Working Group 1 Media in Times of Crisis:
Focus on Media Service Providers in Times of Crisis
Summary of the WG
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The Working group session started with a keynote of *Boro Kontić*, Director of the Media Centre in Sarajevo. He has over 30 years of experience in the field of journalism and is inter alia the author of the documentary movie "*Years eaten by lions*", about journalism and hate speech in ex-Yugoslavia between 1991 and 2010.

In his presentation Mr. Kontić stressed out the importance of professional journalism. It was noted that propaganda and media come together in times of crisis and one should not blame only media, as media is usually the reflection of society. As everybody can be media today, it is crucial for professional journalists to investigate all the details and to approach the subject from all the possible angles (as it was shown on a very interesting video clip during the session – the video showed the same scene from different angles thus providing the view with three different impressions), as choosing to report from one single/specific perspective might distort the truth. And as it was mentioned during the discussions, truth is the first victim of war.

In his presentation Mr. Kontić pointed out that in modern journalism the word 'why?' is often missing. It seems that trying to explain why some events occur is not interesting for the media these days. Other than that Boro Kontić stressed out two main characteristics commonly found in propaganda: 1. treating others as enemies, and 2. depicting enemies as possessing some dangerous weaponry.

This was followed by the presentation of *Xesco Reverter*, World news editor at TV3, the generalist TV channel of the Catalan Broadcasting Corporation, and former special correspondent in different world crisis and hotspots. From his perspective as public broadcaster, he reported on how his channel has invested time and resources to cover and explain the refugee crisis.

In particular, Mr. Reverter showed three examples how media can provide a positive contribution during crisis. Firstly, TV3 broadcast dedicated, long-format news programmes which attempted to report about the crisis from every single perspective. Secondly, TV3 broadcast children's programmes, where TV3 explained the situation of refugees with a language appropriate for kids. Thirdly, there were some short news programmes where the channel tried to relate the crisis situation with some of the European values (Opera for example).

All this helped to create a healthy environment and contributed to shape public opinion in a good manner, which resulted in some people from Catalonia volunteering to help migrants in crisis situations.

Finally, Senior Adviser *Ingvil Conradi Andersen* shared the recent work and activities conducted by the Office of the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media in this field and reported on the issues at stake for media from their perspective.

It was emphasised that during crisis situations those who are in power always will try to take control of the information; that is why media professionalism and ethics become crucial.

Three main issues were highlighted: the crisis in Ukraine, the fight against terrorism and reporting on the migration crisis.

The crisis in Ukraine was and still is one of the number one priorities of the Office over the past couple of years. The main challenges include threats, violence and harassment of journalists, denial of access and accreditation, blocking of television channels, propaganda and media manipulation. Ms. Andersen pointed out the distinction between illegal propaganda (such as war propaganda for example) and other forms of propaganda, such as fabricated news, or trolling which doesn't necessarily violate international laws. The activities of the Office therefore included dialogue meetings, trainings for the regulators, conferences, publications[1] and recommendations.

The main challenges in regard to terrorism include conceptual shortcomings/definition problems, blocking/filtering of internet content, encryption and anonymity.

As for the migration crisis, it was noted that safety issues, attacks and harassment of journalists, as well as denial of access to refugee camps and other premises were the major challenges. The office notably issued a Communiqué on the rights and safety of journalists reporting on refugees.

What followed was a lively and interesting discussion. A representative from the Croatian regulatory authority AEM reported on one of their recent decisions[2] with regard to the temporary suspension of the licence of a local broadcaster for incitement of hatred. The decision had triggered protest against the regulator.

It was pointed out that, generally, positive approaches should be favoured and that blocking is never a long term solution of the problems. False information should be confronted with fact-based reporting. It was also highlighted by all three speakers that one may manipulate news and information, but that eventually people will always get the message and learn the truth. It is therefore the task of regulators to promote/to contribute to an enabling environment for the free flow of information. Moreover, it was remarked that it is up to media – and not governments - to create content and thus provide/ensure pluralism.

Participants of the working group also highlighted the importance of self-regulation, which of course is linked to media literacy – as always a determining factor. Media ownership and transparency were also

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[1] See in particular "Propaganda and Freedom of the Media", A non-paper by the Office of the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media on propaganda and media freedom, 26 November 2015; http://www.osce.org/fom/203926

[2] For more information on the case see: http://www.epra.org/news_items/incitement-to-hatred-croatian-aem-temporarily-suspends-local-tv-licence

mentioned as highly relevant in that context. It was stressed out that it is important to be able to access all kinds of information and content to be in the position to making one's own conclusions.

It was pointed out that in any case transparent regulation of the media is crucial, which preferably should take the form of self-regulation. In this way existing ethical codes would appear more effective. However, there is also a need for an educated and independent judiciary, which can properly deals with interferences with freedom of expression in order to prevent arbitrary restrictions.

At the end of the discussion, the representative of the Council of Europe, Ms. Lejla Dervisagic mentioned some of the Council of Europe reference documents in relation to the discussed issues[3].

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[3] See notably the Guidelines of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe on protecting freedom of expression and information in times of crisis:
https://search.coe.int/cm/Pages/result_details.aspx?ObjectID=09000016805ae60ehttps://search.coe.int/cm/Pages/result_details.aspx?ObjectID=09000016805ae60e
Recommendation No. R (97) 21 of the Committee of Ministers to member states on the media and the promotion of a culture of tolerance, Recommendation No. R (99) 1 of the Committee of Ministers to member states on measures to promote media pluralism: https://rm.coe.int/CoERMPublicCommonSearchServices/DisplayDCTMContent?documentId=0900001680645b44