

(IN)FORMING CONFLICT PREVENTION,  
RESPONSE AND RESOLUTION:



THE ROLE OF MEDIA  
IN VIOLENT CONFLICT

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# INFOCORE Deliverable D8.3

RESEARCH REPORT FOR THE GENERAL PUBLIC

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**RESEARCH REPORT FOR THE GENERAL PUBLIC**

## INFOCORE'S KEY FINDINGS TO DATE

## (EXECUTIVE SUMMARY)

In today's society, few things are as valuable as reliable communication, together with accurate information. These become priceless when dealing with violent conflicts, as media is considered to play a role in shaping the course of conflicts and conduct of war. However, this has been an ongoing discussion for some time. News media stands as one of the main sources of information for citizens and policy makers, sharing a certain responsibility for the generation of responses and helping to provide solutions to situations of war. The INFOCORE research project was born in 2014 under the 7th European Framework Program of the European Commission (Theme SSH.2013.4.2-1 "Media in conflicts and peace building") and aims to investigate whether mediated communication has an impact on the emergence and escalation of violent conflicts (no matter the intensity of the violence) as well as on the attempts at their prevention, management and resolution. The project's specific objective is to analyse the dynamics of conflict news content and production over time and to identify recurrent patterns of information diffusion. The following pages provide a summary of the main key finding obtained to date.

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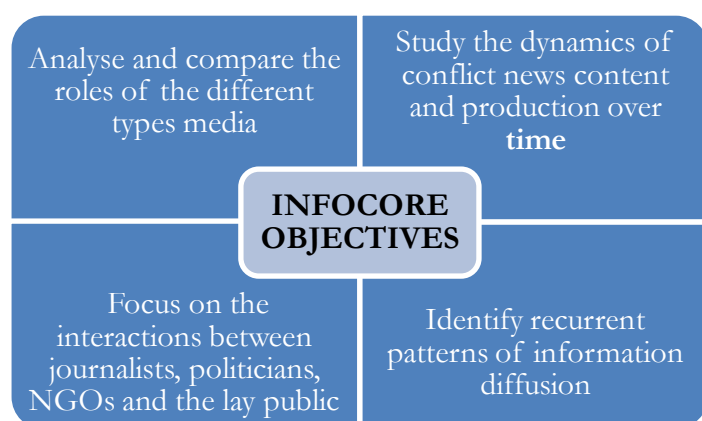
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## Introduction

In today's society, few things are as valuable as reliable communication, together with accurate information. These become priceless when dealing with violent conflicts, as media is considered to play a role in shaping the course of conflicts and conduct of war. However, this has been an ongoing discussion for some time. The different roles of media in violent or latent conflicts range from informants, interpreters and evaluators, to early warners, agenda setters and even motivators. Furthermore, establishing reconciliation measures in conflicts depends, to some extent, on the role of media, capable of mobilizing the international public and of generating pressure on politicians. News media stands as one of the main sources of information for citizens and policy makers, sharing a certain responsibility for the generation of responses and helping to provide solutions to situations of war.

However, the current dynamics of communication regarding conflicts are changing. The rise of the internet and social media has increased the speed and accessibility of conflict news, and also the number and nature of the actors involved in shaping this news. Now, trained journalists have to share the communicative space with implicated active citizens, bloggers, Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs), politicians and also with Diaspora communities that all together no longer need media to address their message to the public. Moreover, while for some researchers traditional media had a tendency to encourage war, the emergence of new communication technologies might have the potential to provide different media coverage, opening up new ways of reaching a successful peace process.

The [INFOCORE](#) research project was born in 2014 under the 7th European Framework Program of the European Commission (Theme SSH.2013.4.2-1 "Media in conflicts and peace building") and aims to investigate whether mediated communication has an impact on the emergence and escalation of violent conflicts, no matter the intensity of the violence, as well as on the attempts at their prevention, management and resolution.



The project's specific objective is to analyse the dynamics of conflict news content and production over time and to identify recurrent patterns of information diffusion. To do so, INFOCORE analyses and compares the roles of different media which, in turn, interact with a wide range of stakeholders. Thus, the study not only focuses on the production of news consumed daily by citizens, but also analyses thoroughly the interactions that occur between professional journalists, politicians, experts/NGOs, strategic communicators in the field of public relations and the lay public.

The study focuses on three main conflict regions –the Middle East, the Western Balkans, and the African Great Lakes areas– and there, specifically, on six enduring conflicts with different idiosyncrasies

and currently at varying developmental stages. All of them have been through many phases of escalation and de-escalation and have experienced different levels of violence. Additionally, all of them are intra-state conflicts with some international dimensions, which guarantees local and international media coverage.

In the Western Balkans, the [INFOCORE consortium](#) selected the fragile peace in Kosovo, with low levels of inter-ethnic violence and strong foreign involvement (from Serbia, the European Union and the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation). The Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia was also chosen, characterised by ethnic tensions and higher levels of violence. In the African Great Lakes region, the focus was set on the conflict in Burundi, which mainly revolves around political rivalries influenced by ethnic undertones, and where peace and reconciliation remains fragile with several peaks of violence. The Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) was also incorporated to the case study. The DRC is notable for very violent clashes between government, UN forces and various domestic and foreign-supported rebel groups and militias. In the Middle East, the exceptionally violent civil war in Syria was selected, where several political, religious and militant groups have surfaced to fight against the military army of Assad's government and against each other. In the Syrian war there is also considerable presence of both foreign volunteers and international militaries. Finally, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict was included, which alternates short but outstanding escalations and prolonged phases of limited violence. This last conflict includes high levels of diplomatic involvement of the international community. The table below shows the time range of each conflict covered by the INFOCORE research project and the following pages provide a summary of the main key finding obtained to date.

**Table 1.** Time range of the conflict cases studied by the INFOCORE project

Conflict	March 2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	June 2015
Israel-Palestine										
Syria										
Macedonia										
Kosovo										
Burundi										
Congo										

### Journalists in violent conflicts: Influences and role perceptions

With regards to media in [violent conflicts](#), it is worth noting that there are several factors that play a key part in the production of conflict news. Some of these factors can be identified as influences on the journalistic processes and also as the actual roles that journalists adopt when developing their work. So far, very few studies have focused on conflict journalists, meaning that their journalistic routines, role perceptions and perceived influences remain largely unknown.

A priori, what seems irrefutable is that conflict societies, post-conflict societies and non-conflict societies are subject to several societal forces, which implies that journalists from different types of societies will perform varying roles and will be constrained by different influences. News production in a conflict society, for instance, is shaped either by an affiliation with one of the conflict parties or the predominant elite's opinion, or by direct physical threats, fear of detention or even targeted killing. In a non-conflict society, journalistic routines may be influenced by a variety of factors from different levels: societal level (political or economic factors), organisational level (the characteristics of the media outlet) or even from an individual level (understood as individual preferences of a journalist, his/her professional self-concept, etc). Finally, in [post-conflict](#) society, there is a general tendency to underestimate the power exerted by political and economic entities, and to overestimate the autonomy that journalists are able to exercise. Specifically, in post-conflict societies, the conflict context continues to play an important role in the political and economic scenario in general and in the media landscape in particular. Indeed, self-censorship (meaning the individual journalist's self-restriction of his/her freedom of speech) seems to be especially relevant in post-conflict societies due to a variety of reasons.

In a similar way, the roles of journalists differ depending on the respective society's media system and also on the type of particular conflict situation. For example, a new model of East European journalism is developing in the post war Western Balkans, determined by a specific professional culture and also by historic developments.

Preliminary results obtained by the INFOCORE consortium have tried to explain the different roles and influences perceived by conflict journalists, with emphasis on the factors that shape the production of news in post-conflict societies.

#### *Roles of journalists in (post)conflicts*

When talking about post-conflict societies the INFOCORE research project refers to the Western Balkans and the African Great Lakes regions, specifically to the conflict situations in Macedonia, Kosovo, Burundi and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Even though these conflicts differ significantly, there are some similarities in the roles that post-conflict journalists play, given their experiences of war, dictatorship and past abuses of the state.

To begin with, the idea of developing responsible journalism is shared by professionals from both the Western Balkans and the African Great Lakes region. In the first case, journalists understand that their work guides citizens in their decision-making processes and helps to ensure the improvement of the societal system. Journalists see themselves as key pieces of the state and nation-building process. In order to accomplish this task, they believe they have to promote a peace agenda; however, at the same time, they believe that journalists should not favour conflict solutions.<sup>1</sup> This is one of the major differences between journalists from the Western Balkans and those from the African Great Lakes, who play a broader 'peace journalist' role. In fact, journalists from Congo and Burundi believe they should contribute to finding solutions and reconciling communities.<sup>2</sup>

**Journalists from African Great Lakes play a broader 'peace journalist' role than those from the Western Balkans**

Responsible journalism is also understood by journalists from Congo and Burundi as being careful not to release information that could threaten the fragile peace of the region.<sup>3</sup> In Kosovo and Macedonia, opinions are divided between journalists who don't want to research stories dealing with the past because of the possibility that news may revive the ethnic divisions, and those who believe it is their moral duty to investigate public officials of suspicious backgrounds, but always with impartiality and an objective research of facts.<sup>4</sup>

Journalists from both areas believe that they have to develop a surveillance function (the watchdog role). In the case of journalists from the Western Balkans they understand this function as part of their duty to search for the truth and inform the public, especially regarding the violation of human rights and international laws.<sup>5</sup> As for journalists from the Great Lakes, they believe they should denounce any form of public misconduct.<sup>6</sup>

**Table 2.** Summary of the roles played by journalists in post-conflicts societies

ROLES/ CONTEXTS	WESTERN BALKANS	AFRICAN GREAT LAKES
<b>PEACE JOURNALIST</b>	Promotion of a peace agenda & pieces of nation-building process	Direct contribution to find solutions and reconcile communities
<b>RESPONSIBLE JOURNALIST</b>	Division of opinion about releasing information threatening peace	Not releasing information about sensitive issues
<b>WATCHDOG ROLE</b>	Covering international law and human rights' violations	Denounce any form of public misconduct

Scholars have long been interested in studying journalistic role conceptions. Numerous typologies have been proposed, for example the watchdog, the neutral and the interpreter. However journalistic roles' perceptions appear to be significantly different depending on the journalistic culture and the country where the professionals work. They can also vary though time depending on the historical moment. Peace journalist, responsible journalist and the watchdog function are professional roles' perceptions that can be applied to the journalists in the post-conflicts studied by the INFOCORE research project. However this does not mean that these roles are shared by all journalists or that they can't play different roles in different moments.

#### *Influencing conflict news production in post-conflict societies*

Before examining the influences observed in post-conflict societies, it is worth noting that the external pressures exerted over the journalistic profession appear as a common factor in the six conflicts studied by the INFOCORE research project. In fact, journalistic work is always subject to several influences. In particular, the journalists involved in the six conflicts analysed think of their work in more autonomous terms than it actually is. Indeed, the data obtained from the retrospective reconstruction of the news-

making process with the actual [journalists](#) confirm that editorial policies and access limitations to some locations and to people on the ground are key influences in the development of their work.<sup>7</sup>

Furthermore, technological limitations are also observed in the DRC and Syria, countries that have experienced direct repression of freedom of speech and press. For example, in January 2015, internet and cell phone services were suspended in Congo. That suspension obstructed access to journalistic sources, information and even newsrooms, making it difficult for journalists to report. Audiences are also limited by this repression of freedom of press. News consumers with internet access (the internet penetration rate is roughly 6%) were also deprived of the possibility of being informed. These practices, typical of ongoing conflicts, remind us of the direct censorship that has been absent in the DRC since the beginning of the 1990s.<sup>8</sup> No wonder since the beginning of the Syrian civil war, disruption of both internet and mobile phone services has also been constant. In Syria, digital surveillance represents a serious problem and internet and mobile phone services appear to be controlled by the government. This serious issue has in fact been debated at the European Parliament, which concluded that the need to protect freedom of expression regarding social media is vital and discussed the possibility of banning the export of surveillance, security and censoring technologies to countries such as Syria, where human rights are violated.<sup>9</sup>

**Technological limitations are observed in the DRC and Syria, countries that have experienced direct repression of freedom of speech and press**

Self-censorship is an important influence on the news-production process of post-conflict journalism. In general terms, all journalists from the five countries (Kosovo, Serbia, Macedonia, Congo and Burundi) have experienced various forms of self-censorship, the origin of which can be tracked to the fear experienced and to the possibility of negative consequences to themselves (journalists who are critical are subject to threats or even physical attacks) or to other people (their sources or even the general public).

**Self-censorship is an important factor influencing post-conflict journalism in the Western Balkans and the African Great Lakes**

Politics is one of the dominant factors constraining freedom of press. In the Western Balkans, media owners are usually politically engaged, so journalists feel the necessity to moderate their criticism or avoid news referring to certain political scandals.<sup>10</sup> In Congo and Burundi, the ambiguous legal framework and media regulatory authorities are perceived by journalists as weapons to silence media outlets that sympathise with the political opposition. Moreover, any criticism of the government is perceived as ‘anti-patriotic’.<sup>11</sup> These conditions are internalised by journalists and manifest themselves in the shape of self-censorship.

Economics is also a determinant restraint to freedom of press in post-conflict situations. In both regions, media outlets experience dependency on economic support, especially on advertising. In the Western Balkans, the Government often uses the mechanism of state advertising to reward obedient media and to punish those that are critical towards its policies, so that independent media becomes financially exhausted and has no resources.<sup>12</sup> In Burundi and Congo, state outlets are the only type of



local media that has no survival problems mainly due to the huge amount of public money they are granted but also because of the privileged money they receive from advertising. More specifically, some media outlets in Burundi have become dependent on aid from foreign development programs (85% of their annual budget) and it is in fact only these outlets that are able to criticise the government.<sup>13</sup>

Furthermore, in both regions, journalists have to deal with great job instability. In Congo and Burundi, journalists don't have a contract or regular salary.<sup>14</sup> In Macedonia, Kosovo and Serbia the economic conditions are also

disastrous and journalists are dependent on media owners.<sup>15</sup> These precarious conditions don't establish the appropriate basis for journalists to overcome the external and internal pressures of their daily lives, and promote the exercise of self-censorship.

**In the Western Balkans, independent media is financially exhausted and has no resources**

**Table 3.** Summary of the factors influencing news production processes in post-conflict societies

INFLUENCE/CONTEXT	WESTERN BALKANS	AFRICAN GREAT LAKES
<b>POLITICAL FACTORS</b>	Media owners are politically engaged	Ambiguous legal framework & criticism of Government considered 'antipatriotic'.
<b>ECONOMIC FACTORS</b>	Obedient media rewarded with state advertising	State media are the only outlets without survival problems
<b>JOB INSTABILITY</b>	Dependence on media owners	Lack of contracts or regular salaries

Given the above, self-censorship translates into a less critical form of journalism. Some events do not ever make the news or are softened for the public. Moreover, journalists sometimes decline to ask critical questions when interviewing high-profile political figures. In all studied cases from the Western Balkans, political and economic scandals are self-censored; in the specific case of Serbia, stories about war crimes and issues from the past wars appear to be sensitive topics that journalists often decide to censor.<sup>16</sup> In conclusion, self-censorship is an important factor that should be taken into account when analyzing post-conflict journalism.

### **The processes of news production in violent conflicts**

There is little doubt that media coverage of violent conflict is a matter of public concern. As described in previous paragraphs, it is a key source of information for the general public to understand the development of violent conflicts and, at the same time, it is said to contribute to the actual process of development. Furthermore, media coverage of violent conflicts has its own idiosyncrasy. Conflicts develop in complex unclear ways, adding difficulty to the news-making process, which currently requires high speed and is greatly dependent on contact networks. It is therefore relevant to understand how

conflict news is produced: the processes and routines of journalists to make decisions regarding the construction of conflict stories.

There are several crucial stages in the news-making process, especially when it comes to media coverage of violent conflicts. The first one concerns the selection of relevant news in a complex environment. This means deciding which facts are to be exposed, which sources quoted and which elements emphasised. However, the elaboration process doesn't end here. Once these elements are selected from the environment, they have to be introduced into the news context. This implies ordering them by relevance and also developing a narrative to create a story. In this way, news is [framed for publication](#), i.e. attention is focused on one central idea to express one possible suggested interpretation of reality. Hence, news becomes a construction made from different pieces of reality, and is not a transposition of reality itself.

#### *Selection of news items in violent conflicts*

Story ideation is the first step of the [news-making process](#). INFOCORE's research has found that at this stage, journalists covering the six conflicts studied by the project, whether on the ground or as correspondents for European institutions, picture their job in idealistic terms. Journalists speak about following their intuition to pursue a lead in order to identify a relevant story. In any case, local journalists, particularly in the Kosovo and Macedonian conflicts, seem to have developed a special sense to know when an outbreak of violence (inter-ethnic violence) is going to take place. This gut feeling is connected with their expertise due to covering the conflict for a long time on the ground.<sup>17</sup>

**Local journalists in Kosovo and Macedonia have developed a gut feeling to know when an outbreak of violence is going to take place**

Despite this intuitive mechanism, the ideation-process of a news story is less proactive than journalists believe. In the reconstruction process of news-making developed by INFOCORE with conflict journalists, professionals confirmed that they follow a daily routine when ideating stories: they check out the press coverage made by market leaders and also consult the information released by NGOs. Thus, it is not unusual that throughout the coverage of events, different outlets quote the same sources, yet to different extent. Furthermore, what seems to be undeniable in light of the investigation is that, in the majority of cases, story ideation comes after the lead of salient events; however, this characteristic is more relevant in foreign coverage than in domestic coverage of conflict situations.<sup>18</sup>

The similar routines followed by journalists imply the development of self-referential journalism and also of patterns of convergence in the news selection process. Specifically concerning the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, INFOCORE has found great similarities in the selection of news between all analysed domestic and foreign media. However, it is possible to find different levels of similarities. The highest levels are found within most countries, but also between outlets with cultural and language similarities. Israeli and Palestinian outlets also show some correspondence, most likely because they share the same conflict reality. However, these similarities diminish when comparing outlets from the Middle East region and Western Europe, probably due to European reliance on agency material. If similarities

between European outlets present lower levels this may be because they have more stable journalistic styles.<sup>19</sup>

### *Interpreting news facts in violent conflicts*

In the process of covering conflict events, journalists have to decide between multiple possible ways of presenting the story. Depending on these decisions, media coverage addresses different sides of the same coin and, in doing so, can contribute to [peacebuilding](#) or to the escalation of conflicts.

Unlike journalists seem to think a priori, the narrative of the conflict news not only takes into account the facts taking place on the ground. Journalists also provide the story with subjected elements. INFOCORE's qualitative<sup>20</sup> and quantitative<sup>21</sup> research has shown that the selection of the story narrative and angle is a result of journalists' selective interpretation of what is going on. The evidence of conflicts, such as facts and quotes, are not just simply integrated into the news text by journalists; the process is far more complex.

With regards to texts, sources and quotes, the common assumption that political source frames are introduced more or less directly into the news has been put into question by INFOCORE's results. In fact, only about 12% of news on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, from domestic and foreign outlets,

**The common assumption that political source frames are introduced directly into the news has been put into question by INFOCORE's results**

reproduced source texts with only minor changes being made. In the remaining cases (88%), the political source frames were transformed into news frames that suffered different levels of modification, from the lowest level of change where the central organizing idea is transported more or less faithfully, to higher level of transformation where only selected fragments of the source frame are arranged in order to corroborate the journalist-defined news frame, or even where journalists rarely preserve perceptible elements from the original source frames. In this extreme case (20%), journalists summarise with their own words the source frame's central organizing idea to focus on its communicative actions in the political struggle.<sup>22</sup>

Something similar happens with the changes in salient information. As frames try to address a comprehensive interpretation of the great amount of available information on the conflict, they are constantly challenged to integrate new evidence. The way this evidence is incorporated depends on its own nature in relation to the previous frame: it can be corroborative, challenging or even disconfirming evidence. In the specific case of the chemical weapons crisis developed during the Syrian civil war (2013), INFOCORE found that corroborative evidence was included as long as it didn't contradict the previous frame. However, challenging evidence implies new facts that require an explanation. They can be riddles that usually end up being attenuated by the news narrative, but they can also be unexpected events that eventually result in the adaptation of the frame. Finally, the emergence of disconfirming evidence implies the invalidation of some key position of the frame previously maintained by the journalist or media outlet. In these cases, disconfirming evidence was often marginalised or simply ignored. So, at the end, new available evidence may result in the alteration of facts when these are understood as inconvenient, but

also in the alteration of the frame, especially when unexpected information is provided by highly salient sources.<sup>23</sup>

Of course, some other interpretative [transformations](#) are introduced during the news-making processes in violent conflicts. INFOCORE's team has also found cultural transformations throughout the

**More references are made in domestic coverage to inside groups, which are better valued. On the other hand, foreign coverage seems to be more balanced concerning sources**

Israeli-Palestinian conflict coverage where journalists either emphasised or eliminated cultural references provided by sources. It seems to be the case that foreign media outlets remove specific collective references and highlight aspects that could happen anywhere, while domestic media outlets underline popular, national or religious cultural symbols already presented by sources. Indeed, more references are made in domestic coverage to inside groups,

which are also better valued. In the cases where voices from “the other side” were quoted, these sources were always counteracted. On the other hand, foreign coverage seems to be more balanced concerning sources.<sup>24</sup>

Dark colours and negative emotions (e.g. outrage and grief) were communicated in the specific case of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.<sup>25</sup> That is what is called ‘emotive transformation’, which has also been established as a factor of the conflict news-making process. In fact, during the online coverage of the 2014 Israel-Gaza conflict, the most prominent frame (60%) found in news texts was the ‘fighting frame’ which described the fighting and bombardments, consequences of war and suffering, death as well as injuries. Regarding the visual frames transmitted by the pictures, the first identified frame revolves around ‘civilian suffering’.<sup>26</sup> What seems evident is that the interpretative frames elaborated by journalists point to themes of violence, victims and suffering.

**In the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, dark colours and negative emotions (e.g. outrage, grief) were communicated by domestic coverage**

Finally, we can identify one more transformation linked to the frames’ mobilizing components, i.e. the specific agendas ([agendas for action](#)) advanced by frames. In particular, concerning the Syrian chemical weapons crisis, INFOCORE analysed the British newspaper ‘The Guardian’ s and the American daily ‘The New York Times’ coverage of the conflict, which confirmed the importance of the role of agendas for action, detected in one third of all sentences throughout the entire time range.<sup>27</sup>

### Researching the escalation of violence in conflicts

When talking about violent conflicts, their dynamics appear to be one of the most important characteristics, linked to each conflict’s specific context and idiosyncrasy. All conflicts have, due to their nature, dynamics of escalation and de-escalation. These dynamics should be understood as two different phases within a conflict and provoke different methods of external intervention. By studying these phases we are able to visualise how conflicts evolve over time and how they can be approached in the most efficient way.

Escalation can be defined as an increase in the intensity of a crisis or conflict, whether intra-state or inter-state. Even if escalation can be subdivided into phases, what must be taken into account is that it entails a qualitative change of the conflict.

News media stands as the central arena for political conflict, where antagonists compete for public attention and support. Indeed, as previously explained, it is often claimed that press coverage is one of the variables that can affect the escalation or de-escalation of violent conflicts. All in all, media is considered to be structurally more supportive of escalation than of peace-building, due to its newsworthiness criteria, and there is widespread concern regarding its role in violent conflicts. In times of violent escalation, professional standards are said to be replaced by patriotic journalism or even by an ethnocentric bias - giving priority to in-group sources and narratives-, and other influences and loyalties. This is what researchers have been calling the ‘rally around the flag’ effect. In this context, it seems relevant to explore the process of news production and its relationship with the escalation of violence.

#### *News production levels during escalation phases*

On the whole, it is possible to say that the production of conflict-related news increases during escalation phases.<sup>28</sup> This is also the case for NGO communications on violent conflicts, largely focused on violence and escalation.<sup>29</sup> This higher level of information on the increase of violence could have a direct impact on European parliamentary sessions where, at least during the debates concerning the Syrian and Israeli-Palestinian conflicts, the attention paid to the media and to NGOs by Members of Parliament (MPs) seems to increase as events escalate on the ground.<sup>30</sup>

**Media’s attention to violent conflicts increases during escalation phases**

A more in-depth analysis of media’s increased attention to violent conflicts during the escalation phases indicates that this tendency is strong and pervasive in foreign and domestic coverage. However, there are several differences between foreign and domestic media, and also between the different conflicts. Attention spikes in foreign coverage generally coincide with major conflict events, but while this is perfectly synchronised in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, in the African and Balkan conflicts these peaks of coverage often lag a month or so behind the major escalations. Interestingly enough, domestic coverage sometimes increases before the escalation of violence.

**The tendency of foreign media is to delay its attention on the escalation and move on to something else quickly**

Furthermore, in the cases of the Syrian, Kosovo and Israeli-Palestinian conflicts, media coverage decreases slightly after an escalation spike. In conclusion, we could say that the tendency of foreign media is to delay its attention on the escalation and then move on to something else rapidly. However, it is important to note that according to INFOCORE’s findings, this attention never completely vanishes (with an average of 5 articles a month per foreign outlet in the cases of Macedonia and Burundi and with a minimum of one text a day in the case of the Middle Eastern conflict). Further INFOCORE findings show that domestic media coverage during all stages of the conflict, on the other hand, is a matter of routine and therefore much higher and steadier. Therefore,

foreign media coverage on violent conflicts is escalation-orientated, and this is only partly the case in domestic conflict coverage.<sup>31</sup>

#### *News content during escalation phases*

In terms of news content, the number of references to violence and suffering clearly increases during escalation phases. In domestic media, the attention to violence seems proportional to the actual amount of violence, but foreign media responds by either increasing its references to violence, or by ignoring minor escalations. At the same time attention levels to peace, non-violence and conflict management tend to diminish during escalation phases. What seems to be clear from INFOCORE's results is that violence and victim-oriented news in media is not a pattern that appears during escalation phases alone, as previously thought, but rather that the focus remains relatively stable over time, and is only slightly intensified during escalation phases.<sup>32</sup>

When we compare the similarity of news selection during the major military escalations of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, it is worth noting that acute violence leads to a slight increase in the similarity of

**The similarity of sources and events quoted by Western and Middle Eastern media can be explained by a higher amount of news agency's material during escalations**

sources and events quoted. This increased resemblance —researchers speak of 'convergence'— following military escalations declines only partly afterwards. This convergence found between Western and Middle Eastern media can be explained by a higher amount of available material from news agencies due to increased interest in the Middle East conflict during major escalations, as well as by the effortless reciprocal scrutiny of information in the digital age.

However, convergences (resemblance) and divergences (a drawing apart) in the interpretation of news, even if they seem to coincide with major events in the Middle Eastern conflict, do not follow a simple pattern. For example, the divergences in interpretations of Middle East outlets during escalation phases may be understood as politically-motivated reflections of the 'rally around the flag' effect (see above). However, in general terms, alterations in the similarities and differences of the interpretations can be best explained by changes in the political outlook, editorial line and sourcing practices of the media outlets.<sup>33</sup>

#### *Levels of journalistic standards during escalation phases*

Concerning violent escalation, news media has frequently been accused of taking sides with one particular perspective. By losing critical distance and favouring in-group sources and ethnocentric narratives, journalists are said to jeopardise their professional standards. Nevertheless, an analysis of the data obtained by INFOCORE shows only a slight decrease of critical distance during escalation periods. Even if foreign coverage appears, on the whole, more distanced than domestic coverage, this tendency changes over time and is not associated with moments of escalation, giving little support to the theory that critical distance in journalistic practice decreases during escalation phases.<sup>34</sup>

**INFOCORE's findings show only a slight decrease of critical distance in journalistic practice during escalation phases**

Something similar happens regarding NGO communications on violence and escalation. These topics are treated by NGOs with great sensitivity and, more importantly, with a high normative quality of the constructs they use when referring to the conflict ([evidential beliefs](#)). In this respect, the professional standards of NGOs seem to be guaranteed during escalation and violent phases.<sup>35</sup>

Furthermore, when concerning discursive constructions claiming specific goals that must be achieved ([agendas for action](#)), usually addressed in the news during escalation phases, it might be assumed that dominant expressed agendas would point to violent solutions. However, INFOCORE's research conducted on the chemical weapons crisis of the Syrian civil war (2013) shows that, even when global diplomatic patience was running out and the United States was on the verge of ordering a missile attack, the agendas for action proposed by both The Guardian and The New York Times during the escalation phase were closer to asking for de-escalation than violent solutions, promoting in this way the peace-building process rather than the escalation of the conflict.<sup>36</sup>

Finally, INFOCORE was concerned about the plausible ethnocentric approach in the coverage of events during escalation phases. On the whole, for the Syrian, Israeli-Palestinian, Kosovo and Macedonian conflicts, it is possible to confirm that escalation phases increase the visibility of both sides of the conflicts in the news media, more strongly for the in-groups, but not at the expense of out-groups. Moreover, the overall evaluation is [polarised](#) only to a limited extent and depending on the nature of the escalation. When unexpected escalation derives from acts of violence perpetrated by one side (murders, acts of terrorism), the polarisation pattern appears only on the victim's side. When both sides of the conflict are involved in violent acts, in-groups and out-groups' evaluations deteriorate, but in-group evaluations do so more weakly. Therefore, escalation tends to increase the number of negative evaluations, although in uneven proportions.<sup>37</sup>

**Escalation tends to increase the number of negative evaluations; however, in-group evaluations deteriorate more weakly than out-group evaluations**

A specific pattern of escalation shared by the six conflicts, although more explicit in the Middle Eastern conflict, refers to the focus transition experienced during the debates. When violence increases, the political institutions and democratic politics are removed from the debate, leaving them dissociated from the violence and responsibility. Instead, the debate focuses on the moral necessity of defending the people. Thus, the fighting concepts are linked to institutions of the in-group collective (i.e. the nation, the culture), and the public debate then revolves around the collective self-reference 'we'.<sup>38</sup>

**Even though coverage does change to some extent during escalation stages, these journalistic alterations mostly reinforce tendencies already established in the news**

This link between escalation and some ethnocentric patterns has also been noticed by audiences inside conflict-burden societies. Specifically, members of the general public in Macedonia questioned about the TV coverage of a clash between an armed group and the police in an Albanian populated neighbourhood, understood the media coverage as ethnically and politically polarised, which could potentially lead to destructive conflict escalation.<sup>39</sup> Nonetheless, in

general terms, the results obtained by INFOCORE point to a limited polarised and ethnocentric bias during escalation phases.

In any case, it could be argued that the previous idea that media has slackened professional standards and supported the escalation processes may need to be re-examined. Even though coverage does change to some extent during escalation stages, these alterations mostly reinforce tendencies already established in the news.

### **Relations between media, members of parliament(s) and NGOs in violent conflicts**

The information generated in violent conflicts is the product of relations that arise between the different actors involved in the communication process. Generally, people use the media to keep abreast of international developments. At the same time, production of journalistic news doesn't happen in an isolated space, but relies on external sources involved in the formation of informative speech. Therefore, there is a highly competitive arena where different actors try to influence the communication processes in order to legitimise or delegitimise certain actions or policy interventions. Consequently, the interdependence and interrelationship between media and other specific actors, such as NGOs and political figures, is fundamental to understand the dynamics of conflict.

NGOs usually act as agents of professional information. In fact, NGOs play an increasingly influential role in shaping the public discourse of conflicts due to their growing resources and available funds. Moreover, NGOs raise public awareness of relevant issues, promote conflict resolution and [advocate](#) for policy changes. The [strategic communication](#) of NGOs generates valuable information that usually presents a different 'reality' of the conflict, based on empirical evidence and often previously unexplored.

On the other hand, in contemporary democracies, parliaments are key institutions where different ideological positions are represented. Parliamentary functions are diverse, serving from local needs to

**The interrelationship between media, NGOs and political figures is fundamental to understand the dynamics of conflict**

international affairs. Specifically, today we can speak of 'the parliamentarisation of international affairs' as a phenomenon in some European countries, where conflict resolution appears as a key issue within the scope of responsibility of MPs. However, in the construction of the parliamentary agenda, actors such as the public, NGOs or the media have special influence on the promotion of specific issues. Moreover, [parliamentary debates](#) are not only usually covered by the media, but may lead to specific foreign policy actions related to conflicts.

Hence, MPs, NGO activists and media professionals cohabit in the same public informative space and interact, setting a specific vision that is addressed to the public. These interrelationships are addressed in the following paragraphs which describe the most remarkable findings obtained by the INFOCORE consortium.



*The mediatisation of NGOs*

NGOs target media outlets to promote their organisational cause and also to obtain fund donors. In a first phase, NGOs focus their attention on gaining access to journalists by giving them new conflict knowledge as a tradeable currency. Moreover, NGOs maintain informal contacts with journalists, helping them to organise and produce their journalistic stories (i.e. by facilitating their access to witnesses or sources). In a second stage, when NGOs have established a good reputation among journalists, they're

**In order to improve their chance to gain public attention, NGOs are adopting journalistic knowledge production and playing the role of 'ersatz journalists'**

given the opportunity to publish articles (as opinion pieces or embedded stories) that address not only evidential facts but also normative claims. This seems to be the best way to draw the attention of policy makers to their cause.<sup>40</sup>

In order to improve their chances to gain public attention, NGOs produce their own informative contents. To that end, NGOs adopt 'media logic', i.e. journalistic knowledge production.<sup>41</sup> The growing professionalisation of their communications can be observed in the increasing number and diversity of sources they use to prove their factual claims (media sources included), and also in the absence of emotional reports of human suffering or even normative demands.<sup>42</sup> Thus, it is possible to say that NGOs are playing the role of 'ersatz journalists'.<sup>43</sup>

When it comes to producing their strategic communication, in general terms NGOs offer more proved than uncertain information, but here we can see some differences regarding the operational scope of different NGOs. Transnational NGOs (TNGO) usually offer more sources and more specific references to the certainty or uncertainty of information than local NGOs, probably because the latter have fewer resources than the former. Moreover, local NGOs offer less uncertain information, because they can't afford to lose their acquired prestige. However, it could be argued that for all topics other than violence and escalation, NGO communications still lack indications on sources of evidential claims, and that therefore their communication skills still have room for improvement.<sup>44</sup>

In any case, the increasing presence of NGOs in media discourse can be confirmed. These appearances are essentially from transnational NGOs (Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International or The Red Cross), but also from local NGOs reputed to be impartial (for example, The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, The African Association for the

**NGOs appear as highly influential actors on the journalistic production process in contexts with elevated intensity of violence**

Defence of Human Rights, from the DRC, or the 'Forum pour le renforcement de la Société Civile', from Burundi).<sup>45</sup> Even if there are differences between the conflicts, it can be maintained that NGOs appear as highly influential actors in contexts with elevated intensity of violence, and where economic constraints, political pressure and physical threats influence the journalistic production process.<sup>46</sup> Thus, the impact rate is high in texts concerning the Syrian civil war and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, although the highest values are found in the DRC and especially in Burundi.<sup>47</sup>

From the point of view of NGOs, a ‘pull informative effect’ has been perceived coinciding with the development of external news events. In these cases, media outlets look for the information and analysis provided by NGOs. Equally, the ‘push effect’ has also been found when NGOs stimulate media

**The media uses NGO references primarily as a source of factual information**

coverage, especially with news information about human rights violations, political oppression and war crimes. In any case, what seems to be true is that the media uses NGO references primarily as a source of factual information, less as a source of analysis, and infrequently as a source of suggestions for action.<sup>48</sup>

Finally, it is interesting to note that in some authoritative contexts (such as Burundi, especially since 2015, Macedonia, Syria and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict) traditional media seems to be increasingly polarised, which means that NGO messages are only disseminated by the opposition’s media.<sup>49</sup>

### *The mediatisation of politics*

Once the mediatisation of NGOs has been established, the mediatisation of political figures also needs to be examined. Even though there is an ongoing academic debate on whether politics or the media comes first, it is possible to shed some light on the issue based on INFOCORE’s findings.

Regarding decisions that should be taken in the political context of violent conflicts (agendas for action), INFOCORE has found that, in the case of the Syrian chemical weapons crisis (2013), The Guardian’s media discourse followed the path lead by the British Government and Parliament. When Prime Minister Cameron called for active intervention, then the newspaper’s discourse expressed an intervention agenda; however, when this idea was refused by the British Parliament and the administration’s attention diminished, the agendas expressed in The Guardian also waned. On the contrary, The New York Times was found to have discussed policy options long before the Obama administration openly talked about possible military action. In the British context, politics seem to have come first, although the same cannot be stated for the United States context.<sup>50</sup>

**In European countries, media references have a notable presence in parliamentary debates, regarding topics of violence, but also in the discussions of peace issues**

In European countries, there is no doubt that media references have a notable presence in parliamentary debates, not only regarding topics of violence but also in the discussions of peace and aid issues.<sup>51</sup> If we compare the German, British, French and European Union parliaments regarding the conflicts studied by the INFOCORE consortium, the British Parliament (House of Commons) gives media the most attention.<sup>525354</sup> When Western Balkan conflicts are addressed, media presence is higher in the national parliaments of the conflicts (Serbian, Kosovar and Macedonian National Assembly) than in the rest of parliaments (English, French, German and UE Parliaments).<sup>55</sup>

When studying why media was mentioned in parliamentary debates on violent conflicts, specifically concerning the Syrian civil war and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, media appeared as key informative channels that can be instrumentalised to support MP’s arguments, as channels where politicians express

their views to the public opinion and also as a dangerous dispositive. In these cases, MPs express their concern about the partial image of the conflict that can be transmitted given the censorship or even the prohibition of journalists in the conflict regions, but also about the negative effects media may have on

**Negative media effects on public opinion appeared as one of the main concerns of MP's regarding violent conflicts**

the public opinion due to the hard scenes that might be conveyed, hurting its sensitivity and also giving the constituents the impression that MPs have failed in the resolution of the crisis. Moreover, media are perceived as capable of radicalizing the spectators because of the proliferation of fundamentalist channels. Therefore, media effects appeared as one of main concerns of MP's regarding violent conflicts.<sup>56</sup>

#### *The relationship of NGOs and political actors in violent conflicts*

NGOs and political figures maintain their own two-way relationship. In fact, NGOs usually address media with precise factual information in order to improve their reputation with policy-makers. The general public is also targeted to put pressure on political institutions. And finally, direct contacts with political figures are established in Western capitals and at an operational level in conflict zones. If we compare the different geographical contexts, the results obtained by INFOCORE show that the relationship established between policy makers and NGOs in the United Kingdom has become part of their professional routine, with the latter providing the former with useful analysis and key information of ongoing developments. However, in the case of France, these contacts seem to appear only during the crises stages.<sup>57</sup> The different types of established relationships between politicians and NGOs are reflected in parliamentary debates where, at least regarding the Western Balkans and Middle East conflicts, NGO presence is higher in the British Parliament than in the French National Assembly.<sup>58</sup>

**When addressing knowledge to political institutions, NGOs try to concentrate on problem solving and predictions of future development in addition to fact-findings and documentation**

The type of dissemination of knowledge provided by NGOs to political institutions is more complex than their informative role with media outlets. In addition to fact-findings and documentation, NGOs try to concentrate on problem solving and predictions of future developments.<sup>59</sup> However, NGOs still seem to have problems with setting the political agenda at parliamentary debates. In fact the German, British, French and European parliamentary debates on conflicts make less references to NGOs than to media,

**NGOs still seem to have difficulties to access and influence political institutions**

which indicates that this type of organisations still have difficulties to access and influence political institutions.<sup>60</sup>

Some of these difficulties become evident in INFOCORE's research on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, where the increased polarisation of Israeli public opinion and the apparent bias of human rights NGOs affect their ability to reach policy-makers.<sup>61</sup> On the other hand, in the Burundi conflict, due to the decomposition of parliamentary opposition, NGOs assumed de facto the role of political opposition.<sup>62</sup>

## The role of social media in violent conflicts

In recent years, we have seen a significant growth in the popularity of social media. Indeed, social media tools such as *Twitter*, *Facebook* and *Youtube* have become key instruments in the development and coordination of a series of recent social movements, such as the ‘Indignants’ movement in Europe as well as the ‘Arab Spring’.

In this same context, it is interesting to note how Web 2.0 platforms have changed the flow of information dynamics, leaving behind the old top-down pattern of information and enabling users to create and [disseminate](#) their own contents. Thus, professional and political constrictions on news production have been evaded and, consequently, new forms of journalism (defined as citizen, alternative or participatory journalism) have appeared. This new phenomenon involves citizens in the production of original news contents, and also enables journalists to access information of events and images that may contradict the official versions, giving a wider range of voices the opportunity to speak and politicians the opportunity to communicate directly with citizens.

**The increasing importance of social media in all aspects of modern life has had a direct impact on the key actors involved in the development of violent conflicts**

Although it’s obvious that the media landscape has changed, new developments in the field are very recent and it’s still not clear to what extent these transformations have altered the traditionally negative influence of media on violent conflicts, as established up until now. The following sections briefly report on those results.

### *The importance of social media in conflict-burden societies*

The increasing importance of social media in all aspects of modern life has had a direct impact on the key actors involved in the development of violent conflicts, i.e. citizens, journalists and politicians. In relation to the first, social networks and news websites have become very relevant sources of information, as well as tools of communication in countries where internet technology has high penetration rates and is available to the lay public. In Macedonia, social media has become the third relevant source of information for local audiences (41%). In Syria, this goes further and, despite the frequent disruptions of internet services, news and comments posted on social media are the most used source of information (71.4%). In Burundi, however, the internet penetration rate was estimated at around 6% at the beginning of 2015.<sup>63</sup>

**Social media are perceived by the audience as less politically biased channels of communication in countries with high levels of internet penetration**

Additionally, audience interaction through social networks and alternative media increases in times of tensions, crisis or war. In fact 23.8% of the audience in Macedonia posts on social networks regarding conflict issues at least once a week, while in Syria this percentage is much higher (52.3%). In Burundi, only a limited number of young educated urban individuals have become involved with the social networks, which they can access from their mobile phones. These alternative channels of communication are perceived by citizens in Burundi, Macedonia and Syria as less politically biased and more accessible than traditional media.<sup>64</sup>

With regards to journalists, social media appears to be an important source of inspiration when it comes to story ideation, particularly in the case of freelance journalists and correspondents covering the six conflicts studied by INFOCORE on the ground or from European decision-making centres. Besides traditional media, journalists now routinely screen social media accounts from the different conflict parties as well as a number of internet sources they believe credible. Although it may seem contradictory, and as mentioned before, this narrows down rather than increases the diversity of narratives and story angles.<sup>65</sup>

Finally, the importance of social media is also reflected in the parliamentary arena, where social media has a higher presence than traditional media and other strategic communicators. This has been confirmed by an analysis of the parliamentary debates on the conflicts of Syria, Israel-Palestine, Macedonia and Kosovo in four parliaments outside the conflict regions studied by INFOCORE (the European Parliament, French National Assembly, German Parliament or Bundestag and British Parliament or House of Commons) as well as by an analysis of the parliamentary debates on domestic conflict situations in the Serbian National Assembly, the Assembly of Kosovo and in Assembly of the Republic of Macedonia.<sup>66</sup>

**In the parliamentary arena, social media has a higher presence than traditional media and other strategic communicators**

#### *Transformations in information dynamics*

Social media allows users to create and disseminate their own content and become news producers, a situation that may be exploited by strategic communicators such as NGOs and other weaker antagonists of asymmetrical conflicts.

In the Syrian and Israeli-Palestinian conflicts, NGOs use social media as an important tool of communication to reach citizens, circumventing the barriers of traditional media. In the case of Syria this direct exchange between NGOs and citizens is due to the fact that traditional media is perceived as biased, unprofessional and lacking in dissemination. Furthermore, through social media, local NGOs are able to address and disseminate information on relevant issues such as violence against women. In the case of Palestinian NGOs, social media such as *Facebook* becomes a vital tool for the exchange of news and information on all conflict-related topics -the conditions of prisoners, for example-, even when the

**In the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, technological changes are perceived to benefit Palestinian interests and threaten the Israeli's**

Israeli authorities restrict the circulation of journalists and the distribution of newspapers. However, it is undeniable that mainstream media remains the most important tool for NGO communication.<sup>67</sup>

It seems reasonable to argue that NGOs benefit from social media and use it as a tool to expose situations of oppression and violence, and so do the weaker antagonists of conflicts. In the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, according to the opinion of political leaders from both sides, these technological changes are perceived to benefit Palestinian interests and threaten the Israeli's. The abuses perpetrated by Israeli security forces are now recorded and uploaded by ordinary Palestinians and human rights groups using camera phones. Even though the Israelis also have cameras and can equally capture Palestinian attacks on

Israeli citizen, the international political environment opposes the Israeli occupation and this implies that the Israeli government would prefer for the conflict to remain muted in the international scenario.<sup>68</sup>

This increasing lack of control of the Israeli authorities over the flow of information due to social media has a significant impact on how the Israeli army and political leaders currently operate. Interviews of Israeli leaders conducted by INFOCORE researchers suggest that they now seem more reluctant to engage in military operations that will involve massive civilian casualties, or that they perceive that the length of these operations should be shortened. However, given the present situation of the conflict, it is not possible to state that the existence of social media has led to any significant changes in the nature of the conflict or improved the chances of its resolution.<sup>69</sup>

#### *The discourses of social media in violent conflicts*

As suggested previously, there is a common understanding that traditional news media usually plays a negative role in the promotion of peace and reconciliation between antagonists, since there is an inherent contradiction between the needs of a peace process (patience, tolerance and a calm environment) and the needs of news (immediacy, interest in threats and violence).

The political and military leaders of Israel and Palestine suggest that social media, like traditional media, is far better at

spreading hate and extremism than at promoting peace and reconciliation. Authorities from both sides of this conflict seem to agree that the internet and social networks have made conflict resolution less likely. Both sides perceive social media as communication channels for the spread of hate and violence.<sup>70</sup> This concern is often discussed at European parliamentary debates, where MPs express the need to reduce the influence of terrorist organisations of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict on public opinion through the use of social media.<sup>71</sup>

In the case of Burundi, a couple of participants in the focus groups held by INFOCORE expressed that some political statements disseminated on the internet (and also through public media) were ethnocentric discourses and close to a hate speech.<sup>72</sup> In the same line, the research carried out by

**Even if social media provides important tools of communications for weaker antagonists of violent conflicts, it doesn't play the expected peace, promotion and reconciliation role**

INFOCORE on the use of *Twitter* by the Burundian presidency and the presidency's spokesperson found that their accounts included several threats to journalists and foreign media. In fact, the spokesperson's tweets promoted polarisation and hate, by developing a discursive opposition between the in-group of citizens and supporters of the president, and the out-group of delinquents and "terrorists", supporters of the opposition parties. Thus, *Twitter*

is transformed in the hands of the Burundian presidency into a means of hegemonic discourse propagation, used to cultivate a sense of authoritative populism.<sup>73</sup>

**At European parliamentary debates, MPs express the need to reduce the influence of terrorist organisations on public opinion through social media**

Even if social media provides important tools of communication for weaker antagonists, the lay public and other strategic actors of conflicts, these preliminary results and conclusions seem to distance social media from its expected role of peace, promotion and reconciliation between antagonists.

## Conclusions

- In the **post-conflict cases** studied by INFOCORE research project, journalists play professional roles linked specifically to the political context where they work, e.g. peace journalism and responsible journalism. Furthermore, self-censorship is an important influence on the news-production process of post-conflict journalism. Political and economic constraints but also job instability can be seen as factors that have an effect on the occurrence of less critical forms of journalism.
- The **ideation-process of a news conflict** story is less proactive than journalist believe. Journalists follow similar daily routines when ideating stories: they check out the press coverage and consult the information released by NGOs. This implies the development of patterns of convergence in the news selection process.
- Several **transformations** are introduced during the news-making process in violent conflicts. With regard to texts, sources and quotes, the common assumption that political source frames are introduced more or less directly into the news has been put into question by INFOCORE's results; only about 12% of news on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict reproduced source texts with only minor changes being made. Moreover, more references are made in domestic coverage to inside groups, which are better valued. On the other hand, foreign coverage seems to be more balanced concerning sources. With regard to emotive transformations in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, dark colours and negative emotions were communicated by domestic coverage.
- During **escalation phases**, the media attention to violent conflicts increases, however, there are several differences between domestic and foreign media. The domestic media outlets sometimes increase before the escalation of violence; however the tendency of foreign media is to delay its attention on the escalation. Furthermore, in the specific case of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, INFOCORE research project has found a slight increase in the similarity of sources and events quoted by Western and Middle Eastern media, which can be explained by a higher amount of news agency's material during escalations. Finally, with regard to journalistic standard levels, INFOCORE's findings show only a slight decrease of critical distance in journalistic practice as well as a small increase in the levels of polarisation and ethnocentric approach during escalation phases. However, it is possible to affirm that even though coverage does change to some extent during escalation stages, these journalistic alterations mostly reinforce tendencies already established in the news.
- **NGOs** appear as highly influential actors on the journalistic production process in contexts with elevated intensity of violence and where economic constraints, political pressure and physical

threats influence the journalistic production process. NGOs, which have become key sources of factual information in violent conflicts, maintain informal contacts with journalists, publish their own articles in media (opinion pieces or embedded stories) and produce their own informative contents adopting journalistic standards of knowledge production. Furthermore, NGOs usually address media with precise factual information in order to improve their reputation with policy-makers as well as establish direct contacts with political figures in Western capitals and at an operational level in conflict zones. The type of dissemination of knowledge provided by NGOs to political institutions is more complex than their informative role with media outlets. In addition to fact-findings and documentation, NGOs try to concentrate on problem solving and predictions of future developments. However, NGOs still seem to have problems with setting the political agenda at European parliamentary debates addressing the specific violent conflicts studied by the INFOCORE research project.

- Concerning the relationship between **the media and the politicians**, in European countries media references have a notable presence in parliamentary debates, not only regarding topics of violence but also in the discussions of peace and aid issues. Media appeared as key informative channels that can be instrumentalised to support MP's arguments but also as a dangerous dispositive that can transmit partial image of the conflict or hard scenes that can give the constituents the impression that MPs have failed in the resolution of the crisis. Moreover, media are perceived as capable of radicalizing the spectators because of the proliferation of fundamentalist channels. Media effects appeared as one of main concerns of MP's regarding violent conflicts
- With regard to **social media**, social networks and news websites have become very relevant sources of information, as well as tools of communication in countries where internet technology has high penetration rates and is available to the lay public. With regards to journalists, social media appears to be an important source of inspiration when it comes to story ideation, and when we take a look to the politicians, in the parliamentary arena social media has a higher presence than traditional media and other strategic communicators. Moreover, social media provides important tools of communication for weaker antagonists (e. g. in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, technological changes are perceived to benefit Palestinian interests and threaten the Israeli's) and other strategic actors of conflicts. However, early indications found by the INFOCORE research project suggest that social media is far better at spreading hate and extremism than at promoting peace and reconciliation.

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