

# STREAMLINING OF MEDIA AS A CFSP INSTRUMENT

## Introduction

It is evident that media has played a significant role in escalating conflicts. This is true for almost all violent conflicts – Yugoslavia, Rwanda, Gujarat, Iraq, Kosovo/a and many more. Media is also employed to radicalise young people into terrorists.

Nevertheless, media may also be used to contribute to the prevention of conflicts and the building of peace. Even in conflict management during a crisis, media and communication strategies are essential. To be successful in its civilian response to conflicts, in its ambitions to spread democracy and fundamental rights and in its ambitions to support social development and regional cooperation in third countries, the European Union has to make use of media as a catalyst for change.

The EU's Common Foreign and Security Policy provides the European Commission with all necessary instruments to deal with civilian prevention of conflicts and to support peacebuilding, including working with the media. Humanitarian Aid (ECHO) along with programmes for human rights and democracy (EIDHR), development cooperation (DCI), neighbouring countries (ENPI) and the Instrument for Stability (IfS) ensuring rapid response in urgent crises and medium-term support under more stable conditions are among the instruments available to the Eu-

ropean Commission. As is often the case, the challenge is to develop and implement coordinated, comprehensive strategies based on these instruments. This is definitely necessary in the field of media, which constitutes a relevant tool in all phases of a conflict, be it the objective democracy, human rights and social development, or be it peacebuilding and prevention of conflicts. Due to the prominent role of the media in achieving these objectives, strategies connecting short-term rapid actions with medium- and long-term measures are essential. This implies tools and mechanisms ensuring the capacity to react rapidly and comprehensively in situations of urgency, crisis or emerging crises.

## Media and structural conflict prevention

When working with local media in conflict areas a delicate balance must be maintained between our immediate goals – conflict prevention, democracy, fundamental freedoms and peacebuilding. Most conflicts are rooted in structural inadequacies, but triggered by dynamic causes often featuring the political leadership of the conflicting parties as participants. The distinction between structural and dynamic factors is very useful when looking at the scope and goals for media assistance.

The prevention of conflicts – recurring or not – requires a public sphere with open discussion of social inadequacies where po-

litical leaders are held accountable. Critical and constructive debates on adjustments to prevent problems from escalating into a violent conflict require independent, professional media as well as a well-functioning civil society.

In the former Yugoslavia it was possible to discuss almost everything in the media, but impossible until the immediate pre-conflict phase to criticise and debate the ruling Communist Party or the fundamental construction of the Yugoslav federal state, characterised by a multitude of national groups. In other conflict countries it has been very difficult to question unfair ethnic and economic divisions, geographical claims on sovereignty and natural resources, or other issues, which may eventually cause an escalation of the conflict.

Rather than merely serving as the government's mouthpiece, the media must be allowed to discuss any issues of relevance to the local community in an early pre-conflict phase, thus opening a new role for the media as a catalyst of social change. It is also essential to ensure that a common media platform is accessible to all population groups to maintain national identity and coherence. The goals and means used by international actors in the early pre-conflict phase are identical whether the objective is conflict prevention, democracy, fundamental

freedoms or sustainable peace and conflict transformation.

### **Dilemmas of media in structural conflict prevention**

When international actors enter a conflict area during conflict escalation or in the phase immediately before the outbreak of violence, the situation is much more complicated.

One of the dilemmas faced after the conflict has escalated is that the very legitimate foreign policy goals of supporting a transition to democracy and promoting fundamental freedoms may easily threaten the peace. Research demonstrates that totalitarian systems in transition to democracy and fledgling democracies are vulnerable to conflicts. When Yugoslavia introduced multiparty elections at the federal level, nationalists were elected leaders in four of five republics. One year later the country was engaged in several severe wars. Similarly, the genocide in Rwanda took place shortly after the first democratic multiparty elections.

The conflict vulnerability of countries in transition does not make the goal of democracy irrelevant, but it indicates the necessity to time and prioritise realistic goals to prevent a country from the gradual escalation of violent conflicts.

Similarly, a free and diverse media landscape accessible to all groups of the popu-

lation is usually considered an important step forward in a democratic development. In the phases right before and after a peaking conflict, there is no guarantee that a quick liberalisation of media laws helps prevent the conflict or that a mushrooming of independent media will stabilise peace. Again, the Yugoslav example is illustrative. Less than two years before the internal wars, new media legislation was passed after heavy internal and international pressure. Private, commercial media were allowed and the state media were required to adhere to international public service standards, including independent and impartial reporting. It is common knowledge that the state media in Yugoslavia acted as a mouthpiece for the political leadership in each republic, supporting violent conflicts with each other.

With the political escalation of conflicts the new legislation was never implemented and the state media ended up as useful propaganda tools. Most of the experienced, professional journalists were dismissed, sent on leave or removed from the screens and loudspeakers. Young, inexperienced staff without journalist educations replaced them, and eventually only patriotic or nationalistic journalists and editors were in control. The Yugoslav example is far from alone in demonstrating the importance of international focus in the conflict escalation phase on the practical protection of the safety, rights and independence of journalists and media rather than concentrate on

pushing for new legislative measures. Timing and priority is crucial.

After the ending of a war where the media has been a means in the escalation of conflict, many international donors have often assumed a need to liberalise the media sector as much as possible, particularly the mechanisms for issuing licenses to new broadcasters. What seems a logical reaction to biased media escalating a conflict may involuntarily sow the seeds for the next conflict as in the former Yugoslav republic, Bosnia-Herzegovina, where 400 broadcasters started up in a war-torn country with a non-existing market. Media without financial resources, almost no professional journalists and hardly any ethical standards tend to associate with political factions which may harm rather than facilitate peacebuilding. An international focus on freedom of speech standards is seldom enough to establish peace in an immediate post-conflict situation or prevent an outbreak of violence in a pre-conflict context, while in a stable democracy it might be one of the most important prerequisites for sustainable peace. Again timing, priorities and a balanced approach are necessary.

Thus, strategies to promote democracy and human rights must necessarily be coordinated with strategies to prevent conflicts or build peace. Consequently, the EU must consider these strategies as interdependent and integrated elements in other development activities.

### Working with media to change conflict dynamics

Timing and approach is even more critical when it comes to actions playing directly into the dynamics of a conflict dealing with content, advocacy and policy.

Numerous violent conflicts demonstrate that most media become biased in their reporting and fuel prejudice against their adversaries once the conflict begins to escalate. In this phase the top leadership of governments, opposition parties, independence movements or threatened minorities attempts to control the media. The media institutions become the scene for internal fights between professional management and journalism on one side and staff submitting to political pressure on the other. In this phase the goal for international media interventions must be to support genuine media ideals like impartiality, diversity and objectivity. Often this can be achieved by combining capacity building, advocacy and increased involvement of local media representatives in international cooperation.

In the immediate pre-conflict phase all significant media are under control or have been harassed and closed down. The space for questioning the top leadership in its fueling of the conflict is minimal or non-existent. Media contributes to moral panic by

propagating prejudice, stereotypes and even hatred against the 'others'. Some media even actively encourage popular participation in killings and fights, making it virtually impossible for the population to rely on any media as neutral. In this phase international media interventions should support cross-conflict, self-regulatory means to prevent media from broadcasting and distributing conflict-escalating journalism. This phase also calls on international actors to make conflict-escalating media aware of the risk of being held accountable to the International Criminal Court. Alternatively, the interventions must be in the form of reliable, trustworthy sources beyond the control of the top leaders.

In this case international organisations, donors and implementers need to consider their media policy carefully. If international donors in crisis situations produce content with unsupported messages or convey particular policies they will fail. This is partly because communication research today shows that the recipients do not uncritically accept and appropriate such messages, and particularly not if their own reality is different from the conveyed messages. And it is partly because constructed messages or positive 'propaganda' for peace hampers the credibility of the local media and makes it difficult for the local population to believe

that the content in media is independent and free. If a journalist in one situation pursues one goal as peace, however important it is, she might be seen to pursue other interests in the political life of a democracy. At its best, media content may help set the agenda for discussions among the recipients. In a short-term perspective international actors must respect that editorial freedom and autonomous control over editorial content remains with publishers, broadcasters, editors and journalists of the local media we support, while increasing their capacity to make professional, impartial and responsible editorial judgements.

Particularly in news and fact-based journalism, international actors must maintain a careful balance, respecting the integrity of the local journalists, while helping to develop their professionalism. Less controversial than news programmes are fiction series, sports and entertainment, which may be highly efficient to set the agenda for popular discussions and contribute to re-establishing relations, re-conciliating populations or increasing awareness about the causes of conflict.

In the charts next page different genres and content are related to the phases of conflict mentioned above and the aims of international conflict prevention or peacebuilding.

Possible interventions/period	Distant pre-conflict	Pre-conflict	Immediate pre-conflict	During conflict
Aim	Removal of root causes of the conflict	Mediation between adversaries and solution of conflict issues	High-level negotiations, monitoring, protection of diverse identity groups	High-level negotiations, humanitarian assistance
Focus of content	Debating existing systemic weaknesses and visions for the future	Debating conflicting issues of concern to the adversaries and allowing access for all identity groups	Strengthening relationship between identity groups, discuss solutions to issues of conflict, and reduce stereotyping in media	Providing neutral humanitarian information and news about political and international development
Genres	News, Documentaries, Debates, Investigative journalism	News, Current Affairs, Debates with phone-ins, Documentaries	News, Current affairs	News, Public service announcements
Media	Existing mainstream, New local, Net media	Existing mainstream, Community, Net media	Existing mainstream, Community media	Existing niche, Main stream, UN, International media

Possible interventions/period	Immediate post-conflict	Post-conflict peacebuilding	Transformation of conflict society
Aim	Humanitarian assistance, re-establishment of relationship and state structures	Reconciliation, social change, civil networking between adversaries	Involve society in the development of joint values, visions and systems
Focus of content	Providing neutral humanitarian information and news about post-conflict and discuss solutions to the triggers of conflict	Re-establishing relationship through dealing with human life of enemies, providing common platforms for interaction, communication and cultures	Analysing and debating economic, social, structural and political inadequacies, search for solutions and common visions for future society
Genres	News, Current affairs, Public service announcements	News, Current affairs, Documentaries, Public debates, Fiction, Sports	News, Current affairs, Documentaries, Public and political debates
Media	Existing mainstream, UN, New local media	Existing mainstream, Niche, Net, Local, Community media	Existing mainstream, Niche, Net, Local and community media

A coherent EU-strategy employing all instruments in coordinated efforts to prevent conflicts, build peace and secure fundamental rights across the world is in high demand. But media also plays an important role in preventing long-term threats by helping to avoid radicalisation and the recruitment of youngsters to Islamist-based terrorism.

In the Federally Administered Tribal Area (FATA) in Pakistan the sense of isolation and negligence from the national authorities combined with very active religious leaders in the villages of the FATA, bordering Afghanistan, has fuelled increased radicalisation of the local population, and particularly youth. The strong basis for bitterness and hostility towards the national authorities and rest of the world can only be removed if the isolation is breached and the empowerment of the local population is increased. The only broadcaster transmitting in the area is Pakistan radio, which has very little credibility with the local population. A neutral network of community radios providing independent public service programming including important news and social reporting could help in creating a common public sphere within the FATA, give the local population a voice in the Pakistani community and strengthen their sense of inclusion in the national and international communities. It would be very important to include also neutral reports about events in rest of Pakistan and the region.

Another example where EU intervention could be useful is in dealing with the Bolivian media to prevent violent conflicts, as land reforms, nationalisation of the hydrocarbon sector, and the election of a constituent Assembly to agree on a new constitution has drawn protests from the dominant city-based broadcasters, representing primarily the middle and upper classes. As a contrast to the very critical private media a new public radio network covering also the rural part of the country may ultimately prove to develop into a mouthpiece for the government defending the government's reforms rather than becoming the balanced and much needed public service broadcaster providing access for the marginalised, poor parts of the population. The division between the government and opposition is now reproduced in the media structure, which makes it urgent to encourage private and public media to act professionally, to be balanced and impartial, reflecting all parts of the population. The EU could prevent an escalation of conflict by facilitating an interim Forum for Dialogue involving private and public media, journalists, politicians and regulatory bodies to agree on guidelines such as:

- codes of ethics and systems for media self-regulation;
- public service broadcasting – programme standards and goals;
- private media – roles, programme standards and markets;
- community media – social role, programme standards and funding;

- license allocation procedures, including programme standards;
- principles for capacity building of journalists and editors.

This step is supported from the Bolivian government and willing partners from the European public service broadcasters and the NGO community.

Lebanon is another example, where media could help prevent internal violent conflicts and conflicts between Israel and Hezbollah. The stakes are high for the involved politicians and the media is an important tool. Inter-cultural dialogue is virtually non-existent so it is crucial and urgent to establish a mutual, neutral, diverse and moderate platform for dialogue and debate to keep peace and promote unity in the country. The political leaders from all factions seem most focused on their own private media, which has made it difficult for the public broadcaster, Télé Liban, to reflect the diversity of all the popular groups and strengthen national coherence. Nevertheless, the public broadcaster would be an obvious platform for running a project focusing on programmes with dialogue and debates among the population groups, and independent and diverse news programmes. To succeed, such a project should be managed by all conflicting parties in the country and probably be facilitated through ASBU, EBU and relevant representatives from the NGO community working with media in conflict.

Together with other measures such as diplomacy, mediation, civil society collaboration, travel, trade, disarmament and non-proliferation, media can make an important difference to peacebuilding and conflict prevention.

#### **Steps to be taken**

For EU there are plenty of challenges in making media an integrated and efficient tool in its efforts to prevent conflicts, build peace, democracy and development. The Common Foreign and Security Policy still needs to streamline the use of media.

It is crucial to ensure coherence within short-, mid- and long-term strategies. The impact from rapid short-term measures must not be counterproductive, but rather support long-term goals of conflict transformation, democracy and development. Therefore, it is important that the thematic media strategies are coordinated. It is also essential that the coordination between the EC delegations, the geographical units and the important instruments such as IFS and EIDHR is proactive and action-oriented.

Finally, it is important to build the strategic, human and technical capacity for the EU to act rapidly and comprehensively with media in conflicts and crises. With a capacity to react rapidly the media can act

as a lifeline by contributing accurate and life-saving information about humanitarian assistance as it does in Darfur and did in Afghanistan. The media can through rapid actions take the first steps to re-build relationships and confidence across conflicting communities, or the right and timely steps to prevent escalation of a conflict.

It would be logical for the EU to make a dedicated media taskforce ensuring internal coordination at all levels including the capacity to react rapidly. It would however be more efficient to enter a genuine partnership with the Bonn Network and make use of the strategic, technical and human capacity of the member organisations, which are all actively working with media in conflicts.

The Bonn Network has more than 25 member organisations worldwide – among them the Council of the European Union, OSCE, UNDP-BCPR, EBU, numerous media development organisations, researchers and the international media. By partnering with the Bonn Network, the EU would take an important step towards a global collaboration and coordination of media strategies with governmental, non-governmental and intergovernmental actors working actively with media in peacebuilding and conflict prevention.

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