(IN)FORMING CONFLICT PREVENTION, RESPONSE AND RESOLUTION:

THE ROLE OF MEDIA IN VIOLENT CONFLICT

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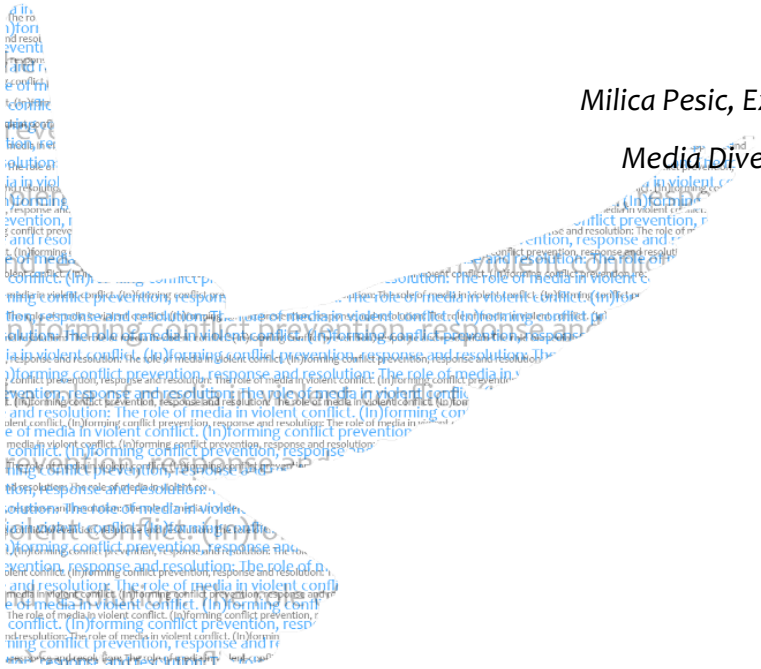
PROCEEDINGS ON THE STAKEHOLDER SEMINARS

BALKANS

OHRID, 2-3 JULY 2016

Milica Pesic, Executive Director

Media Diversity Institute



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BALKANS

(EXECUTIVE SUMMARY)

The Ohrid conference was one of the 'testing' INFOCORE events where different stakeholders from the Balkans - media actors, civil society, communication educators and policy makers –shared their experience as related to conflict reporting AND came up with initial ideas about how research still in the working stage could be used by different players. A vivid debate on the role of journalists in preventing, reporting and reconciling conflict showed why projects like this one are still very much needed even in regions such as the Balkans, where the 20th anniversary of the war was marked in 2015.

The participants agreed all stakeholders still have work to do, either together, by continuing the dialogue, or each in their respective field.

Good, responsible journalism is always about balance, accuracy, fairness, inclusiveness and sensitivity. The papers presented show that these basic principles become even more important at times before, during and after a conflict, requiring both journalists and media decision-makers to respect basic professional principles.

And while the INFOCORE findings can help journalists learn why and how to improve their skills, editors can benefit too when creating a culture of tolerance within the newsroom or developing their own internal editorial guidelines related to conflict reporting.

Sharing the findings of this project will help all media personnel including executives, content producers, journalists and support staff of media outlets, production companies and in particular news agencies.

Stress was placed on journalist unions and associations, since only they can take over some of the responsibilities, such as adopting and promoting a code of ethics for journalists in regard to conflict reporting, developing guidelines on reporting across ethnic and religious lines, or supporting public discussion on the work of journalists related to conflict reporting.

Conflict reporting curricula or inclusive journalism curricula with conflict reporting elements could also be developed on the basis of INFOCORE's findings and recommendations.

Participants at the Ohrid Conference stressed the importance of interaction between civil society and the media (though the two seldom cooperate), in particular in countries with a lack of independent media and/or a weak civil society –. To establish or improve this cooperation, CSOs can use INFOCORE's findings and expertise to develop their strategies, implement their programmes or monitor media content related to conflict reporting.

Finally, according to both the researchers and the participants, policy-makers at the EU and national level could benefit from INFOCORE's findings at several stages - from assembling effectiveness data, generating debate and actions to supporting projects which facilitate exchanges of good practices among conflict and media projects around the world, especially from regions with a longer tradition in such

projects.

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Work packages - The following WPs were presented and discussed:

WP1: How the news comes into being: Researching conflict news production in Kosovo and Macedonia. Abit Hoxha, Thomas Hanitzsch - LMU Munich

WP2: Political leaders, asymmetrical conflicts, and the media: the case of Macedonia. Gadi Wolfsfeld - IDC Herzliya

WP3: The role of publics in shaping mediated communication in different conflict contexts. Snezana Trpevska - School of Journalism and Public Relations

WP4: Understanding NGO roles and influence on media coverage of conflict: the cases of Kosovo and Macedonia. Christoph Meyer - King's College London

WP5: Interactions & dissemination of news in social media. Dr. Dimitra Dimitrakopoulou, Dr. Salome Boukala - Hellenic Institute for European & Foreign Policy (ELIAMEP) Athens

WP6: Strategic Communication & PR. Romy Fröhlich, Marc Jungblut - Ludwig Maximilian-University Munich, Department of Communication Studies and Media Research

WP7: Journalistic transformation: conflict news narratives on Kosovo and Macedonia. Keren Tenenboim-Weinblatt, Christian Baden – The Hebrew University of Jerusalem

WP8: Reception of news contents in political debates. Prof. Dr. Rosa Berganza, Dr. Valeriano Piñeiro-Naval – Universidad Rey Juan Carlos

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WP1 Presentation and Discussions

Abit Hoxha, LMU Munich, presented the research and findings of **How the news comes into being: Researching conflict news production in Kosovo and Macedonia.** Among other issues, the theoretical aspects of news production phases in the ideation, narration and presentation of news were presented. The following questions were raised in the presentation: how professional journalistic values and routines, their interactions with sources, audiences and other actors, and various contextual factors shape the production of conflict related news; the epistemological challenge; the advantage of retrospective reconstruction etc.

The key study findings:

- Conflict journalists rarely reflect on news production routines in everyday reporting
- Traditional content analysis generates little knowledge about how the news is produced

Professional ideology and occupational self-consciousness may call upon journalists to deny the existence, or power, of certain external forces (such as political pressures or PR influence).

Regarding 'the advantage of retrospective reconstruction', it was reported that researchers can confront journalists' responses in the interview with the outcome of their reporting. This way, they may become aware of the inconsistencies between their own (often normative) answers and their practices on the ground.

Regarding the findings in the ideation, narration and presentation of news as stages of conflict,-related news production, it was reported that developing the idea for a news story is crucial stage in the production of news. It often starts by looking at other media, social media or some initiating form of receiving information from other sources. The other stage is the narration of news. In this stage, journalists ask themselves: What story do I want to tell? Journalists are likely to choose a particular angle that anchors the central narrative advanced in the news account, which in turn frames the reported facts in a specific narrative perspective. These narratives have a temporary dimension as they span across the past, present, and future. Many journalists seem to think that the central narrative and story angle are somewhat "inherent" to what is happening on the ground. In this view, the news is not so much an intellectual reconstruction of "reality" as a true, "logical" reproduction of "the facts". The story narrative and angle usually result from the journalist's selective interpretation of what happened. The same facts do, therefore, lend themselves to often strikingly different readings of "reality" – all of which may equally claim to report "the truth". Once a story is ideated and the key narrative, story angle and frame are determined, journalists need to establish their discursive authority over the story by presenting "true" and consistent facts in support of the story. Most journalists maintained that facts precede the story narrative and that it is the "facts out there" that set the stage for a certain story. Journalists collect facts and quotes until they arrive at the right story to tell. In other words, it is the "reality" – the facts and quotes – that make for the story. Journalists are confronted with a variety of information. Inevitably, they have to make choices by selecting which facts to include and which people to quote. Story presentation contains a substantial element of randomness, especially in the context of conflict reporting. Not everyone is equally keen to speak to a journalist, which is particularly true for vulnerable populations.

The research conclusions: Journalists are contemporary witnesses – minute-keepers who produce a first draft of history. Such an understanding is very much in line with common sense, which suggests that journalists construct the story out of "the facts". Conflicts are complicated and often have a long history that is loaded with meaning and interpretation.

Few journalists, for instance, would be able to report on conflict without having in mind a particular perspective that primes their interpretation toward a specific key narrative. In their effort to make a complex conflict simple and accessible to their audiences, journalists have no choice but to make decisions about which facts to use and what to emphasize, and how. It is for this purpose that journalists – mostly inadvertently – actualize the factual evidence that speaks to the central narrative and that best "exemplifies" what they think the story is essentially about.

Journalists present a fair and accurate account of conflicts for the most part. However, what we would like to point out is that conflict coverage is highly contingent. Journalist are not "just reporting the facts", they are also telling stories about conflicts. There are many, equally "true" variations depending on the key narrative the journalist choses in order to tell a meaningful story to his or her audience. But there is one important caveat here: the way many conflict journalists approach their coverage severely constrains the space of possible narratives. Overall, we think that researching news production through retrospective

reconstruction has greatly helped us better understand the way in which conflict news is coming into being.

Discussion

Of all the Balkan countries, why analyse only Macedonia and Kosovo? The idea was to investigate conflicts in different stages (conflict and peace building); hence, the Balkan region as a case of peace-building and post-conflict case study (as opposed to Syria). 'The idea was to make a thick description within case analysis and then use that as some kind of an indicator of what is going on when the conflict is in the phase of unstable peace, such as in Kosovo and Macedonia' (Igor Micevski).

Why are most stories follow-ups? Is it a lack of creativity on the part of journalists? **'**Most of the coverage shows that the follow-up (from other media as well) comes from different places. It's never proactively done. Journalists have too much work to do and don't have the time to focus coming up with something brand new' (Abit Hoxha).

What is meant by conflict or political tensions in the states that were at war, and what is the role of journalists in this regard? 'Our definition of conflict is very wide, to include Kosovo and Macedonia. Conflict is not only absence of peace. There is a conflict in Kosovo, ethnic hatred and tension, and inter-ethnic violence. Same is valid in Macedonia, within a very wide description of conflict. Kosovo and Macedonia have the youngest average age of journalists' (Abit Hoxha). Hoxha also stated that some of the journalists interviewed said that they lacked capacities and that was why they did not create stories. It was noted in the discussion that media / journalists in the region have their own realities and so foreign journalists are more acceptable because they include different sources and all sides in their reports. Local journalists are biased. The participants agreed that since younger generations are more open-minded than the older generation of journalists in the region, journalism education should offer more open-minded interpretations of journalism and media professions.

WP2 Presentation and Discussions

Gadi Wolfsfeld, IDC Herzliya, presented **Political leaders, asymmetrical conflicts, and the media: the case of Macedonia**

Explaining the *Politics-Media-Politics (PMP)* principle, Wolfsfeld said that the role of the media can be understood as a process in which variations in political environments have a major impact on media systems, values, and practices, which then have an impact on political processes. Wolfsfeld offered two propositions: a/ the role of the media in politics can be best understood as one in which variations in political environments are the most important factors leading to variations in media systems, values and practices [The Politics First Proposition]; and b/ the news media do not merely reflect the nature of the political environment, they also make an independent contribution to the process due to the ways in which they transform political events into news [The Media Transformation Proposition]. 'The ability of the more powerful antagonist to take control over media coverage is based on their ability to take control over the political environment' said Wolfsfeld,, listing three indicators of the amount of control:

- The ability of the more powerful antagonist to generate a consensus among the political elites in support of their policies.
- The ability of the more powerful side to take control over conflict events.
- The ability of the more powerful antagonist to take control over the flow of information

Interviews related to *the Ability of the Macedonian government to generate consensus* showed that less government control over the political environment leads to more opposition voices being heard and allowing challengers to bring third parties (e.g. EU, U.N., NATO) into the conflict. 'One of the most important roles the media can play in asymmetrical conflicts is to make the conflict more equal. Until now the PMP principle has been applied to countries with a free-press and it will be worthwhile to see if it can be usefully applied to countries such as Macedonia where the press is not completely independent' (Wolfsfeld). Cross-culturally speaking, the more polarized the political environment (e.g. Macedonia) the more polarized the media environment, which has a major subsequent impact on the political environment (PMP). In general the WP2 found that oppositional political leaders in Macedonia do not trust many of the major news media in the country. The fact that most media represent particular political and/or ethnic groups means that the media are in most cases more likely to increase rather than lower inter-ethnic hostility. Northern Ireland's shared media is an important exception to this rule.

The overall lesson is that political success/failure leads to media success/failure which can often lead to more political success/failure (PMP). While formal and informal control over the media certainly makes it easier for governments to take control of coverage, it does not solve their political problems. There is also a lesson to be learned about having influence on the international media. Even the best public relations strategy is not going to solve a country's problems with the international media (Israel is a good example of the power of this myth). 'Governments must try to achieve a political consensus if they have any hope of bringing peace and reconciliation to their country. Having control over the media and having a good media strategy is no substitute for genuine political change'. (Wolfsfeld).

The advent of the digital age has created important opportunities for weaker challengers to be heard. These opportunities become even more critical in countries without a democratic press. Nevertheless, this does not mean that weaker challengers in asymmetrical conflicts will succeed. Control of the mainstream media is still important and media success is not the same as political success.

Discussion

Most of the participants in this WP session talked about the opportunities social media could present for 'weaker challengers'. It was pointed out that in Macedonia the Government - which controls offline media (and thus influences the conflicts) - has been trying lately to "take over" the social media through pro-government activists who are using social media to advance the government's agenda. Events are sometimes distorted due to 'take-over' social media interventions, making socially active people nervous.

Explaining the correlation between 'high social media use - low number of protests', Wolfsfeld said: 'For a healthier media environment in Macedonia, you have to enlist third parties and create allies into the

conflict. It is much easier to have a political courage if you have a stronger back. The richest countries have plenty of internet and social media, but the people were not unhappy, so they didn't use them for activism. The social media is helpful for political purposes in places where the conditions are hostile.'

According to Wolfsfeld, more and more journalists follow politicians' Facebook posts and use them as a starting point in their stories. But in most countries the mainstream media are far more powerful than social media. If a big social media story is not picked up by the mainstream media, it dies.

WP3 Presentation and Discussions

Dr Snezana Trpevska - School of Journalism and Public Relation presented **The role of publics in shaping mediated communication in different conflict contexts.** The objectives of this research, which covered Macedonia, Kosovo, Burundi and Congo, were as follows:

-identify the patterns of *use of the* conflict news

-examine the *views and interpretations of the audiences and publics* about the conflict itself, the media and particular news coverage

-examine the *types of inter(action)* between lay publics and different types of media

-examine the perceptions and beliefs of the general audiences about the conflict related coverage

Two types of news framing are especially relevant when analysing the destructive role of news framing:

1) Zero-sum mind-set. News coverage frequently tends to reduce a complex issue or dispute to two competing sides (*issue dualism*) by marginalizing other voices or aspects. From the conflict theory perspective this coverage has the potential to encourage destructive escalation because it reinforces divergent interpretations of the polarized news audiences and conceals the aspects of the dispute and the actors that might be significant to the conflict's de-escalation or resolution.

2) Polarizing the parties. Visible in the news coverage of inter-ethnic conflicts when journalists tend to frame the conflict events from the perspective of their own ethnic group (*ethnocentric framing*). From the conflict theory perspective, this coverage has the potential to encourage destructive escalation because it tends to justify and promote the values, beliefs, attitudes and actions of one's own group and to delegitimize those of the out-group, leading to potential violent mobilisation and it contributes to the reinforcement of interpretations and attitudes about in-group superiority and out-group depreciation. It is especially connected to the phenomenon of 'victimisation'.

Two distinctive interpretative frames revolving around the discourse of 'victimhood': ***ethnic self-victimization*** and ***resistance to ethnic-self-victimization***. In both cases, the media are colonized to serve these manipulating discourses.

Trpevska presented the patterns of *use of the* conflict news, demonstrating that domestic media are the most relevant source of information (in Macedonia TV is the first source 74,5%, in Syria TV is the second

source 65,1%, in Burundi radio is the only available source). Regional, neighbouring or international channels are important sources of information when they disseminate information in the languages spoken by local audiences or when access to local/domestic media is limited. Social networks and news websites are relevant sources of information if technology has reached a high level of penetration (in the Syria/Damascus area it is 71,4%, in Macedonia it is third source, 41,1%). Word of mouth is a highly important source of information in all cases (in Macedonia it is the second source, 57,5%, in Syria the third source, 55,9%, in Burundi, no data), which again indicates that the media have a limited effect.

The WP3 research shows that in Macedonia a significant part of the audience thinks that the coverage by the ethnically and politically polarized media may potentially lead to destructive conflict escalation. The ethnicity of the respondents is obviously in correlation with these perceptions. For the Syrians, Arab satellite TV is more trusted as a source than the local TV channels. News websites and social media, although used frequently as information sources, are not trusted by a significant number of the audience. These findings also confirm the arguments drawn from previous studies that ethnocentric news coverage reinforces conflictual attitudes within the audience and might lead to escalation.

The WP3 study also shows that if they have access, audiences engage much more in interaction with the alternative channels of communications than with the traditional media which are mostly viewed as politically manipulated and closed to citizens. Audience interaction through social networks and alternative media increases in times of tension, crisis or war, provided that the infrastructure is developed or is still functional.

Discussion

During discussion it was clarified that WP3 researchers were interested in how ethnocentrism was framed in different media, that they were not comparing the content of the media outlets to each other but that they were looking for the different ways in which the audience perceives or reacts to different coverage. The public, when viewing things for the second or third time, acquires new and different perceptions. 'During the Kumanovo tragic accident coverage (when a young Albanian boy was killed), the audience reacted too quickly, instigated partly by social media. Some journalists commented that the accident was covered up with the help of government officials. The public in Macedonia holds belief that Macedonian media do not cover news concerning the Albanian community, and *vice versa*, the Albanian ones do not cover news concerning the Macedonian community. But the event is covered by all Macedonian media equally. Because of the preconceptions, the public held the media accountable.' (**Frosina Cvetkovska**).

WP4 Presentation and Discussions

Dr Christoph Meyer - King's College London, presented the preliminary results about **Understanding NGO roles and influence on media coverage of conflict (the cases of Kosovo and**

Macedonia). The main preliminary findings of WP4: growing organizational resources, expertise, local presence, professionalization of communication, source credibility, cheaper communication technology & rise of social media have led to decreasing importance of 'traditional' knowledge providers; reduced presence of Western diplomats, security restrictions; and rising costs of conflict coverage whilst many news media face a crisis in the business model.

Theoretical Assumptions about 'NGO Influence':

-**"Political factors":** position of NGOs *vis-à-vis* those who hold political power and regulate their activities, external or internal empowerment vs pressure

-**"Conflict factors":** historical and cultural legacy of conflict, degree of polarization, politicization, (in)security for staff and society

-**"demand factors",** resulting from news media resource scarcity and physical security constraints, soliciting NGOs to provide factual information, analysis, or agendas for action, distrust of political actors.

-**"supply factors",** resulting from NGOs' ability and willingness to create news value and establish credibility, drawing on their own networks, resources, legitimacy and communication means, thus taking initiatives independent of external events

NGOs in Kosovo:

Overarching importance of EU shaping political context: NGOs benefit from sufficient access to funding from the international community and EU, giving them a relative continuity and independence from their government; NGOs through their access to knowledge, contacts and legitimacy can effectively raise some issues in the media and prompt government action when related to EU progress reporting; NGOs say they find the media landscape relatively open to their communication entailing critique of governments, although this does not necessarily mean that governments will be responsive; NGOs highlight that media are naturally cautious not to intensify interethnic tension and relatively open to the role of NGOs in this regard. **But**: the limited ability of NGOs to reach the north of Kosovo, mostly private Serbian TV, but also public television of Serbia 'has made the audience much more linked with nationalistic circles and very closed to people like us' (Local NGO). Most NGO activities focused on local cooperation with institutions and bodies in the North and on building some links with the less influential but more sympathetic parts of the media in Serbia.

NGOs in Macedonia:

The overall political context of the politically controlled media-system shows a split across ethnic lines, strong political manipulation of the media and a willingness to stir up ethnic tensions; there is limited space for NGOs to operate and media assistance measures have limited effect. The WP4 research also shows limited & unsystematic international/EU engagement in terms of implementing a plan to promote reconciliation and prevent conflict; NGOs noted problems with media regulation, adjusted under EU pressure, but it seems to have strengthened state power; NGOs suffer from pressure and lack of access to state or opposition controlled media, making it difficult to raise politically inconvenient issues, promote truthful, professional and conflict-sensitive reporting; NGOs are extremely careful about

communication with the media due to being manipulated & criticised; the focus is on building up credibility with the public through high quality/neutral information and small projects.

Discussion

The discussion showed that the differences in the political context in Kosovo, and particularly the role of the EU, as compared to Macedonia help explain a great deal of the more constrained roles and influence of mostly local NGOs in Macedonia. With an under-financed, ethnically divided and politically manipulated media system, NGOs have only limited influence, particularly when international attention/pressure is sporadic and focused only on instances of violence, rather than longer term engagement and addressing the root causes. Some NGOs seem capable of making a contribution through a combination of their own resources (as compared to the media's), their access to local and well as EU/international information, professionalism in gathering information, fostering a culture of being multi-ethnic, and their attempts to build a positive track-record & build up credibility in the eyes of different communities

Some other points from the discussion: Some NGOs are perceived as affiliated with certain political parties, some are not. The current government in Macedonia is not keen on cooperating with NGOs. It criticizes NGOs as being 'funded by the Open Society Foundation' or 'working with the opposition parties'.

WP5 Presentation and Discussions

Dr. Dimitra Dimitrakopoulou, Hellenic Institute for European & Foreign Policy (ELIAMEP) Athens presented **Interactions & dissemination of news in social media.** The WP5 research showed the limitations and challenges of social media, such as their importance in different countries and during different conflict cases; the complicated terrain of study (language limitations, selection of users, identification or anonymity issues); beyond tweets and Facebook posts there are deeper meanings that are connected to ideological, political and sociocultural factors; any analysis of social media texts has to be linked to people, discourses and contexts.

The researchers used quantitative content & network analysis to measure the contents that were operationalised theoretically as well as identified in the sample texts. They studied the timelines of Twitter activity within the selected timeframes, focused on the social relations between actors, identified clusters of involved and interconnected actors and produced an overview of the structure of the network focusing on emergent clusters, communities and key participants. In the case of Burundi they focused on two major actors: Burundi's presidency and the presidency's spokesperson, aiming to investigate how the Burundian leadership used social media correlating their Twitter activity with what was happening on the ground (events & fatalities).

Discussion

Responding to the comment that audiences in Kosovo are not so open and active on social networks in terms of conflictual happenings, Anamari Repic pointed out that there is no activism in Kosovo in terms of formal or informal groups, but rather the activism comes from individual citizens. 'What provokes them to react is mainly NGOs, that start criticizing decisions of the government and the citizens then react. The opposition parties are really active, and sometimes they take the NGOs' role. They use social media to be more present, even though they already are present on mainstream media. But it doesn't mean that the citizens are not active'.

Asked whether social media at least manage to engage opponents in discussion, or 'everyone stays in their bubble', Dimitrakopoulou (who strongly encouraged the participants to come with suggestions for further research) responded by suggesting more follow-up studies to find out whether social media are there to bring forth new arguments, or just serve to incite hate speech. So far, the study shows that a pattern emerges across different conflicts: when an official media is shut down, the need for an alternative source of information appears. 'This was apparently the case in Kosovo, and was also the case in Burundi. It is often not verified, but it allows people to communicate and mobilize and organize themselves. The mobilization is more useful on social media than its information potential because social media are not that accurate'. (Dimitrakopoulou).

According to Abit Hoxha (Kosovo), most of the protests in Kosovo are organized on Facebook and mainly in English. But when an event has ended, they delete everything, in fear of surveillance. Anamari Repic (Kosovo): 'The opposition is present in mainstream media, but not satisfied with their representation in the public broadcaster. It is critical for them to publicise some events or protests through social media, and especially Facebook. Political parties in power are happy with traditional media.' Goce Trpkoski (Macedonia): 'When media freedom was deteriorating, the use and influence of social media in Macedonia grew. Social media was dominated by opposition, not just the party, but also citizens that oppose the government, and other non-formal organizations. The government then orders their sympathisers to comment and be active on social media, with copy-paste comments.'

The debate was concluded by Dimitrakopoulou who insisted that mainstream and social media are not two competing realities. 'They are both used as a tool for propaganda by governments, and it makes the whole media field complex. We are all using social media, for good and for bad. We need to see how it's used and make the most of it.

WP6 Presentation and Discussions

Marc Jungblut - Ludwig Maximilian-University Munich, presented **Strategic Communication & PR,** focusing on the difference between 'factoids' and facts and the application of "evidence" in NGO strategic communication on war and armed conflict. Jungblut's starting point for WP6 research was the claim that NGOs play a key role during conflicts: they are significant actors in conflict-related discourses and can be powerful influencers in terms of media coverage and communication of the conflicts. They have their own source networks, intelligence tools, local experience and a diversity of activities (PR

campaigns, policy briefs, etc.). Romy Fröhlich and Marc Jungblut's work analyses the publicity of NGOs in this field, focusing on the epistemological status of NGOs' strategic communication.

The WP6 study is based on comparisons of several types of NGOs in six international armed conflicts (Kosovo, Macedonia, Israel/Palestine, Syria and DRC, Burundi) in three regions: the Great Lake region of Africa, the Western Balkans and the Middle East. They examined a sample of texts (either in English, German or French) from 66 NGOs, of which 33 transnational (TNGOs) and 33 local. The results differ between the types of NGOs and between the different conflicts.

The main research questions: How (well) is NGOs' strategic communication/PR on war and armed conflict adopting discursive strategies of 'truth' by providing evidence, and how do respective results allow for conclusions on the quality/excellence of their communication? The study addressed the questions by using a twofold research strategy: First, it aimed to examine if and how NGOs communicate the epistemological status of information on war and armed conflict. In particular, it concentrated on factual statements, which the researchers called 'evidential claims'. Second, this study sought to analyse how transparently NGOs communicated the sources of their evidential claims. Since NGOs' communication strategies and their success vary, the study differentiates local and transnational NGOs (TNGOs).

According to the findings, the communication of NGOs on war and armed conflict is focused on 'violence/escalation', a topic which surely demands the highest sensibility for evidence. In respect to this, one can accredit the NGOs under investigation with a professional awareness for the actually precarious circumstances: the normative quality of NGOs' evidential claims - judged by the number of epistemological statuses and the reference to certainty - is the highest in the topical domain 'violence/escalation' (over 10 epistemological references on average per text). 'The other side of the coin is that other topics cannot profit from a comparatively high normative quality of evidential claims. Further professionalization is also needed concerning the indication of sources of evidential claims - an important normative criterion for excellent strategic communication/PR: 47% of all texts do not provide any source specification. This high share is disappointing. Following the normative approach, it is obvious that NGOs' communication on war and armed conflict therefore still needs to improve the factual character of their communication and thus to avoid the impression that they are somehow dealing with factoids.' (Jungblut).

Discussion

The discussion showed that journalists in the studied regions are not prepared to deal with strategic communication. They mainly republish press releases without analysing them or quote what is said at press-conferences without fact-checking. The media are in a financial crisis, and do not have money to invest in capacities, especially human, they do not train journalists, and do not invest in special sectors in the media, such as the economy. Zekirja Shabani recommended when talking about Kosovo to 'focus more on media capacities to see why they are not investing to be on the same level as interest groups,

because they invest a lot.' 'The education system is also a problem, universities contribute a lot to destroying the journalism profession. Journalists are not prepared for the market'.

Snezana Trpevska (Macedonia): 'The party in power is very good in strategic communication to frame or reframe each event in the current political conflict.' **Sanja Vasic** (Macedonia): 'The whole reign of the government in Macedonia is based on strategic communication. The neighbouring governments use the same tools and tactics to communicate with the public.' **Goce Trpkoski** (Macedonia): 'Strategic communication is perfected in Macedonia, in all media. The online portal sphere, that's the least regulated in the country, are first to smear and spout hate speech towards anyone who opposes the government. **Zoran Dimitrovski** (Macedonia): It is not serious to define that as a success in strategic communication, because it is a dictatorship that uses all the mechanisms for propaganda. They own most media. We cannot say that they are succeeding in communication. They would be successful if they get to the independent media. If their message penetrates them, then we can say they have success.

Zaneta Trajkoska (Macedonia): We as a society were not ready for the reign of VMRO-DPMNE. They sold us a lie in 2006, under the guise of transparency and accountability, they manipulated the system. They introduced party centres of communication. The system of informing they created is used for personal and party interests. They created their agenda, and used the media in the process. They bought some of them and created a system of control. Either they bought them or they corrupted them. They also created "independent" experts that propagate for the government. They totally occupied the media space. We didn't expect this in 2006. Their reign is a smart strategic system that enslaved the country. They are defocusing the public, and that is part of their strategy.

Marc Jungblut (final remark): Societal communication in Macedonia needs to be investigated more.

WP7 Presentation and Discussions

Keren Tenenboim-Weinblatt, Christian Baden – The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, presented **Journalistic transformation: conflict news narratives on Kosovo and Macedonia.** The presenters listed news construct public negatives that make sense of ongoing conflict: observe developments to define conflict events; select and amplify sources' conflict narratives; reflect conflict narratives in culture & public discourse. In their view, this contributes to the transformation of the available information to:

- Evaluate certitude and relevance
- Provide political orientation
- Negotiate cultural identity
- Enable emotive involvement
- Maintain professional credibility

The WP7 research tried to answer 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? -Constructing,

evaluating, advocating. It also looked at the power over media by looking at ownership, restriction, cronyism.

Some of the study's findings: while independent media refer to both sides or offer explicit conflict reference, partisan media refer to the other side or explicit conflict reference, and rebel media provide all content.

When tracing news contents and constructions, the WP7 research looked at distance and professionalism; topics, issues and frames; group identities and rally-round-the-flag; diversity, dialogue and mediation.

Discussion

The discussion mainly focused on answering the question related to the journalistic contribution to the conflict news narrative. **Lirim Dulovi** (Macedonia): 'We (Macedonian Ethnic Albanians) know what is happening in Macedonia language media because we understand Macedonian, while our (ethnic) Macedonian colleagues are handicapped because they don't know what Albanian language media say. We should insist on professional journalism before a conflict has happened. Journalists can have a role in bringing peace, because they can tell the truth.' Gadi Wolfsfeld: 'Journalists use the same defensive mechanism - intellectualization - to avoid trauma. When your side has done something horrible, you tend to analyse it intellectually, and when your people are killed, you react emotionally. This reinforces hatred.' **Zekirja Shabani** (Kosovo): 'Journalists take sides in the conflicts. They cannot stay neutral.' **Goran Temenugov** (Macedonia): 'We have had many tense moments since 2007. The media with mixed teams of Albanians and Macedonians provide more balanced coverage of a conflict than the other media. They calmed the tension. Media should strive to be like this.'

Answering the question 'How much truth can you tell your audience?' **Goce Trpkoski** (Macedonia) said: 'This goes beyond Balkan borders. American media do not report fully on the American army and their loses worldwide.' **Anamari Repic** (Kosovo): 'We don't have true peace in the region, and this is why Albanian media report about Albanians and for Albanians and Serbs report about Serbs and for Serbs. They report to their audience. The same is in Macedonia and in Serbia. We have a silent conflict.' **Marija Stankovic** (Serbia): 'In the regions such as Balkans, journalists pay the price of freedom of speech with their lives. That's why there is fear constantly. They are judged not only by 'their' politicians but by their close relatives and friends who check how loyal to their ethnic groups they are'.

WP8 Presentation and Discussions

Prof. Dr. Rosa Berganza & Dr. Valeriano Piñeiro-Naval, Universidad Rey Juan Carlos (Spain) presented **Reception of news contents in political debates.** Their starting points were: the impact of media on MPs is a clear sign of the ongoing mediatisation of politics; the action of political actors is increasingly subject to media logic; NGOs also seem to have an influence on the formation of the public and political agenda. The WP8 research interests were focused on Parliament's attention to traditional

media, ICTs/digital/social media and NGOs; salience of issues concerning Macedonia, Kosovo and Serbia in the different European Parliaments; presence of tensions between Greece and Macedonia due to the name in European and Balkan Parliaments; state building in Macedonia, democracy.

The research team analysed 2,412 parliamentary documents related to Macedonian (from January 2011 to June 2015) (n=893) and Kosovar (from January 2010 to June 2015) (n=1519) post conflicts.

This study, conducted by a content analysis, allowed the team to describe European and Balkan parliamentary reality. Their next goal will be to understand the reasons and carry out more in-depth research in this field. For example, regarding Macedonia, interethnic relations between the Macedonian and Albanian people will be another interesting point of analysis (ethnocentrism, Kumanovo incident, etc.).

Discussion

Rosa Berganza: Politicians are sensitive to the media, they want to appear in the news. They know how media logic works and they use this knowledge in order to address their message to the public. Media are not the only key actor setting the political agenda; a lot of internal factors and other external actors contribute to setting the agenda. There are a lot of literature and empirical studies focusing the fact that it has become increasingly important for politicians to get attention in the media to their political work.

Zekirja Shabani (Kosovo): Politicians without media are dead, they don't exist. They exist to be present in the media.

Suggestions: More meetings about this between journalists.

Recommendations

Despite the fact that the papers presented at the Ohrid conference were not in their final stages, it was clear that what was presented there could be of immense use to different sectors represented at the event. The papers presented were meant to provoke reactions among members of different stakeholder platforms – the media industry, civil society, communication educators and policy makers – their comments, questions, suggestions and their initial thoughts on how they (the participants of the Ohrid event) and their peers could benefit from the findings and the recommendations of the INFOCORE team.

It was stated at the event, that all sectors present at the conference could benefit from the research outcomes, especially if the final document contained clear and user-friendly recommendations, ideally with concrete examples where a certain action had been successfully applied.

The recommendations that follow are grounded in the preliminary findings as well as in the discussions that followed the presentation of each of the eight working groups at the Ohrid conference. They are also based on the experience of such organisations as the Media Diversity Institute which has worked in the field of the media and conflict with the following stakeholders - Media, Civil Society Organisations, Media Educators and Policy Makers.

What each of the listed stakeholders would use from INFOCORE's work strongly depends on the social, economic and political structures of a given country, on their media governance structures, which vary widely from one country to the next, as well as on the nature of the conflict.

Thus we do not propose here that every media outlet, NGO or academic institution should imitate the ones mentioned in this document, or that every country should have the same media legislative framework. Rather, that these initiatives should help to inspire other researchers, media outlets, NGO policy-makers and media educators to take actions adaptable to the social, economic, political and cultural realities of their respective countries.

All stakeholders

Use the findings to step up the dialogue by encouraging and participating in balanced, inclusive dialogues, platforms for reflection, debates, cooperation and partnerships between policy-makers, civil society organisations and media organisations on the role of media in pre-, conflict and post-conflict situations, in order to identify emerging issues and opportunities and exchange best practices.

Take aim and measure when designing any initiative inspired by the INFOCORE finding, in order to promote/introduce responsible reporting on conflict in an organisation or across organisations, establish and communicate clear and quantifiable goals (such as, in the case of media organisations, minimum targets in conflict reporters' recruitment, minimum annual, training hours for the workforce etc.) and ensure that progress is monitored continuously and fully evaluated once an initiative has run its course.

News Media (online and offline; private or public)

Content Production

Good, responsible journalism is always about balance, accuracy, fairness, inclusiveness and sensitivity. The papers presented show that these basic principles become even more important at times before, during and after a conflict.

The INFOCORE findings can help journalists learn why and how to use a broader network of expert sources; provide background information; put facts in context; investigate documents in the public domain (archives, libraries, local offices); interview people with knowledge; portray people as human beings instead of representatives of religious or ethnic groups; avoid negative labels; or separate facts from opinion but treat opinion as relevant.

On the other hand, the INFOCORE findings can help editors with ideas on how to organize in-house training for journalists; invite members of religious and ethnic groups to come to the newsroom; encourage more senior journalists to support younger colleagues in these matters; support best journalism practice; create a culture of tolerance within the newsroom; or develop their own internal editorial guidelines related to conflict reporting.

Related to content production, it is equally important to Monitor Inside and Verify from Outside by establishing internal and external structures involving managers, journalists, editors and trade union

representatives in order to review the quality of conflict related reporting, encourage best practices and improve news-room performance. Cooperation with civil society organisations could help strengthen independent monitoring of conflict coverage and contribute to increase intercultural dialogue.

Human Resources

The research shows the need for training on all levels. The project findings can help media organisations understand the needs and benefits of training, as well as learn how to provide training in conflict reporting which would, at the same time, overcome stereotypical portrayals of the 'other side'.

Sharing the findings of this project, disseminating and translating the manuals for journalists available online and focused on covering issues around conflict reporting. This will help all personnel to benefit from knowing how to use a fair and inclusive vocabulary, including executives, content producers, journalists and support staff of media outlets, production companies and news agencies in particular.

Voluntary codes of ethics related to conflict reporting and mentioned at the Ohrid discussions could be promoted as clear mission statements to avoid all forms of bias and reporting based on common stereotypes and prejudices. These codes could also include guidelines to help journalists and media outlets denounce hate speech (a '5-point hate speech' test was mentioned).

Journalists' Unions and Associations

Although in some countries covered by the project journalists' unions and associations sadly took political, rather than professional lines, which has been the case in the majority of media outlets, unions and associations can still play an important role, as stated at the Ohrid conference. Some of the responsibilities only they can take over are the following: to adopt and promote a code of ethics for journalists related to conflict reporting; to organise training and workshops for journalists in conflict reporting, diversity reporting, issues related to tolerance, religion, security policy etc., based on INFOCORE's findings and recommendations; to develop guidelines on reporting across ethnic and religious lines; to initiate campaigns and debates among journalists, unions, publishers and civil societies; to support public discussion on the work of journalists and media coverage of issues related to tolerance, religion, security policy and other issues related to conflict reporting.

Communication and journalism academia

Since all INFOCORE experts are communication experts, their colleagues in project or other countries could benefit from their expertise and offer more open-minded interpretations of journalism and the media profession.

The development of conflict reporting curricula or development of inclusive journalism curricula with elements related to conflict reporting could also be built on the INFOCORE findings and recommendations.

The modules which help communication and journalism students learn different methods to analyse media coverage of conflicts and critically think about media in general could benefit from INFOCORE's findings too.

Civil Society Organisations

Interactions between civil society and media are extremely important and useful for both stakeholders (though the two seldom cooperate) especially in countries with a lack of independent media and/or weak civil society. To establish or improve this cooperation, CSOs can use INFOCORE's findings and expertise when:

- Ensuring correct preparation, for instance through needs assessments or feasibility studies, and implementation of projects related to media and conflict.
- Considering media relation training of their personnel working on conflict issues, where INFOCORE's findings and expertise can help them improve their knowledge and understanding of how media work and how to set up effective media partnerships and strategies to promote diversity.
- Engaging with media and journalism schools as sources of expertise and information, offering to help them design and produce programmes covering conflict issues.
- Monitoring media content related to conflict reporting and developing new projects related to media and conflict could benefit from INFOCORE's findings.
- Advocating 'transferability' across borders and regions while keeping in mind the specifics of countries and regions.
- Developing sustainability strategies for all conflict and media initiatives, exchange best practices on the implementation of projects with media partners, and develop guidelines for choosing partners and contractual staff for media diversity initiatives.
- Exploring networking and partnership opportunities with other CSOs, which have complementary skills or resources that can strengthen planned or existing media and conflict initiatives, such as NGOs specialising in training on media relations, programme production techniques and tools. Conversely, NGOs that can provide these skills or resources should disseminate information about these opportunities more effectively, for instance through online directories.
- Actively search for information about existing funding opportunities for media and conflict initiatives from different EU and other international funds and programmes.

Policy Makers

Policy Makers include the EU institutions, intergovernmental organisations, funding agencies as well as other institutions, international or national, which support the policy framework, training and financing

of initiatives related to media project which aim at conflict prevention, responsible conflict and post conflict reporting. All of them could benefit from the INFOCORE findings and recommendations when:

- Facilitating or conducting a mapping of policies related to recruitment (within the media), with a view to assembling effectiveness data, generating debate and action, and providing benchmarks against which progress might be measured.
- Developing longer term funding programmes and plan for follow-up funding for relevant media and conflict initiatives.
- Giving priority to initiatives that address gaps, support media content productions following the principles of responsible reporting.
- Disseminating information among all the interested parties in regards to the existing funding opportunities for conflict and media initiatives.
- Supporting media awards for responsible conflict reporting and measuring their impact in order to promote quality and enhance standards in journalism as related to conflict issues.
- Supporting networking projects and dialogue platforms, which facilitate exchanges of good practices among conflict and media projects around the world, especially from regions with longer traditions in such projects.
- Encouraging the establishment of bursaries, promoting training, as well as training-of-trainer projects on how to cover issues related to pre-, conflict and post-conflict occurrences.

Annex I: Programme

Saturday 2nd July

9h30 – 10h00 Welcome, General Introduction to Infocore Project and Dissemination

10h15 – 11h45 WP1 Journalistic news production in conflict
20min Presentation of research findings by Infocore WP team
20min Q&A for all (Infocore team and the participants)
30min Participants discuss the results and prepare recommendations
20mins – participants report back and discuss results and recommendations with the presenters

11h45-12h00 Coffee Break

12h00 – 13h30 WP2 Political interactions with conflict news production
20min Presentation of research findings by Infocore WP team
20min Q&A for all (Infocore team and the participants)
30min Participants discuss the results and prepare recommendations
20mins – participants report back and discuss results and recommendations with the presenters

13h30-14h30 Lunch

14h30 – 16h00 WP 3 Lay actors' use and reception of conflict news
20min Presentation of research findings by Infocore WP team
20min Q&A for all (Infocore team and the participants)
30min Participants discuss the results and prepare recommendations
20mins – participants report back and discuss results and recommendations with the presenters

16h00- 16h15 Coffee Break

16h15- 17h45 WP4 NGOs' and experts' interactions with conflict news
20min Presentation of research findings by Infocore WP team
20min Q&A for all (Infocore team and the participants)
30min Participants discuss the results and prepare recommendations
20mins – participants report back and discuss results and recommendations with the presenters

19h30 Dinner

Sunday 3rd July

9h30 – 11h00 WP 5 Interactions & the dissemination of news in social media

20min Presentation of research findings by Infocore WP team

20min Q&A for all (Infocore team and the participants)

30min Participants discuss the results and prepare recommendations

20mins – participants report back and discuss results and recommendations with the presenters

11h00-11h15 Coffee Break

11h15 – 12h45 WP 6 Strategic communication of news & PR

20min Presentation of research findings by Infocore WP team

20min Q&A for all (Infocore team and the participants)

30min Participants discuss the results and prepare recommendations

20mins – participants report back and discuss results and recommendations with the presenters

12h45-13h30 Lunch

13h30 – 15h00 WP 7 Dissemination of news in the media

20min Presentation of research findings by Infocore WP team

20min Q&A for all (Infocore team and the participants)

30min Participants discuss the results and prepare recommendations

20mins – participants report back and discuss results and recommendations with the presenters

15h00- 15h15 Coffee Break

15h15- 16h45 WP 8 Reception of news contents in political debates

20min Presentation of research findings by Infocore WP team

20min Q&A for all (Infocore team and the participants)

30min Participants discuss the results and prepare recommendations

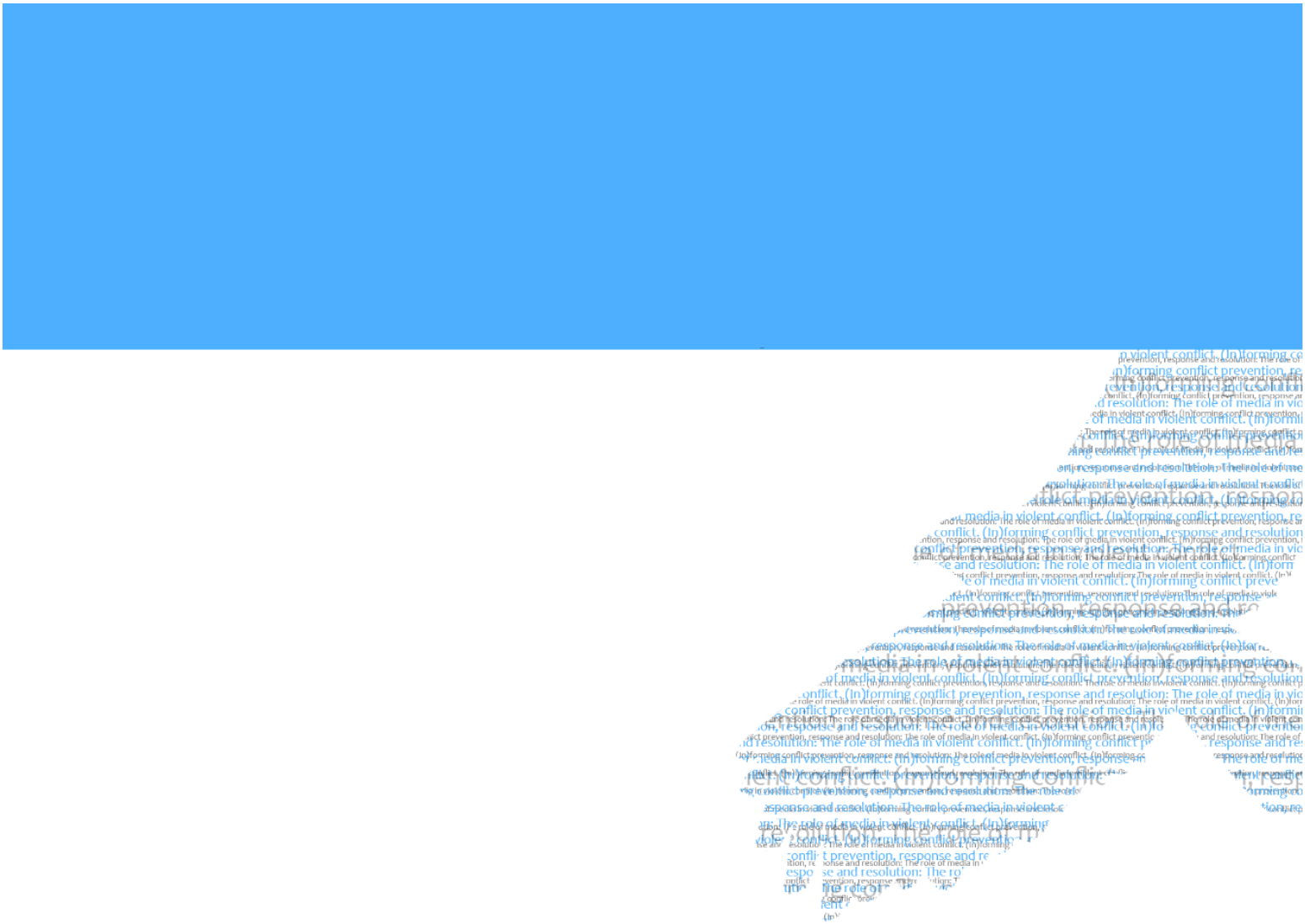
20mins – participants report back and discuss results and recommendations with the presenters

16h45-17h30 Debriefing

18h30 Participants' Departure

Annex II: List of Presenters

Presenters	**Institution Name**	***WP***
Marc Jungbut, Abit Hoxha	Ludwig Maximilian University Munich	WP6 WP1
Christoph O. Meyer,	King's College London	WP4
Gadi Wolfsfeld	Interdisciplinary Center Herzliya	WP2
Keren Tenenboim-Weinblatt, Christan Baden	The Hebrew University of Jerusalem	WP7
Dimitra Dimitrakopoulou	Hellenic Foundation for European & Foreign Policy	WP5
Georgios Terzis	Global Governance Institute	WP9
Snezana Trpevska, Igor Micevski, Zaneta Trajkoska	Visoka Skola za Novinarstvo i za Odnosi so Javnosta Privatna Ustanova	WP3
Rosa Berganza, Valeriano Piñeiro-Naval	University Rey Juan Carlos	WP8
Marie-Soleil Frère, Anke Fiedler	Université Libre de Bruxelles	WP3



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