERAGE**

Eric Sangar gave the first presentation under this theme. He focused on the question of whether NGOs are able to drive media coverage of the conflicts in Israel-Palestine and Syria, or if these organisations are used as supplementary sources without

having an independent influence on the coverage. In the case of Syria, traditional media are seen as propaganda, so NGOs rely on social media to overcome the perceived bias as well as the poor dissemination and access of traditional media. In the Israel-Palestine conflict, the public media landscape is polarised and right wing media perceive NGOs as being a political opposition force. Therefore NGO information is disseminated only by selective domestic media. NGOs, in turn, have become a central source of factual information for international media in periods of high intensity violence, such as the Gaza War of 2014.

In their presentation at the Larnaca workshop, Marc Jungblut and Dr. Romy Fröhlich focused on political actors' and NGOs' strategic communication activities during conflicts. It was shown that much less strategic content was released on the Syrian conflict than on the Israeli-Palestinian war. Several potential explanations were provided. First, strategic communication (production and dissemination) may be more



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difficult in a conflict with high levels of escalation than in areas with lengthy phases of limited violence. Second, security issues linked with the conflict mean there are fewer NGOs and social movement stakeholders on the ground during (long-lasting) heavy violence like in Syria.

The researchers also looked at whether and how transnational NGOs, local NGOs, as well as local and international political actors communicate the epistemological status of the information they publish, and how transparently they communicate the sources of their claims. Based on their study, researchers advise to increase source evidence in strategic texts (this applies particularly to local NGOs and international political actors in both conflicts).

THEME 3: THE IMPORTANCE OF SOCIAL MEDIA: USES, INTERACTIONS, & DISCUSSIONS

Dr. Dimitra Dimitrakopoulou's presentation focused on the Israel-Palestine conflict and demonstrated a multi-methodical approach. Working with quantitative content and network analysis, the researchers were able to measure the contents that were operationalised theoretically as well as identified in the sampled texts. The research extended its scope by employing network analysis to study the social relations between actors and to identify the main actors' personal networks. Dr. Dimitrakopoulou also presented the discourse analytical approach used to analyse the speeches and tweets by the Israeli Prime Minister as central political actor in the conflict under study.

The second presentation, by Dr. Gadi Wolfsfeld, addressed two questions: Has the digital age made it easier for the weaker parties in an asymmetrical conflict to compete politically with a more powerful party? And is the media more likely to be a force for conflict and hate or peace and reconciliation? In relation to the first research question, it was stated that digital media contribute to making asymmetrical conflicts more symmetrical by making it harder for the stronger antagonist to control the flow of information. However, there is no concrete evidence that new media have had an effect on the conflicts themselves. Concerning the second research question, both Israeli and Palestinian leaders agreed that new media were much more likely to spread hate than messages of peace and reconciliation.

THEME 4: THE INTERPRETATION OF CONFLICT: NEWS, NARRATIVES & AUDIENCE PERCEPTIONS

Dr. Christian Baden and his colleagues looked at the coverage of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in both local and international news sources. They found considerable agreement on the selection of events and issues, also between Israeli and Palestinian media, even if their framing differed. They also found that escalation in the conflict initiated enduring phases of narrative misalignment, and only gradual realignment following peace talks.

The second presentation, given by Igor Micevski, looked at the audience's and lay public's interpretations and perceptions of

ethnocentric conflict coverage. Media can cause three potential issues. First, they have the ability to encourage conflict escalation by reinforcing opposing interpretations of polarized news audiences. Second, they may conceal certain aspects of disputes that are significant to conflict de-escalation or resolution. Lastly, media can potentially contribute to the disempowerment of moderate actors who might push for resolution if given the chance. Ethnocentric framing plays a role in all three of these potential issues because it has the potential to encourage destructive escalation.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The final portion of the conference allowed researchers and participants to discuss how they could make the most of the information presented. Stakeholders saw a need for a structured operation and partnership between the INFOCORE project and institutions on the ground, thus enabling INFOCORE to better define the impact of media in conflict. It was also said that more concrete examples resulting in better-defined terminology would be beneficial.

It was widely felt that researchers' broad scope of the study might have hindered the contextualization of the studied events. It was also agreed that the data INFOCORE researchers have collected should be made accessible to other researchers around the world. Participants also mentioned that in the case of radicalization and violent extremism, for instance, audience-

disaggregated data would be very helpful to NGOs. Better grasping how youths are using social media

or how armed groups are resorting to the latter would strengthen NGOs' capacities to implement

impactful need-based media projects.

African Great Lakes Region Stakeholders' Workshop, Gisenyi
Rwanda 28-29 September, 2016

The third stakeholder workshop took place in Gisenyi, Rwanda on the 28-29 September 2016. The aim was to discuss each Work Package's first provisional findings in the African Great Lakes Region. The audience was composed of about 50 journalists, academics, policy makers and civil society representatives from the DRC and Burundi. This workshop allowed different actors playing important roles in conflict prevention, response, and resolution in the Great Lakes Region to meet and share ideas and concerns about the role of media in violent conflict while taking into account the specificities and similarities of their national contexts.

**THEME 1: INFORMING
CONFLICT PREVENTION,
RESPONSE, AND RESOLUTION:
THE ROLE OF MEDIA IN
CONFLICT**

In this initial presentation, Dr. Eric Sangar explained that the INFOCORE project aims to understand the differences in conflict-related media coverage across different conflict countries and contexts as well as the impact of media coverage on conflict resolution. Dr. Sangar also emphasized the importance of focusing on the different motivations and interactions of specific actors involved in conflicts. The discussion that followed had participants asking questions such

as: How are results going to be used? What is the possible influence of the media on the nature of conflicts? Are there limitations of the project in time and space? And what roles do gender and hate speech play in this project's findings?

**THEME 2: JOURNALISTIC
PRACTICES IN CONFLICT**

In his presentation, Abit Hoxha addressed the question of how journalistic professional values and routines, their interactions with sources, audiences and other actors, and various contextual factors affect the production of conflict-related news. The researchers selected prominent media outlets in each country, they identified relevant stories related to conflicts, and interviewed the respective journalists. Some preliminary conclusions are: News in conflict situations is complex and thus requires decisions in and out of the newsroom; journalists legitimize their role as authoritative storytellers; and there can be many, equally "true" versions of stories.

The roundtable discussion allowed five journalists to provide more specific insight into the research and provide personal accounts. Afterwards, there was a discussion about the importance of freedom of expression and access to information in areas of conflict as well as the safety of journalists in the field. Participants also

mentioned journalists' right to have their own opinions and their ethical responsibility to provide accurate information. The discussion also addressed problems faced by journalists in the DRC like activism, populism and overconfidence.

**THEME 3: INTERACTIONS
BETWEEN THE MEDIA AND
POLITICAL LEADERS IN
CONFLICTS**

Dr. Marie Fierens, who presented a paper on behalf of Dr. Marie-Soleil Frère, focused on the interactions between journalists and political leaders in Burundi and the DRC, and the political and economic interactions that have structured them since the emergence of private media in the beginning of the 1990s. In the researchers' opinion, these non-public media have created several issues including: changes in the independence of the media in general; the individual and collective responsibility of journalists in front of political leaders; and the acceptance of the fourth estate by the political establishment.

The roundtable was comprised of four political leaders. They recalled and assessed their interactions with the media and commented on the validity of INFOCORE's research. The resulting discussion addressed political leaders' attitudes towards journalists in times of conflict,

political leaders' manipulation of the media, the importance of financial independence and sustainability of media outlets, and the lack of independent regulation of media in the DRC and Burundi.

THEME 4: THE INTERVENTION OF NGOS IN CONFLICT AREA COVERAGE

In this presentation, Dr. Eric Sangar looked at INFOCORE's results on NGOs' communication strategies and their impact on conflict-related media coverage in the DRC and Burundi. The researcher stated that NGOs both in Burundi and the DRC, compared to conflict in other regions, have a proportionally high influence in media discourse. However, the recent authoritarian turn in Burundi has limited the NGOs' access to domestic media, and has transformed them involuntarily into an "ersatz opposition". In the DRC, the biggest obstacle for a more effective dissemination of NGO messages is the weak economic situation of domestic media, which limits journalists' capacity to provide independent and evidence-based coverage.

The roundtable was made up of four NGO representatives. Each talked about his or her specific NGO, its activities, impact, and

interactions with the media and political arenas. The discussion that followed brought up the neutrality of NGOs and its impact on their ability to provide 'objective' conflict information. The discussion also mentioned the influence of external funding on NGO communicative capabilities.

THEME 5: MEDIA AND PUBLICS: MUTUAL INFLUENCES IN CONFLICT

In this presentation, Igor Micevski analysed the use, perception, and evaluation of the local and global coverage of conflicts in Burundi and the DRC. Specifically, this project investigated whether and how audiences shape news coverage by interacting with the media or by using social networks. The research showed media use patterns in both countries. It also addressed the issue of trust towards conflict-related news and aspects of media literacy.

Four journalists participated in the roundtable. The discussion looked more closely at the methodology of audience analysis, the issue of hate speech, the importance of cross-checking data provided by social networks, the cost of internet access, the

development of multimedia platforms, and the reluctance of national broadcasters to use social media content.

THEME 6: THE ROLE OF SOCIAL MEDIA IN CONFLICT NEWS DISSEMINATION

The four journalists that took part in this roundtable discussion gave their personal views on the benefits and drawbacks of social media's influence in news dissemination. Some saw social media as a boon because of their ability to reach large audiences quickly and rapidly (and thus potentially saving lives in some cases). Others, however, saw social networks as a bane because of the difficulty of verifying information and sources.

THEME 7: DISCOURSE ANALYSES OF CONFLICT NEWS COVERAGE: MEDIA CONTENT, NGOS, & POLITICAL SOURCES

This presentation by Marc Jungblut revealed INFOCORE's findings on conflict discourse analysis, specifically with regard to media content, NGOs, and political sources. Both the quantitative computer-based content analysis and the qualitative analysis were explained. The next steps of the research were also detailed. They included investigating the interaction between different discourses, analysing how ideas, frames, and claims can travel between the different (public) discourses, and ultimately linking the findings from interviews to content analytical data. It was said the scholars would integrate local experts' ideas as they kept working.



African Great Lakes Region Stakeholders' Workshop, Gisenyi Rwanda 28-29 September, 2016

Brussels Final Stakeholders' Workshop and Dissemination Conference
Belgium 16-17 November, 2016

In mid-November INFOCORE hosted its last conference in Brussels Belgium. During this event, the researchers presented their latest results. Discussions were initiated with the audience whose remarks will prove to be invaluable as the researchers continue to work on their studies in the coming months.

**The final dissemination
conference in the news**

INFOCORE's Final Dissemination Conference gathered over 80 audience members. Amongst them were several journalists from prominent media outlets. Some wrote articles about what they saw and heard. Elena Cavallone, from Euronews, published a piece titled '[Media & Conflicts: Dangerous Liaisons, An INFOCORE Study Reveals](#)'. This text and the accompanying video highlight findings from each of the regions studied by INFOCORE: the Balkans, the Middle East and the Great Lakes Region in Central Africa.

In his article in *The Huffington Post* '[News Media's Role in Conflict](#)', Philip Seib emphasizes the duality of INFOCORE's findings: there is room for hope but there is also much more room for improvement. Academics, media professionals, and the broader public must all make changes if the future of the news industry and that of conflict is to see progress.

**THEME 1: THE INFORMATION
ENVIRONMENT OF CONFLICT
NEWS PRODUCTION**

This theme was discussed by two speakers, each explaining their latest



Brussels Final Dissemination Conference, Belgium, November 17, 2016

research findings. First, Dr. Christian Baden discussed the "finalities" of conflict. Such finalities are the goals that the conflict parties pursue within the war, and which determine the conditions for a possible cessation of violence. If these finalities are reached, the fighting can stop. In the case of Syria, international media and parliaments (the European Parliament, and the Syrian and British parliaments) did not give systematic regard to the finalities expressed by the National Coordination Body for Democratic Change (the coalition of groups opposing the Bashar Al-Assad regime). This makes it very difficult to find a resolution to the ongoing war.

The second presentation, given by Abit Hoxha, centred on the question of how journalists generate news stories. The main conclusion, based on interviews with journalists working in Syria, Israel, Kosovo, F.Y.R.O. Macedonia, and the DRC, was that reporters often gather facts to fit a story they already have in mind instead of facts leading to the story construction.

**THEME 2: THE CONTRIBUTION OF
NGOS & POLITICAL ADVOCATES:
INPUTS & STRATEGIES**

On behalf of Dr. Meyer, Dr. Eric Sangar presented research that showed that NGOs are increasingly influential in the dissemination of conflict news. This is because traditional news outlets are facing financial hardships and cannot always reach zones of combat due to worsening security conditions for journalists. NGOs are thus important sources to provide up-to-date information about certain conflicts. In contexts like that of Syria, local NGOs have almost become the exclusive providers of factual information. This involvement on the part of NGOs in conflict news reporting can be evaluated as both negative and positive. Some of the positive consequences are that they can provide information about areas that are scarcely covered by traditional media and they can send out "early warnings" about crises. Some negative aspects are that the information NGOs publish, though seeming to follow journalistic standards, can be primed by specific agendas and contribute to a moralist framing of armed conflict, which

might limit the potential for detached conflict diplomacy.

Marc Jungblut discussed how often political actors and NGOs in the conflicts studied by INFOCORE mentioned (1) the sources of information they used and (2) how certain or uncertain their claims were. One of the main findings was that both political actors and NGOs tended to emphasize in their communication certainty rather than uncertainty. They thus seem to follow a media logic rather than an expert logic (the latter would more readily reveal which information is still uncertain). Overall, the conflicts in which certainty or uncertainty were most mentioned were also those for which sources were most often cited. The only exception to this finding was the DRC. Reasons for this finding are still being investigated.

THEME 3: THE ROLE OF SOCIAL MEDIA: USES, INTERACTIONS & DISCOURSES

Dr. Dimitra Dimitrakopoulou presented an interdisciplinary approach for the study of social media in conflict-ridden societies, ranging from content and network analysis to discourse analysis and social media ethnography. This synthesis aims to provide 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. The approach is further complemented with material from field work carried out by the other researchers in the project (mainly interviews and focus groups) so that data can be correlated.

The next presentation, which was given by Dr. Gadi Wolfsfeld, dealt with the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The two main conclusions of this study were that asymmetrical conflicts can be made more symmetrical thanks to new media because the dominant antagonist can no longer have full control over the flow of information. However, this loss of control over what information is shared can also have negative consequences: A certain amount of secrecy is required for peace talks to be successful. Though new media have had an impact on the control of information, there is no evidence to indicate that they can alter the course of conflicts.

THEME 4: AUDIENCES AND LAY PUBLICS IN TIMES OF CONFLICT: SOURCES OF INFORMATION, PERCEPTIONS, & INTERACTION WITH THE MEDIA

This theme was addressed by a two-part presentation, given by Dr. Snezana Trpevska and Dr. Anke Fiedler, on the use of media in conflict zones, the way the general public views the role of media in conflict and how it interacts with it, and the public's beliefs on conflict news coverage. The countries analysed were Kosovo, Palestine, Israel, Syria, the DRC and Burundi. Media use differs from one country to another. In the DRC and Burundi, people consume media with different political leanings. In other conflict cases on the other hand, people have access to a much broader selection of media and can therefore decide to only use media that match certain ideologies or incline to one of the conflict parties. In general, it seems that people in the countries studied tend to distrust the

traditional media—knowing that they are biased—even if the same people state that they are regularly informed by these media.

THEME 5: THE GENDER DIMENSION

Dr. Keren Tenenboim-Weinblatt explored the links between gender, conflict and journalism in Israel-Palestine and the DRC. Using content analysis, she and her colleagues found that female journalists do not use peace-related concepts more than their male counterparts. However, women are more people-oriented in their writing and focus more on precision (raising questions, sourcing information, etc.). Men, on the other hand, tend to focus more on facticity and providing orientation.

Dr. Rosa Berganza and Dr. Beatriz Herrero gave the following presentation. They focused on whether European parliaments (the Bundestag, the Assemblée Nationale, the European Parliament, and the United Kingdom's House of Commons) discussed sexual violence towards women in the DRC and in Burundi. Certain parliaments, such as the House of Commons, discuss these topics much more than others. What is more, European parliaments seem to prefer using international media, rather than African media, when discussing sexual violence against women in the DRC and Burundi.

The third presentation, given by Dr. Romy Fröhlich, dealt with the representation of women in strategic communication on war and violent conflict. The study aimed to test the veracity of the claim that the appeal



Brussels Final Dissemination Conference, Belgium, November 17, 2016

for protection of women often serves as a political or humanitarian justification for military intervention and war. If the claim is true, one should find those “justifications” also in the strategic communication material of strategic actors. One of the research conclusions was that 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.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

The last part of the Brussels Final Dissemination Conference focused

on the implications that the research conclusions could have on policy-making. Some of the recommendations made during the conference and in subsequent policy briefs are as follows (selection).

Training programmes for media professionals, policy makers and lay publics could be created to prevent, respond to and resolve conflict. Concretely, this could mean raising awareness about hate speech spread by new and traditional media. These awareness-raising efforts should be directed at media professionals as well as lay publics (inside and outside the context of school and university). Policy makers themselves could also receive additional training on the importance of independent media,

and media regulation. A truly free press is essential to safeguard a multiplicity of voices in the public sphere.

Not only should diverse voices be represented, minority groups should be included in all debates shown in the media. This is part of adopting a **participatory model**. What is more, media should have mixed newsrooms with staff coming from different ethnic groups.

Moreover, media professionals should generate **creative ideas** on how to communicate across national and linguistic barriers to reduce polarization. Additionally, the media should use appealing ways of presenting peace building and cooperation in the news. This could increase the amount of attention audiences give to peace-related news.

LEGAL NOTICE

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

INFOCORE at International Conferences

September, 2016

Sept. 6: [Joint MeCoDEM – INFOCORE Workshop for Early-Career Researchers, University of Leeds](#) (Leeds, United Kingdom)

Sept. 28-29: [Great Lakes Area Stakeholders Workshop](#) (Gisenyi, Rwanda)

November, 2016

Nov. 9-12: [6th European Communication Conference European Communication Research and Education Association \(ECREA\)](#) (Prague, Czech Republic)

Nov. 16: [Final Stakeholder Seminar](#) (Brussels, Belgium)

Nov. 17: [Brussels Final Dissemination Conference](#) (Brussels, Belgium)

Nov. 18: [MeCoDEM Workshop on Social Media, Conflict and Democracy](#) (Brussels)

Conference Papers

- Abit Hoxha & Thomas Hanitzsch (2016). How the news comes into being: Researching conflict news production through retrospective reconstruction interviews
Paper presented at the 66th ICA Annual Conference, Fukuoka, Japan.
- Christian Baden & Keren Tenenboim-Weinblatt (2016). This means war: Identifying patterns of escalation in conflict news using quantitative discourse analysis and comparative semantic networks
Paper presented at the 66th ICA Annual Conference, Fukuoka, Japan.
- Dimitra Dimitrakopoulou & Salome Boukala (2016). Exploring the Israeli-Palestinian conflict through the lens of social media: A multi-methodical approach
Paper presented at the 66th ICA Annual Conference, Fukuoka, Japan.
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