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The News Media
and the Transformation
of Ethnopolitical Conflicts

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1. Introduction

For most journalists, reporting on conflict is not a special situation governed by a unique set of rules. The situation is, in fact, quite the reverse: reporting on political, economic and other collisions of interests within a society is very much a part of the journalist's everyday routine. Conflicts are, after all, part of daily life in a democracy. Subsequently, the absence of reports in the media on conflicts would suggest that democracy itself has been lost.

Ethnopolitical conflicts differ from other forms of political conflict in several crucial ways. The fundamental distinction is that the conflicting parties often resort to violence because they see this as the only means of resolving their grievances with other ethnic communities. In recent years, Europe has again experienced a significant number of ethnopolitical conflicts, especially following the disintegration of authoritarian regimes in Central and Eastern Europe.

Evidently, however, nationalism by no means seems to be restricted to eastern or south-eastern Europe. In western Europe as well, the media plays a significant part in whipping up nationalist feelings of xenophobia, racism or ethnic chauvinism. As immigration into Europe increases over the next few years, these ethnopolitical conflicts are likely to gain in significance. Nationalistic tensions, coupled with the creation and expansion of supranational institutions such as the European Union (EU), which are designed to serve as a counterweight and means to reduce or even eliminate nationalism, will continue to play a central role in European politics and thereby also in the media.

Most research into nationalism takes as its starting point the notion that centralised communications, social mobility and increased levels of economic contact can help surmount cultural differences between factions of the population and thus foster a more homogenous culture (Gellner 1983). However, there are also indications that increased communication can in fact produce the opposite effect, at least in areas where several equally developed cultures exist side by side. This occurs because improved communications and transport reinforce a sense of being different in those who belong to minority groups (Connor 1994). It is not surprising then that ethnic tensions and separatist demands are on the increase throughout the world.

In ethnically diverse communities, the media often serves to reinforce existing differences and thus accelerate a disintegrating effect on the homogeneity of the population. The key issue is, then, under which conditions, as Anthony Giddens (1997) suggests, do „negative spirals of communication" (mutual negative perceptions which degenerate into hate, feeding more hate) between ethnic communities develop and ultimately degenerate into violence?" Moreover, „Under which conditions can the media actively promote empathy, peace and political stability between differing community factions?"

This chapter explores the relationship between the political framework of conflict regulation and journalism. Second, it specifies what it sees as the determining factors within the media system. Third, it attempts to evaluate the efforts of external actors such as international and

non-governmental organisations (NGOs) to support the transformation of conflicts. It indicates the limits of external intervention, including coercive measures. Finally, some conclusions on the potential role of the media are drawn and some recommendations proposed for improving the performance of the media in situations of tension and conflict.

2. Consensus (Consociation) Democracy and ‚Constructive Journalism'

Throughout human history, there have been several commonly employed methods of resolving ethnic tensions and conflicts. Among these are a) genocide, b) enforced population exchange, c) partition of the state (secession/self-determination) or d) integration/ assimilation (McGarry and O'Leary 1993). Ethnic strife is generally regulated through four principal methods: a) hegemonistic control, b) third-party mediation, c) cantonisation or federalisation and d) establishing models of power-sharing or consensus democracy (‚concordance democracy').

In reality, as intra-state conflicts are played out, these approaches tend to appear simultaneously and in varying combinations. Genocide and enforced population exchange are disapproved of from a moral perspective and are rejected by the international community. Secession too is generally considered unacceptable. The federalist model usually proves to be fragile if the population of the country in question is ethnically heterogeneous. Even the proponents of a federalist Europe have become noticeably quieter in the face of resurgent nationalism. The political *Zeitgeist* instead favours consensus democracy (power sharing between political subjects) as a means of transforming ethnic conflict.

It should be remembered that what we are witnessing is an experiment. Never before has a lasting solution to fundamental ethnopolitical conflict been brought about through consensus (consociation) democracy. Throughout the history of the formation of the nations in Western Europe, force has always been what defined political realities. Moreover, even established modern democracies such as Britain, France or Spain have failed notably in their efforts to end nationalist conflicts in places such as Northern Ireland, Corsica and the Basque Region.

The architects of the consensus democracy model for the resolution of ethnopolitical conflicts begin from the assumption that the usual democratic safeguards are insufficient to prevent the abuse of power in multicultural or ethnically divided societies. The principle of majority rule always harbours the danger that minorities will be overruled or disadvantaged. For this reason, political institutions have been proposed to ensure that all sections of society have their requisite share of power. The guiding principle is the proper balancing of interests on all levels of the political system.

The prerequisite for such a balance between ethnic groups in the state must be a corresponding compromise between the political elites that head the different ethnic groups. This must include a renunciation of violence such as the forced assimilation or persecution of weaker ethnic groups, as well as attempts at secession. The concept of consensus democracy in an ethnically heterogeneous state thus rests on the following four elements:

1. a grand coalition between the political elites of the various sections of the population;
2. a proportional representation system, with corresponding precautionary measures to ensure equal rights in important areas such as education, control of public expenditure, employment policy and public service broadcasting;
3. a right of veto for all those sharing power, enshrined in the constitution;
4. the guaranteed internal autonomy (self-determination) of all ethnic segments constituting the state.

Such a model of consensus democracy is admittedly idealistic, as it presupposes, on the part of the nationalistic centres of power, a conscious renunciation of the type of politics which seeks unilateral advantage. Therefore, consensus democracy must be viewed not so much as a state that can be realistically achieved in full, but rather as a goal or aspiration. One can concede, however, that even a mere process of conflict transformation which is based on such a model already incorporates a significant element of peaceful conflict transformation, to the extent that unilateral objectives and their achievement by pressure or force are ruled out from the outset.

In an ideal world, the media should at least attempt to orient its reporting style towards the creation of peace, instead of intensifying prejudices that in turn heighten conflict. Such ideal journalism is a critical part of the consensus democracy concept, and represents the proper role of the media in conflict prevention and resolution. Despite this, the media is often perceived as giving priority to negative aspects in its reporting of conflicts, with a suspicion that they do this consciously because it ‚sells better‘. Demands are often made upon the media to adopt a more constructive role in conflict prevention and experienced journalists are frequently accused of being innately sceptical. Nevertheless, it is too simplistic to expect the media as an entity to feel collectively obliged to actively promote the peace and development of civil societies.

Time and again, international state and non-state organisations, as well as other institutions, have issued statements expressing the view that the media could have an important role to play in constructively reporting about conflicts and combating the propaganda of hate. For example, in the closing declaration of the European Conference on Conflict Prevention (Amsterdam, 27-28 February 1997), the EU was called upon to examine how they might support the reporting efforts of independent local media in societies prone to conflict. In addition, special education was proposed for local and European journalists working in conflict regions. Journalists would be urged to convince the general public and politicians in power of the need to invest in conflict prevention. It was further suggested that this could begin with emphasis being drawn to the considerable humanitarian and material costs of conflict management.

The International Federation of Journalists (IFJ) remains convinced that the media can not only help to defuse conflicts, but also that it is uniquely positioned to encourage coexistence and co-operation between people of different origins. „By practising objective, fact-based reporting that avoids stereotypes or stirring up rumours, individual journalists and the media as a whole have a tremendous potential to contribute to understanding and bridge-building“, was the view taken by IFJ in a manual addressing this topic (IFJ 1997). In the course of a debate about the reporting of ethnic conflicts in Africa, this organisation also drafted detailed and practical recommendations for more balanced and objective media reporting on such events. Neither is there any lack of sophisticated suggestions from other important players on the international stage as to the precise nature of positive or constructive journalism. Besides the classic five ‚w‘s, (*why, what, who, where, and when*) which should be covered in news items, for instance, demands from the United States of America (USA) also call for an ‚s‘ (*solutions*) as well as a ‚c‘ (*common ground*).

There are high expectations placed upon the journalist‘s role. These include the proposition that journalists reporting on conflicts should be trained in the techniques of resolving conflict, and should always aim at acquiring an impeccable reputation as promoters of peace. They are asked to enlighten the public, and tell the stories of the victims of conflict, rather than reinforcing the point of view of the perpetrators of violence.

It has even been suggested that the media may well be the most powerful means available for the resolution of future conflicts or even for the prevention of wars. Furthermore, journalists are well supplied with well-intended proposals to help them realise these expectations. Johan Galtung

(1997) for instance suggests that journalists should:
* illuminate the story in detail from all sides;
* be careful to draw from diverse sources;
* restrict overuse of elites as sources, but should make use of different experts;
* avoid glorifying the technology of war;
* also use dramatic imagery to portray the horrors of war;
* offer sensible and well-written reports about ordinary people;
* supply more background reports;
* be aware that news makers (spin doctors) are out to manipulate them;
* avoid treating their work itself as a story;
* give ample coverage to and promote peace initiatives.

Box 1: Suggestions for Peace Journalism

Annabel McGoldrick and Jake Lynch (a correspondent for the British news media *Sky News* and *The Independent*) have developed a set of rules for the improved coverage of conflicts, which among others, include the following techniques:

1. AVOID portraying conflict as consisting of only two parties contesting one goal. The logical outcome of such a scenario is for one to win and the other to lose. INSTEAD, a peace journalist should DISAGGREGATE the two parties into many smaller groups pursuing many goals, thus opening up more creative potential for a range of outcomes.

2. AVOID drawing stark distinctions between the self and the other. These are often used to establish the impression that the other party is a threat or beyond the pale of civilised behaviour – both key justifications for violence. INSTEAD, seek the other in the self and vice versa.

3. AVOID treating a conflict as if it is only going on in the place and at the time that the violence is occurring. INSTEAD, try to trace the links and consequences for people in other places now and in the future.

4. AVOID concentrating on what divides the parties and the differences between what they say they want. INSTEAD, try asking questions that may reveal areas of common ground, and lead your report with answers that suggest that some goals may after all be shared or at least compatible.

5. AVOID reporting only the violent acts and describing the horror. If you exclude everything else, you suggest that the only explanation for violence is previous violence (revenge); the only remedy, more violence (coercion/punishment). INSTEAD, show how people have been blocked and frustrated or even deprived in their everyday life, as a way of explaining the violence.

6. AVOID blaming someone for starting it. INSTEAD, try looking at how shared problems and issues can lead to consequences that all the parties say they never intended.

7. AVOID focusing exclusively on the suffering, fears and grievances of only one party. This divides the parties into villains and victims, and suggests that coercing or punishing the villains might constitute a solution. INSTEAD, treat the suffering, fears and grievance of all sides as equally newsworthy.

8. AVOID victimising language such as ‚destitute,‘ ‚devastated,‘ ‚defenceless,‘ ‚pathetic‘ and ‚tragedy,‘ which only tells us what has been done to and could be done for a group of people. This dis-empowers them and limits the options for change. INSTEAD, report on what *has* been done and could be done by the people. Don‘t just ask them how they feel, also ask them how they are coping and what they think. Can they suggest any solutions?

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9. AVOID the imprecise use of emotive words to describe what has happened to people.

- ‚Genocide' means the wiping out of an entire people.
- ‚Massacre' is the deliberate killing of people known to be unarmed and defenceless. Are we sure? Or might these people have died in battle?
- ‚Systematic' e.g. raping or forcing people from their homes. Has it really been organised in a deliberate pattern or is it a number of unrelated, albeit extremely nasty incidents?

INSTEAD, always be precise about what we know. Do not minimise suffering but reserve the strongest language for the gravest situations or you will beggar the language and help to justify disproportionate responses that escalate the violence.

10. AVOID demonising adjectives, for example, ‚vicious,' ‚cruel,' ‚brutal' and ‚barbaric.' These always describe one party's view of what another party has done. To use them puts the journalist on that side and helps to justify an escalation of violence. INSTEAD, report what you know about the wrongdoing and give as much information as you can about the reliability of other people's reports or descriptions of it.

11. AVOID demonising labels like ‚terrorist,' ‚extremist,' ‚fanatic' and ‚fundamentalist.' These are always given by us to them. No one ever uses them to describe himself or herself, and so, for a journalist to use them is always to take sides. They mean the person is unreasonable, so it seems to make less sense to reason (negotiate) with them. INSTEAD, try calling people by the names they give themselves. Or be more precise in your descriptions.

12. AVOID focusing exclusively on the human rights abuses, misdemeanours and wrongdoings of only one side. INSTEAD, try to name ALL wrongdoers and treat equally allegations made by all sides in a conflict.

13. AVOID making an opinion or claim seem like an established fact (e.g. „Eurico Guterres, said to be responsible for a massacre in East Timor…. „). INSTEAD, tell your readers or your audience who said what („Eurico Guterres, accused by a top U.N. official of ordering a massacre in East Timor…. „). That way you avoid signing yourself and your news service up to the allegations made by one party in the conflict against another.

14. AVOID treating the signing of documents, which bring about military victory or cease fire, as necessarily creating peace. INSTEAD, try to report on the issues which remain and which may still lead people to commit further acts of violence in the future.

15. AVOID waiting for leaders on our side to suggest or offer solutions. INSTEAD, pick up and explore peace initiatives. Ask questions to ministers, for example, about ideas put forward by grassroots organisations. Assess peace perspectives against what you know about the issues the parties are really trying to address. Do not simply ignore them because they do not coincide with established positions.

McGoldrick and Lynch 2000

Reviewing these recommendations for good journalism in crisis situations, it is easy to fall into the false assumption that all that is needed is to report clearly, without prejudice, and ask probing questions in such a way as to enlighten readers/listeners/viewers about the ‚real problems'. It is further implied that their audiences will only then begin to understand the ‚real costs' and reassess their views accordingly. In a similar vein, many commentators simply believe that the new and better information technologies, such as the Internet, will almost automatically generate more peaceful means of overcoming conflict. A good example of this is the opinion of Jay Moore, a teacher of history at the University of Vermont and a specialist in conflict transformation. In his

contribution to the debate on war and peace reporting (on *www.mediachannel.org*), he expressed his conviction that, in the age of the Internet, reporting on conflicts and wars will never again be the same. This has resulted from people now being able to communicate directly at a distance, across the front lines, as was clearly evident in the case during NATO's attack on Serbia in 1999!

Nevertheless, Moore cautions that the Internet is by no means a substitute for more traditional and established methods of reaching out, such as leaflets, vigils, sit-ins and various other forms of ‚propaganda of the deed', i.e. forms of activism that have been employed by peace groups and other NGOs. He points out that access to the costly hardware and telecommunication facilities that make it possible to use the Internet for organising is skewed by race and class, as well as, to some degree, by gender. Although the Internet includes many kinds of people, it is also much more subdivided by interest and identity groups that may or may not communicate with one another. It seems best at linking those who already have some interest in communication and not as effective at reaching the unconverted.

But before we engage in a debate on how Internet and other new technologies might alter the ways in which conflicts and wars are perceived and opposed worldwide, we should first pose the question as to why humbler and simpler ideas have so far been unsuccessful. Any realistic evaluation of the degree to which the media can contribute to conflict prevention and resolution must be founded on an analysis of the general political, economic and social framework for media development in the country in question; only then can we hope to properly examine the specific opportunities for the individual members of that media. The following sections outline the basic elements of just such an analytical framework.

3. Determining Factors within the Media System

We can best assess the role of the media in the prevention and resolution of conflict and in the safeguarding of peace if we see that role as essentially a component and expression of overall social conditions. Any framework describing the most important influences on the media should therefore highlight four fundamental areas:

- *political context*: the rule of law versus despotic authority;
- *economic conditions*: the media as an autonomous economic organisation or one subject to governmental control (media as part of the state apparatus);
- *quality of journalism*: critical and analytic reporting or mere functioning as ‚stenographers of power' using the ‚language of hate';
- *public attitudes*: enlightened democratic traditions or authoritarian value systems.

Under this model, the media is seen as a vector, the direction of which is determined by the influence of each of the four individual elements. A weakness in one factor can only be partially compensated for by the strength of another. In short, no element can exert its full weight if the others are lacking or flawed.

This analytical framework allows for the exploration of the inter-relationships of the four elements under various scenarios. If, for example, journalistic training is seen as the best starting point to inculcate higher standards of reporting in the long term, it must be realised that any efforts in this direction will unfortunately remain unsuccessful, while authoritarian forms of rule do not allow for media autonomy or as long as economic necessity stymies any increase in media consumption.

On the other hand, media which has succumbed to the language of hate will find that their impact will be limited by the extent to which they are addressing an educated public raised in an

enlightened, democratic tradition. Certainly, the evidence of established western democracies in times of economic prosperity supports this assumption. Moreover, in any state governed by the rule of law, media outputs that incite either ethnic hatred or illegal political action is usually dealt with in the courts.

There is, however, also some evidence that the long-term effects of the language of hate can be highly deleterious even in established democratic societies, and that legal counter-measures undertaken to combat it can themselves cause controversy. Different legal and political traditions also play a significant role here: whereas US courts will, in general, hesitate to impose limitations on the freedom of expression, most western European judges are notably apprehensive about Nazi propaganda or other similar remnants of an evil past.

Certainly, the propaganda of hate, even in marginal media, is capable of achieving a profound effect on the public if, under conditions of economic crisis, the fears and aggressive inclinations of the target audience are on the rise. In such situations, authoritarian political elites can come dangerously close to the levers of power, thus undermining the legitimate rule of law.

The analytical framework presented here points out at least three particular situations which can emerge whenever the media is forced to operate under conditions of increasingly violent tension and conflict. These can arise before, during and after such situations, although, in real life, these transitions are fluid.

If reports about tension and conflict are issued in a genuinely free and independent manner and presented in a fair and balanced way, they can indeed help to overcome conflict in that they will serve to educate the public, allowing their readers and listeners to form independent opinions. On the other hand, biased and manipulative reports can all too easily accelerate and intensify the crisis.

If the media is to be expected to function as a part of the consensus democracy approach to intra-state conflicts, other essential conditions and preconditions must also be fulfilled. These include: a clear commitment on the part of the political elites to resolve the conflict by peaceful means; a willingness to respect the rule of law; economic stability; high levels of education and a democratic awareness on the part of the target audience. Again, any strengthening of one of these fundamental elements will only bring about the desired result if progress has been achieved in the other areas as well.

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Box 2: External Donations and the Impact of non-Nationalistic Journalism

In many transitional countries, especially under conditions governed by efforts at post-conflict rehabilitation, aid from the USA and western Europe has fuelled an NGO boom, with a correspondingly strong impact on the media. For instance, as part of various external attempts to establish long-term solutions for the conflict in the area, significant levels of foreign investment was channelled to non-government media in Bosnia and Hercegovina. At one stage this small republic had more media outlets than Berlin or Madrid, although less inhabitants! In this way, international institutions supported the growth of the media in this country. Western governments and NGOs caused, above all else, a significant increase in journalistic output, an increase that was unfortunately only rarely accompanied by a corresponding improvement in the quality of the journalistic product or of its political impact. The overall political situation, as illustrated by the uninterrupted dominance of nationalistic political parties in all elections after the Dayton peace accords in 1995, does not seem to have been significantly affected by the proliferation of new, anti-nationalistic media. Even the best-equipped media and the best-trained journalists will have little effect on their readers and listeners if economic recession persists in their country and as long as extremists call the

political tune. Regardless of this, the better journalists are trained and the more technically equipped their media is, the better the prospects that they will be able to strengthen and reinforce key initiatives for politics, the economy and society.

Box 3: Aiding Democracy through the Media

*A failed project:*At the beginning of 1997, the US Government made $200,000 available to a group of liberal journalists in Croatia, thus enabling them to found the news magazine Tjednik. The Soros Open Society Institute and some other NGOs contributed considerable funding. Unfortunately, the magazine, although of high journalistic quality, had little impact and had to be closed a short time later under a burden of enormous debt. It seems that, at least at the time, the homogenised public of Croatia was unreceptive to a non-nationalistic discourse as offered by the magazine.

*A successful project:*There are fortunately more positive examples. One of these is the Belgrade-based Beta news agency, which was founded in the early Nineties by several journalists who opposed the prevailing nationalistic paradigm that was widespread among the Serbian public at that time. With the support from Western donors, the project has made a considerable impact by placing high emphasis on lean management and new information technologies. Over the past five years, this organisation has become the leading press agency in southeast Europe, supplying print and audio information to several hundred customers throughout the region, the rest of Europe and overseas.

The establishment of economically stable and a politically balanced media presupposes both an effective rule of law and a functioning market economy. Media that is well organised and functions democratically has a vested interest in ensuring that the public gains an insight into the workings of government and economic players. Only then, can it develop best practices and play a positive role in conflict transformation.

4. External Efforts to Transform Conflicts: Activities of International Organisations and NGOs

4.1 The ‚freedom of the media‘ versus the ‚control of the media‘

There are certain conditions that contribute to the prevention of conflict. These can be summarised as: the rule of law, a tradition of tolerant and democratic political culture, and (financial) independence of the media. If in the course of conflict, it becomes clear that national justice is being perverted, international law provides some further measures that can be taken into consideration by international political committees. Nevertheless, there is not much evidence of effective measures undertaken to counter national authorities who fail to follow the media guidelines set out in internationally recognised documents such as those of the Council of Europe or of the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), even though issues of this kind appear regularly on the agendas of international committees.

International agreements and authorities that can exercise political control serve as an important point for orientation. Thus ideal conditions, as set out in international agreements, can be

invoked by democratic bodies in areas affected by conflict, as well as by the democratic media itself. Since the end of the Cold War, membership in the Council of Europe and observance of OSCE regulations have taken on a particular importance for former communist countries where there is believed to be a threat of intra-state conflict. For these countries, the incorporation of the political, legal and other principles of the Council of Europe is seen as an important prerequisite for subsequent entry into the EU, which is the most important means of integration into the European continent. The post-communist elites in these countries thus derive much legitimacy from their various promises to take their countries into the EU as a ‚zone of permanent peace'. Effectively, they can always be taken at their word by comparing, particularly in times of crisis, the actual situation in their countries with the rules and standards implied by the international legal and political obligations their countries have agreed to.

A number of cases involving alleged infringement of press freedom in western European states have already been tried before the European Court of Human Rights. Most observers expect an increasing number of cases linked to intra-state conflicts to arise in other parts of Europe. However, it can take many years for infringements to be properly addressed in the international courts.

The international community, insofar as it seeks to emphasise its declared belief in the need for the timely prevention of conflict, must be constantly on the alert for problems affecting the media in crisis-ridden areas. The respect for freedom of speech and freedom of the press must become a primary component of international politics and not dealt with as something of secondary importance. A move in this direction was made at the end of 1997 with the appointment of Freimut Duve, a member of the German Social Democrat Party, as the first media ombudsman at the OSCE.

4.2 What international law says

In 1993, in direct response to the experiences of the civil war in Yugoslavia, the Council of Europe organised a seminar in Strasbourg dealing with issues faced by the media in situations of conflict and tension. The Deputy Chairman of the European Court of Human Rights, Rudolf Bernhardt, took this opportunity to analyse existing legal safeguards for media autonomy in the context of the state in crisis situations (*see* Reljic 1998, p. 102),

Article 10 of the *Convention on Human Rights*, in particular, protects freedom of speech and the press. It allows that „in the interests of national security, territorial integrity and public safety...“ and other overriding interests, restrictions on this freedom are certainly possible. In fact, Article 15 states explicitly that in emergencies which „threaten the life of the nation“, extensive restrictions to the freedoms guaranteed in Article 10 are permissible, as long as they are provided for under international law.

Bernhardt accentuated this crucial problem when he asked: „Where is the borderline to be drawn between media freedom and the permissible restrictions, especially in situations of conflict and tension?“ And his answer was: „The extent of permissible intervention in the activities of the mass media is difficult to circumscribe“. Thus, this senior judge held that advanced censorship is not permissible under any circumstances and that none of the available measures may be used without a legal basis. He added three further conditions that must be fulfilled before any restriction of media autonomy could be considered justified (ibid.):

- Restrictions and interventions that are imposed by public authorities must serve the purposes laid down in Article 10 of the Convention on Human Rights, such as „protection of national security, territorial integrity or public order.“
- All restrictive measures must meet the test of being ‚necessary' in a democratic society. The

appropriate national authorities shall decide whether they are necessary, but their conduct must be reasonable. Furthermore, all national conduct shall come under international scrutiny, and must therefore be verifiable by the European Court of Human Rights.

- No measures taken by the authorities, even in situations of tension and conflict, may be outside the control of independent courts.

Bernhardt pointed out in particular that Article 15, which relates to the empowerment of the authorities in public emergencies and states of war, permits even more extreme restrictions than Article 10 that is intended for use in normal times. He writes, resignedly, „It is extremely difficult, and even impossible, to demonstrate clearly and convincingly the powers of public authorities as well as the limits of any measures taken in such emergency situations". His conclusion follows the same vein: „Any measures taken in such exceptional situations which are not designed to restore order, peace and democracy fall outside the proper function of public authority" (Reljic 1998, p103). On the occasion of International Press Freedom Day (3 May, 1996), the Council of Europe's Committee of Ministers issued a declaration and recommendations concerning the protection of journalists in situations of tension and conflict (Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe 1996). These recommendations emphasised the importance of the role of journalists and the media in alerting the general public to infringements of national and international law and to human suffering in situations of conflict. In this way, they can help to prevent further infringements of human rights and human suffering. Principles for the physical protection of journalists and the guarantee of their rights and working conditions were also described in this document.

The recommendation was essentially an extension of Articles 10 and 15 of the *Convention on Human Rights*, augmented by a few practical tips stressing the need for adequate insurance cover for journalists reporting in war zones. National authorities were urged to make the work of journalists easier by removing restrictions on the use of telecommunications equipment and relaxing entry requirements. The recommendation also drew attention to the hotlines manned by the International Red Cross in Geneva and by other international organisations, to which journalists can turn for help whenever they feel their safety is threatened.

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Box 4: Monitoring the Media Coverage in Potential Conflict Areas: The European Institute for the Media

Since 1992, the European Institute for the Media (an NGO located in Düsseldorf, Germany) has carried out more than 40 missions designed to monitor media coverage of parliamentary, presidential and other elections in countries of eastern and central Europe and in the former Soviet Union. The missions, mostly financed by the EU or OSCE, sought to evaluate whether the media provided impartial and balanced coverage of the issues to be addressed and the political choices facing the electorate in these situations. Especially in newly established democracies, the level of political communication during the election process is an important indicator of the overall state of the democracy.

EIM monitoring makes use of both qualitative and quantitative methods of analysis. The former is gleaned from the interviews that international experts conduct with media professionals, the candidates and their representatives, public authorities, researchers and others involved in political communication. Quantitative analysis measures the total amount of time and space devoted to political candidates as well as assessing the tone (positive, neutral, negative) of the reports.

The preliminary results of such monitoring are normally presented to both the local and international public in a press conference on the day following the elections. The final

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report, which essentially contains a detailed survey and analysis of the media situation in the country of mission, is then published several week later both in English and in the language of the country in which the elections took place (a list of publications can be found at *www.eim.org*).

Monitoring projects in this manner can affect events in several ways. The immediate influence arises from the presentation of the preliminary report to the local public, which thus receives impartial information as to how well it has been served by the media. Another outcome is that the international community also gains reliable information about the work of the media in newly established democracies. This information can prove useful for the subsequent planning of assistance policy and other actions from abroad.

EIM's media reports further serve as a type of early indicator for potential conflicts, especially those of an ethnopolitical nature. They describe the main substantive issues governing political communication, and also describe just how these are discussed. For instance, if public authorities suppress criticism, or if they tolerate hate speech and other forms of inflammatory public discourse, this is likely to lead to tensions and conflicts.

The EIM pointed out, for example, in its report on the Russian presidential elections, March 2000, that Vladimir Putin overwhelmingly dominated the media coverage during the campaign. The general reporting still did not live up to the standards and regulations set out in the laws of the Russian Federation or in the international agreements to which the Russian Federation is a signatory. Although there is still a long way to go, some improvements of reporting have been made in the 2000 election, which was less confrontational than the reporting about the State Duma campaign in the previous December or in the previous presidential elections in 1996. Large segments of the public, including many people working in the media, appeared to have accepted the outcome as a foregone conclusion, probably because of the popularity of the acting president and the overwhelming advantages enjoyed by him.

Nevertheless, during the final week of the campaign, the state-controlled TV channel ORT once again resorted to 'black PR', actively denigrating the opponents of the acting president. The methods contradicted fundamentally the ethical principles of the journalistic profession, as well as falling short of the international standards that Russia has endorsed. This reversal to past practices, coupled with disturbing signs that Vladimir Putin's administration intends to approach media-related questions in a more assertive way, indicate that freedom of expression and the autonomy of the media in Russia is endangered. Subsequent developments, such as legal proceedings against and the imprisonment of several leading Russian media figures, seem to show that this warning was accurate.

4.3 NGOs activities for the protection of freedom of speech and journalists' rights

It is only relatively recently that NGOs have come to the fore in the fight to protect freedom of speech and the rights of journalists. Within the political framework established during the Cold War, governmental organisations such as the OSCE or UNESCO always functioned as the arena (among others) in which issues of journalistic freedom were discussed. Since the end of the Cold War, however, a growing number of NGOs have become increasingly involved in this process as well.

Among the best known of the organisations specialising in the field of media are: the International Federation of Journalists in Brussels (*www.ifj.org*), Reporters sans Frontières in Paris

(*www.rfs.fr*), the Committee to Protect Journalists in New York (*www.cpj.org*), the Glasnost Defence Foundation (*www.gdf.ru*) in Moscow, the International Press Institute in Vienna (*www.freemedia.at*), Article 19 in London (*www.article19.org*), the International Freedom of Expression Exchange (*www. ifex.org*) in Toronto and many other NGO's and human rights groups.

All of these organisations collect and publish information about censorship and other forms of infringements on the freedom of expression and autonomy of journalists. Also acting as international pressure groups, they further demand that public authorities move to rectify such violations. Governments are, in general, sensitive to such exposure, as it tends to have a significant impact on their standing in the international community. Thus, criticism from international civil society, as personified by the NGO community, can sometimes produce highly adverse effects on uncivil governments, often making further external financial support conditional on demonstrated improvements to the country's human rights record, a record that must include respect for press freedom.

However, the debate surrounding legal and political protective measures designed to safeguard the freedom of the press and the safety of journalists in crisis situations has led most analysts to the disappointing conclusion that journalists and the media have only very limited direct means available in order to contribute significantly to the ending of conflict. As paradoxical as it may seem, the amount of media autonomy that can usually be achieved in violent situations is limited.

Nearly every intra-state conflict will attract the intervention of external powers. Whether it is through the will of major external powers acting alone or as a result of concerted action undertaken by the international community, the authorities of the country in question can almost always be induced to make concessions in the area of media autonomy in return for political, military and other forms of support. This was evident, for instance, in all parties' relative tolerance of pointed critical media attention in the course of the Yugoslav civil war. What remains unclear, however, is just how durable such media organisations can be, especially after international attention to their crisis region has dissipated.

4.4 The limits of coercive ,information intervention'

In the summer of 1997, the peace process in Bosnia had essentially ground to a halt. Diplomatic initiatives and threats of military action appeared to be having little effect on the situation, particularly on the actions of the extreme nationalist faction of the Bosnian Serb leadership. In fact, quite the opposite had occurred: the international peacekeeping troops were increasingly referred to as occupation forces in the television channels controlled by Serb nationalists. Thus images of NATO tanks were shown, interspersed with archive footage of Nazi occupation troops taken during the Second World War. Tension mounted (*see* Reljic 1998, p91).

Along with other Western politicians, the then German Foreign Minister Klaus Kinkel proposed that the international peacekeeping force should ,jam' such broadcasts in an effort to combat „one-sided, anti-Western, demonising reporting". Carl Levin, the Democratic Senator from the US state of Michigan, expanded on this suggestion a few days later. He pointed out the US military should make use of its capability to transmit radio and television programmes directly to the Bosnian-Serb population, using the EC-130E Commando Solo Aircraft, in order to suppress and drown out undesired propaganda. The US had already effectively employed similar methods in Grenada, Iraq and Haiti (ibid.).

A few weeks later, international peacekeeping troops in Bosnia moved to occupy important broadcasting centres, in a concerted effort to get some of the worst ,offenders' off the air. Even so, in the parliamentary elections held shortly afterwards in the Bosnian Serb Republic,

the radical nationalist parties were able to maintain their position, despite the fact that the dissemination of their broadcasting propaganda had been significantly restricted by the actions of the international peacekeeping force. The strength of ethno-chauvinist political parties in elections in Bosnia and Hercegovina remained unbroken, even five years after the Dayton peace accords, and in spite of the massive amounts of foreign donations that had been invested into anti-nationalistic social and political programmes, including direct support for the media (ibid.).

At the same time, negative sanctions were exerted against the media, such as the closing of overt nationalistic outlets. The notion of this kind of forced intervention in the media during conflicts and wars is, of course, not new. More recently, the wide reach of modern electronic media and the accelerated development of information technology have lent credence to the idea that it may indeed be possible to develop highly complex news systems. These systems would be aimed at eliminating or at least transforming conflict through a combination of political and military means.

Such ‚information intervention' was discussed at length in several issues of the influential US journal *Foreign Affairs in 1997* (Metzl 1997). Since the major powers are evidently becoming ever less willing to fight on a massive military scale the infringement of human rights, the author proposes the creation of an independent UN Information Intervention Unit, specifically geared for intra-state conflicts. The proposal envisages three principle duties for such a unit: the monitoring of information provided in crisis-torn regions; the broadcasting of peace promotion material – *peace broadcasting*, – and in extreme cases, the jamming of radio and television broadcasts in order to halt the flow of hate and war propaganda.

Earlier, two former high-ranking members of President Clinton's administration had voiced the opinion in the same US-journal that information campaigns „to spread the truth" early on in the Rwanda conflict might well have alleviated the tragedy. They also asserted that US air strikes in the summer of 1995 on communications equipment of the Bosnian Serb army could have produced the additional advantage of impeding Bosnian Serb propaganda. Their arguments rested on consideration of the many opportunities for effective intervention available to the United States by virtue of its technological advantage in the fields of data processing and communications, as well as in satellite monitoring and the direct broadcasting of programmes. It was felt that these methods, combined with military force, could well help the US to resolve successfully regional ethnic conflicts and effectively to expand its role as a world power by the successful resolution of regional ethnic conflicts.

I am convinced that methods such as those described above, which find their foundation in external information intervention, including coercive measures such as the jamming of transmitters or professional bans of outlawed journalists, are of very limited effect. Certainly, hate propaganda can be suppressed in part, but it is highly doubtful that the ‚delicate plant of democracy' can be transplanted by force. Even the long-term effect of proactive measures such as the beaming-in of broadcasts from external transmitters is open to question. As media communication is always an expression of national culture, external broadcasts of programmes in the language of the recipient country can never achieve the authenticity and credibility of home-grown media material.

While it is true that in situations in which armed conflicts have broken out and the internal authorities have imposed open or covert censorship on the media, information from whatever source gains in importance, this is usually only the case for a relatively short period. Besides this, as the history of external broadcasting shows only too clearly, even neutral information prepared abroad is viewed by most of its recipients as merely an expression of the political strategy of the country from which it comes.

In principle, the optimal conditions for rapid and irreversible change come about only in the aftermath of larger crises and violent conflicts, as was the case after the unconditional surrender

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of Germany after the Second World War, or with the demise of most of the former socialist countries of Europe after the collapse of the Soviet Union. Under such conditions, the great majority of the population becomes receptive to change and there is little opposition on the part of those formerly in power.

But ethnopolitical intra-state conflicts, of the kind that have increasingly shaken Europe and the world in recent years, seldom end with a clear resolution – as the peace agreements in Bosnia and Chechnya have demonstrated all too clearly. It is far more likely that the crisis itself will create a lasting and determining influence on all aspects of life. The media will thus remain a perpetual victim of conflict, as the authorities maintain political and economic control over them and intensify conflict as they aggravate societal prejudices through biased and manipulative reporting.

The aim must be the safeguarding of peace by changing post-war society in such a way that future conflicts can be effectively resolved without resorting to violence. It seems clear that only concerted actions and initiatives on all fronts, involving politics, economy, media, society and, above all, education, can hope to have a lasting effect. Such actions are, unfortunately, rare.

It is, however, unfair to say that the West stood by passively while nationalist media reinforced conflicts in crisis areas. Many millions of Euros and US dollars have been invested in equipment, training and other forms of media aid. However, an integrated process has rarely been discernible; on the contrary, the EU increased its media aid to Serbia, for example, but prevented this country from participating in the PHARE democracy programme. In addition, Western willingness to provide outside support for securing long-term peace is all too often overshadowed by other, for the most part geo-strategic and power political, considerations. Chechnya and Bosnia are just two examples of this.

5. Conclusion

In most situations of tension and conflict, projects seeking to draw up ambitious guidelines and recommendations for the re-structuring of media communication usually remain in an ivory tower. However, one conclusion is certain: without proper co-ordination between the many media assistance and democracy programmes already established by the EU, NGOs and the other Western protagonists, as well as by the crisis-torn countries themselves, all initiatives run the risk that, at best, considerable financial resources will be wasted. This seems to be a lesson that still has not been learned, if the evidence of the plethora of media aid projects is any guide. They are meant to improve the situation in conflict-torn areas but often end up in competition and may prove redundant.

Box 5: Goals and Tasks of the European Media Agency
- promote transparency and rationality
- combat media concentration and encourage diversity of opinion
- act as clearing-house for the publicising of proposed international media projects
- evaluate project requests from countries in need
- develop the media in the target countries to become self-sufficient and autonomous
- organise, promote and award a ‚quality mark' for the numerous training programmes
- increasing public awareness of the significance of journalism within the political process

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If the international community indeed has the political will, a European Media Agency could well provide a remedy. Its primary task would be the promotion of transparency and rationality in this area. It could begin as a clearing-house for the publicising of proposed international media projects, as well as for the evaluation of project requests from countries in need. In this way, overlap, duplication and waste could be avoided.

The fundamental task of the European Media Agency in the long run, however, would be a concerted effort to put the development of the media in the target countries on a self-supporting footing. Rather than continuing to make charitable donations, the international community should instead stimulate economic growth in the media in countries threatened by conflict. Based on the recommendations of this new organisation, loans and credits from the World Bank, the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD), the EU's Media programme for audio-visual media, or other funding sources, could provide the economic foundation for media autonomy in many regions. In established democracies, projects co-ordinated and supported by the European Media Agency could, for instance, help combat media concentration and encourage diversity of opinion.

Economic success depends essentially on appropriate expertise and product quality. Accordingly, such a new coordinating organisation, at the very least, could serve to organise, promote and finally award some kind of ‚quality mark' for the numerous training programmes for journalists, media managers and other media professions.

In co-operation with media organisations and academic institutions, one important further activity of this organisation would be the continuous monitoring of media development on the Continent. The resulting database could serve as an informed starting point for action programmes and other activities of the organisation.

In addition to this, the European Media Organisation could contribute to increasing public awareness of the significance of journalism within the political process, especially in situations of conflict and crisis. It is very much in the public interest to understand just how centres of political power and journalists, as controllers and operators, handle the media, especially when the foundations of the state are shaken.

This need is particularly urgent when conflict becomes irreversible. After the bloodshed is over, it should not be the case, as it was in the former Yugoslavia, that commentators agree that one word led to another until it was all too late. Real violence, employed by those in power to impose their rule on all parts of the society and to diminish plurality, by restricting or even eliminating media autonomy for example, opens the floodgates for the language of hate in the media. This will incite further vicious circles of violence, until eventually the whole country goes up in flames. From beginning to end, the power driving the conflict is not the journalistic word, but rather the hand wielding the power in state and society.

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