Media Conflict and DEMocratisation

MeCoDEM Final Report

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4.1.1 Executive Summary

The project ‘Media, Conflict and Democratisation’ (MeCoDEM) investigates the interconnections between public communication and contentious politics during periods of regime transformation from authoritarian rule to a more democratic order. By taking a communication approach, the research contributes new knowledge to the understanding of conflicts transitional societies. Conflicts are understood as communication events whose dynamics and outcomes are shaped by the frames, narratives and interpretations that are used by different stakeholders – governments, civil society groups, media – to achieve their goals.

Empirical research has been conducted in four countries: Egypt, Kenya, Serbia and South Africa, each representing contrasting scenarios of democratic transition. The MeCoDEM research programme pursues a mixed-method approach combining both quantitative and qualitative methods, including content analysis, interviews and big data analysis of Twitter communications.

Taken together, the results of the project shed light on the dynamics of public communication in complex conflict situations:

- The democratisation of public communication opens up new spaces for voices that have been silenced under the old regime, but at the same time triggers and intensifies conflicts between competing values, interests and identity claims. Limited communication capacity of the actors involved is one of the reasons why these conflicts often result in civil violence.
- In transitional societies democracy itself is a contested concept. There is no shared understanding of the democratic future of the country and what this might entail. Research participants widely agree that neither the western model of journalism nor that of democracy can be adopted in a 1:1 fashion. But the alternatives remain vague and are prone to authoritarian captures.
- Mainstream media in transitional societies usually follow the dominant discourse of those in power. Even though in some countries the voices of citizens are represented on the media agenda, institutional opposition (political parties, interest groups) are largely absent in the media coverage.
- Vernacular and digital media are an important forum for different groups to participate in the public discourse. But they are frequently the driver of polarisation and inter-group violence.
- While journalists in transitional societies adopt the standard norms of western journalism, such as objectivity, detachment and the watchdog role, the role of the media in conflict situations shows that these norms can be counterproductive for conflict resolution and reconciliation. It is important for media assistance projects to address these dilemmas.
- Current discourse overestimates the role of social media for citizen empowerment, as they are only one element of a broad range of communication tools employed

by civil society actors. ‘Nano media’ like pamphlets, rallies and symbolic action, as well as creative expressions, remain important modes of communication, especially for poor and disadvantaged communities.

- The communication capacity of governments, both on national and local level, remains poor. Government actors continue to use a top-down propaganda model when communicating with citizens. The lack of responsiveness and the inability to listen are one of the main factors that trigger and exacerbate conflicts.

4.1.2 Summary description of project context and objectives

Recent instances of democratic transitions have demonstrated the fragility of emerging democracies and the unpredictability of the outcomes of the transition. In many cases, the attempt to establish a more democratic form of government has been aborted and replaced by authoritarianism; others even descended in civil war with repercussions for international peace. Even countries that are regarded as well on their way towards consolidation have suffered setbacks and struggle with the consequences of socio-economic inequalities, cultural tensions, unaccountable governments and the legacies of the past.

In these processes the media of mass communication have played a pivotal role both as a source of information that mobilises citizens and as a tool of manipulation in the hands of political and economic elites. Recently, the internet has revolutionised the way in which societies communicate. In particular social media are regarded as a driving force in popular uprisings, for example of the Arab Spring.

So far, democratisation research has paid little attention to the role of the media in democratic transitions and the conflicts that accompany these periods of change. And there are hardly any empirical and comparative studies in this area (Voltmer 2013).

The project ‘Media, Conflict and Democratisation’ (MeCoDEM) aims to fill this gap. It investigates the interconnections between public communication and contentious politics during periods of regime transformation from authoritarian rule to a more democratic order. By taking a communication approach, the research contributes new knowledge to the understanding of media and communication in transitional societies. In this project, conflicts are understood as communication events whose dynamics and outcomes are shaped by the frames, narratives and interpretations that are used by different stakeholders – governments, civil society groups, media – to shape the public debate and to mobilise support.

In the course of the project empirical research has been conducted in four countries: Egypt, Kenya, Serbia and South Africa, each representing contrasting scenarios of democratic transition. All four countries have gone through severe political conflicts and social unrests in the recent past, even though the degree to which these conflicts have been mediated differs significantly.

MeCoDEM is a collaborative project that brings together scholars from seven countries and different disciplines, in particular communication and journalism studies, political science and democratisation studies, international relations, sociology, development studies, area studies and computer science.

MeCoDEM also works closely with a range of local and international stakeholders to develop communication strategies that help to achieve sustainable conflict resolutions and a more inclusive and accountable political order. Stakeholders include international media assistance organisations and their local branches, civil society groups, policy makers and think tanks.

The research programme of MeCoDEM is based on three key assumptions that provide the conceptual framework of the project:

- *Democratisation frequently triggers conflicts between antagonistic groups, interests and world views.*

Contrary to the assumption that democracy acts as a mechanism for solving problems peacefully, democratic transitions often trigger conflicts between winners and losers of the transformation and frequently between dormant divisions that are mobilised in subsequent power struggles. Often, the notion of democracy itself becomes a focus of contestation, as different visions of the democratic future compete for domination. In these circumstances, limited institutional capacity and incomplete transitions foster popular disillusionment and discontent, with potentially negative consequences for the legitimacy and survival of the new democratic order.

Scholars of democratisation have pointed out that transitions to democracy are highly volatile periods with an increased likelihood of the outbreak of civil unrest and even violence (Cederman, Hug and Krebs 2010). This applies in particular to elections when competition between political parties and candidates highlights and often exaggerates divisions. In the absence of loyal constituencies, many candidates mobilise or religious ethnic divisions to secure electoral success, thereby triggering inter-communal violence that is difficult to control (Collier 2009; Mann 2004; Snyder 2000). Further, increased citizen participation and rising expectations for a better life put a considerable amount of pressure on policy makers to deliver change, often leading to a spiral of disillusionment. Paradoxically, the abolition of censorship often results in a tightening of authoritarian control, as governments are unable to engage with citizens and public criticism in a constructive way.

We suggest the notion of ‘democratisation conflicts’ to capture the specific conflicts that are triggered by, or accompany with democratic transitions, or the demand for democratic change (Voltmer and Kraetzschmar 2015). Democratisation conflicts denote conflicts that have been dormant for some time, but could not be expressed under authoritarian rule; but they also comprise conflicts that are inherent to democratic politics, like electoral competition, transitional justice and uninhibited public speech.

From a communication perspective, conflicts crystallise around contested interpretations of social conditions and events: what 'really' happened, who is to blame and what should be done to resolve the conflict. Hence, the way in which conflicts are communicated, the words and images that are used and whose voices are privileged, have a profound impact on the dynamic of conflicts and their eventual outcome. Hence, to fully understand democratic transitions and the conflicts that accompany them we have to move beyond the 'hardware' of institutional transformation and pay attention to the 'software' of communication cultures and processes, which by mobilising perceptions and identities determine what kind of political action is possible or not.

- *Contemporary democratisations take place in a media-abundant environment and are shaped by 'media logics' of both traditional and new digital media.*

Technological innovations and the proliferation of channels and platforms have opened up new spaces for communication, which provide dissident voices with a powerful mobilisation tool, but are also highly effective instruments for government propaganda and surveillance. In particular, the rise of the Internet and of social media has transformed the dynamics of popular uprisings like the 'Arab Spring' as well as protest movements and inter-group violence (Deibert and Rohozinski 2010; Diamond 2002).

At the same time, global trends in journalism have given way to a more adversarial, consumer-oriented style of political reporting that increases the pressure on political elites and accelerates political events. While the 'watchdog role' of the media is essential to a functioning democracy, some authors argue that an emerging 'hyper-adversarialism' that breeds negativism and cynicism and systematically prevents deliberative conversations in public communication (McNair 2009, pp. 244–246). It is the model of a commercial press and a journalism of adversarialism that has been widely exported to new democracies. However, in the volatile and fragile context of transitional societies this model might have unintended negative consequences.

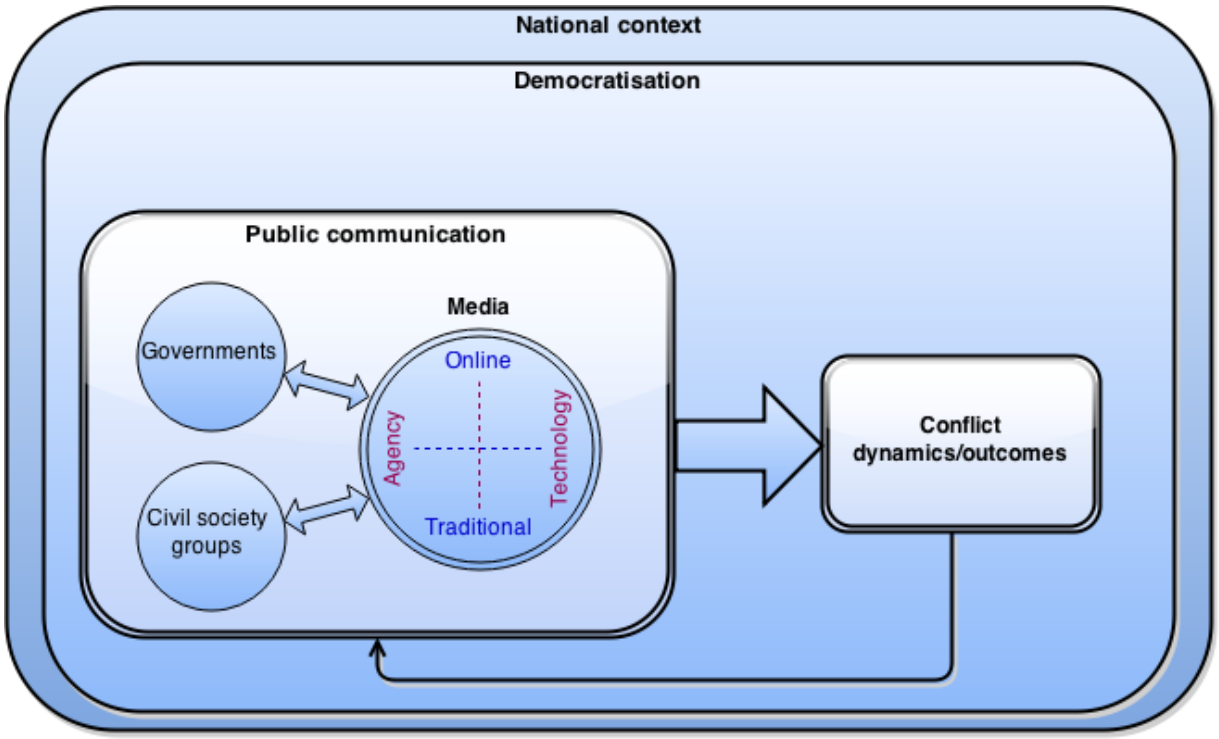
We suggest the concept of mediatisation, which so far has been exclusively studied in the context of advanced Western democracies, to understand the changing media environment in which contemporary democratic transitions take place (Voltmer and Sorensen 2016). In this new media-saturated environment political actors – from protesters to governments – have to incorporate the media's logic of operation into their own strategies and organisational structures. Even though this process is not uniform across countries, we argue that democratisation conflicts are now highly mediatised events. In the media-saturated environment of the 21st century, the ability to mobilise public opinion and to influence the course of politics depends to a large extent on the ability to exploit the technologies and agenda-setting power of a multitude of media outlets and platforms, both online and offline.

- *Public communication encompasses a multitude of platforms, formats and context in which citizens engage with political issues*

The role of the media cannot be understood in isolation. Rather, they are part of an interconnected space of public communication where agendas, interpretations of social reality and identities are constituted and contested. While most of the research on media and conflict focuses primarily on the media (see for an overview Vladisavljevic 2015), the research programme of MeCoDEM investigates the role of the media in their interactive relationship with other actors, in particular governments and civil society actors, who are competing in the public space for attention and recognition. It can be assumed that the way in which conflicts are communicated as well as the degree of contestation in this public space significantly impacts the dynamics and outcomes of democratisation conflicts.

These interactions take place within the context of particular national cultures and political systems, which shape the rules and values of public communication and provide the formal and informal mechanisms for political action. More specifically for the research interest of the MeCoDEM project, the context of democratisation is of particular relevance. Depending on the state of political transformation – the legacies of the old regime, the degree of institutional capacity, the legitimacy of political authority, but also civic culture and social norms – the course of conflicts can take very different directions, with far-reaching consequences for the consolidation of the new democratic setting. Figure 1 gives an overview of these considerations.

Figure 1: A model of public communication in democratisation conflicts



Following from these considerations, the research programme of the MeCoDEM project addresses the overall questions:

- How do the media report on democratisation conflicts and is this likely to promote or prevent cooperation and reconciliation?
- How do journalists understand their own role in democratisation processes and the conflicts that accompany them?
- How do civil society groups communicate during conflicts and do their communication strategies enable conflict resolution?
- How do governments communicate with conflict parties, how responsive are they to the grievances of citizens?
- How do actors who are involved in conflicts use digital media, and do social media help to give voice to excluded groups?
- What is the understanding of democracy, its values and practices, and are these understandings contested between different actors?
- What are the strategies of media assistance organisations for developing media and journalism in transitional societies?

4.1.3 Description of the main results

A. Research design, methodology and data

A.1 Research design

The research design of the MeCoDEM project combines two major elements: a cross-country comparison and a multi-case study approach.

For the **cross-country comparison** we opted for a 'most different design' by selecting four contrasting countries (from North to South): Serbia, Egypt, Kenya and South Africa. These countries are characterised by different socio-economic, political, cultural and historical experiences, but they are similar in that they have all recently embarked on a process of democratic transition (Collier 1993; Lane and Ersson 1994). These differences help us to understand how societies and political systems respond to the 'shock' of democratisation and how they deal with the conflicts that are associated with the transition. The differences also shed light on the contextual nature of democracy itself and how it is understood and practiced in different cultural, political and social circumstances. Ultimately, increasing the variation between the countries under study highlights the need for an approach to impact and intervention that is sensitive to the context in which change is pursued.

In short, the contextual features of the four countries of the MeCoDEM project can be described as follows:

- Serbia:
  Serbia's democracy emerged from the deeply traumatic experience of the break-up of former Yugoslavia and a five-year civil war. After mass protests, Milosevic was forced to step down as president of the country, thus giving way to the first democratic election in 2000. Serbia's democracy is still fragile and struggles with unresolved issues of borders and national identity.

- Egypt
  When designing the project, Egypt was at the forefront of the Arab Spring and great hope was put into its future democratic development. However, the election of Mohamed Morsi in June 2012 and the military coup to remove him from power in July 2013 put an end to the Egyptian revolution. Egypt is an example of stalled transition following the capture of a dramatic popular uprising by powerful old elites.

- Kenya
  Kenya's democracy emerged from a history of colonialism and the struggle for independence followed by nearly thirty years of one-party rule. Since the introduction of multi-party politics in 1992, Kenya has enjoyed relative stability, but

corruption, neo-patrimonialism and ethnic tensions continue to be a threat. Recent terror attacks have further undermined stability.

- South Africa
  The history of more than forty years of apartheid still looms heavily over South African society. In 1994 the first democratic election with full franchise brought the ANC into power, which it has successfully defended in successive elections. Even though South Africa's democracy is widely regarded as well on its way towards consolidation, growing inequality and corruption are responsible for limited citizenship and social unrest.

To investigate the communication of conflict we selected three to four **conflict cases**, regarded as milestones in the recent political development, in each country. The structural nature of most conflicts does not sit easily with the definition of a 'case' as a unit of analysis in case study research. Studying conflicts within the case study paradigm therefore requires identifying moments when conflicts crystallise in the here-and-now and become visible through actual human behaviour (Woodside 2010; Yin 2003). Following from this, our research focuses on conflict events, i.e. incidents which mobilise individuals or groups to engage in public actions and which are defined by a relatively clear beginning and end. While some of these conflict events involve violence between the antagonists, our research – unlike most of the existing literature on conflicts – is not exclusively interested in violent action, and indeed only some of our selected cases fall into that category. Instead, we also include conflicts that use primarily symbolic action – such as demonstrations, blockades or creative expressions – and are mainly fought out with the 'weapon' of the word.

We identified four categories of conflicts that regularly accompany democratic transitions:

- The transformation of citizenship:
  This conflict includes claims for participation, inclusion, representation and the extension of rights. The category also encompasses questions of belonging and collective identity, which often turn exclusionary and thus are frequently the trigger for inter-group conflicts.

- The transformation of power.
  The struggle against authoritarianism and for a more democratic political system always entails the control and restriction of power, which elites often resist. Democratic accountability involves institutions of checks-and-balances, for example the media acting as a watchdog, but also a vigilant citizenship demanding transparency and the delivery of what has been promised.

- Elections
  While elections are an indispensable ingredient of democracy, they are also often the cause – or at least the trigger – of divisions and violence. Since elections are times of increased politicisation, they mobilise all kinds of social, economic, cultural and institutional issues. The way in which elections are handled by political elites and citizens is also an indicator for the maturity of a young democracy, for example when it comes to accepting the outcome of an election.

- Transitional justice
  Countries that are moving away from authoritarianism are often confronted with the question how to deal with the atrocities and human rights violations that have been committed by the old regime or during the transition. The prosecution of the perpetrators is seen as a precondition for a peaceful development of the new society, but it can also open up deep divisions between the winners and losers of regime change.

Not all of these four conflict types have been covered in each of the countries under study because some of them were not relevant during the time when fieldwork was carried out. *Table 1* provides an overview of the conflict cases that were selected for investigation:

Table 1: Selection of conflict cases

	Distribution and control of power	**Citizenship (rights, minorities, identity)**	**Elections**	**Transitional justice**
SERBIA	Ombudsman (2015)	Pride Parade (2010)	Election 2008 (issues: EU, Kosovo)	Milosevic/The Haag (2001)
EGYPT		Maspero incident (2011)	Presidential election 2012, 2014	Christian-Muslim violence (2013)
KENYA		Somali community	Election 2007, 2013	Kenyatta/ICC
SOUTH AFRICA	Service delivery protests (Balfour 2009, 2010; Zamdela 2012-13)	Xenophobic violence (2008, 2015)		
	State of the Nation Address (2015)			

Overall, the set of conflict cases selected by country and democratisation conflict type reveals not only the scope and diversity of the MeCoDEM project, but the many possibilities for analysis:

- aggregated comparisons across countries to reveal general patterns;
- comparisons across conflict cases within and across conflict types to reveal conflict-specific dynamics;
- in-depth analysis of single cases.

A.2 Research methods and data collections

The research programme of MeCoDEM pursues a mixed-method approach that combines quantitative and qualitative methods. The method employed aimed to capture both the content of communications during conflicts, and the strategies, perceptions and objectives of the actors who were involved in these conflicts. Wherever possible, we used the same or similar research instruments based on a core set of concepts to ensure that different strands of the research programme are compatible.

- Quantitative content analysis of media coverage

Quantitative content analysis was used to identify patterns of communication in larger bodies of text (Krippendorf 2004). A detailed codebook was developed to capture the media coverage of the selected conflict cases. The research instrument is informed by the concept of framing (Entman 1993) applied to conflict events and covers variables such as causal attribution, labelling of 'the other', value orientations and proposed solutions. Another set of variables includes conceptions of democracy and the instrumentalisation of the past. Variables on journalistic style, such as bias, tone and the use of emotionality complement the content analytical instrument.

In total, 5.458 articles were coded across countries and conflict cases (see Table 2). The data were processed an analysed with the software programme SPSS.

Table 2: Quantitative content analysis: coded news paper articles

Country	**Conflict case**	**N of articles**
Egypt	Maspero	300
	Muslim-Christian violence	175
	Election 2012	472
	Total	*947*
Kenya	Election 2007	520
	Election 2013 / ICC trial Kenyatta	786
	Somali community	426
	Total	*1.732*
Serbia	Milosevic extradition	661
	2008 election	561
	Pride parade	420
	Ombudsman	279
	Total	*1.921*
South Africa	Service delivery protests	278
	Xenophobic violence	386
	SONA 2015	194
	Total	*858*
Grand total		**5.458**

While quantitative content analysis provides a reliable picture of the pattern of coverage and allows for comparisons across conflict cases and countries in a unified language (numerical data), the level of abstraction required for quantitative content analysis inevitably leads to the loss of information about the nuances and connotations that are so important in conflict communication. We therefore archived all coded articles by using the same ID numbers as in the SPSS dataset. The quantitative dataset can therefore also be used as a gateway to qualitative textual analysis.

- Semi-structured interviews

Another major methodology of the MeCoDEM research programme are semi-structured interviews with key actors who engaged in public communication during the selected conflicts: journalists, political activists/civil society groups and government officials. Semi-structured interviews combine the flexibility and openness of in-depth interviews with a certain level of standardisation that ensures comparability across individuals and set of actors (Rubin and Rubin 2012).

For each set of actors we developed interview guides which included actor-specific questions, while at the same time covered a set of core issues that were asked in all

interviews. Common themes that were covered across all interviews include: narrative of the conflict including understanding of its causes, consequences and possible solutions, perception of own role, values and goals, perception of other conflict parties, communication strategies and relationship with the media.

Wherever possible, we also implemented the reconstructive method by using media images and articles to encourage the interviewee to reflect on their own experiences and observations during one or more of the selected conflicts. This method is particularly useful when the conflict occurred some time ago. Reconstructive material then helps the interviewee to relive the conflict and reflect on how events unfolded, rather than producing rather general, impersonal statements.

All interviewees in the sample have been directly involved in the conflict cases under study: as journalists who covered the event or responsible editors, as political activists or functionaries of a civil society organisation that campaigned for one of the groups or causes in the conflict, or as political leaders who were in a position of decision-making power, either formal or informal, during the conflict.

A large number of interviews took place in remote, rural areas and required extensive and time-consuming preparation. Interviewers had to make themselves familiar with local customs and build networks with local communities to build trust and motivate individuals to take part in the study. This was particularly challenging in Kenya where we conducted interviews with the Somali community which currently feels under threat by accusations of terrorism and heavy-handed security operations by the Kenyan government and therefore responded to our requests for interviews with suspicion. Fieldwork was even more difficult in Egypt where after the military coup in 2013 freedom of speech and academic freedom were increasingly restricted. Under these circumstances, we had to be extremely cautious to ensure the safety of both researchers and participants. Informal networks of trust were used to access to interviewees, and in some cases it was impossible to record the interview. Unfortunately, for security reasons it was impossible to interview members of the Muslim Brotherhood who were key players in the 2012 Presidential Election, but were classified as a terrorist organisation after Mohamed Morsi was removed from power in 2013.

All interviews were transcribed and, if conducted in a local language, translated into English. We used the software programme NVivo for processing and analysing the data. In total, we conducted 267 interviews across the four countries, each lasting on average 1 hour and 8 minutes. *Table 3* provides an overview of the interviews that were conducted by the MeCoDEM project:

Table 3: Sample of semi-structured interviews

	Egypt	Kenya	Serbia	South Africa	Total
Journalist	24	25	29	25	103
Civil society actors	19	25	20	28	92
Government officials	10	23	20	19	72
Total	*53*	*73*	*69*	*72*	***267***

- Social media analysis

Social media communications generate a volume of data that can no longer be efficiently handled with manual quantitative content analysis. Instead, big data stored digitally online necessitates an automated approach to processing data. We therefore created an online platform – **Mecodify** – that enables researchers to extract, save and analyse social media data. The platform also provides tools for data visualisation.

Mecodify has been made available as an open source software through the project website (http://www.mecodem.eu/mecodify/) and can be used by the general public interested in an efficient and secure way of analysing social media communications. Due to privacy issues, the tool is restricted to Twitter data.

Mecodify is able to extract information on a range of variables related to the tweet, such as: tweet content, date and time, number of retweets, location; as well as the tweeter, such as: screen/real name, followers, following, number of tweets generated by an individual tweeter. The platform also includes features for data visualisation which allows Twitter communications to be represented graphically along a timeline and the connections between tweeters.

Since it is possible to break down the data to individual tweets and tweeters, Mecodify can serve as an efficient bridge between big data analysis and a qualitative in-depth analysis of discourses and networks.

- Visual analysis

In the course of the project a broad range of documents and artefacts has been collected that includes visual messages, ranging from images shared on social media (twitter), to campaign material and public expressions of identity and symbolic action, like graffiti, posters and amateur photos of conflict events. These materials are analysed with qualitative methods, using semiotic approaches to cultural expressions of conflict and democratisation (see Parry and Aiello 2015).

B. Findings

In the following, some of the main findings of the MeCoDEM project will be presented. The section is organised along the research portfolios of the Work Packages that were involved in empirical fieldwork. Each of these Work Packages focused on one of the key actors of public communications, as shown above in Figure 1:

- Media
  - news coverage of traditional media (newspapers, broadcasting where access to archives was provided);
  - journalists
- Civil society groups and political activists
- Governance actors
- ICTs: social media communications

Work Packages were designed as comparative research programmes, each working with the four country teams in Egypt, Kenya, Serbia and South Africa. Therefore, most of the findings presented in this section take a comparative cross-country approach. First findings from in-depth analysis of single cases are also presented, where available, to illustrate some of the key issues. Both comparative and single-case study analyses will be further explored in upcoming publications.

B.1 Media representations of democratisation conflicts

The Work Package (WP) 'Media representations of democratisation conflicts' was led by Prof. Nebojsa Vladisavljevic, University of Belgrade (Serbia). The research programme of this WP investigates how the media frame democratisation conflicts and how they portray the conflict parties involved. This analysis is based on quantitative content analysis. A sophisticated coding scheme was developed to capture various dimensions of conflict and democratisation. For our analysis, we selected media that played a relevant role in the selected conflicts, indicated by circulation of agenda-setting power in the public debate. Unfortunately it was impossible to include vernacular media and radio because these media usually do not archive their output in any systematic way.

For a more detailed discussion of the theoretical framework of this WP and its results see Vladisavljevic (2015) and Vladisavljevic and Voltmer (2017).

In the following we present findings on how media coverage in the four countries of our study framed the selected conflicts (see *Table 1* for an overview of conflicts of the conflicts): How do the media explain these conflicts and which solutions to they promote? How do the media portray the conflict parties involved?

Media framing of conflicts

During times of crisis and regime transition, journalists are expected not only to describe events, but also to provide contextual information and analysis. Transitions are traumatic events in the history of a nation and can turn people's lives upside down. The end of dictatorship usually triggers high hopes for a better life. But in the aftermath of regime change, most countries experience wide-ranging problems: the decline of the economy, the outbreak of inter-communal hostilities, or the breakdown of law and order. We categorised journalists' interpretation of the causes of post-transitional conflicts into political, judicial/legal, economic, cultural and international. *Table 4* summarises the results. Note that coded items could have more than one cause.

Table 4: Media coverage: Attribution of causes of conflict by country*)

Causes	**Egypt**	**Kenya**	**Serbia**	**South Africa**	**Total**
Political institutions	66,8%	76,6%	42,8%	44,4%	57,6%
Judicial/legal	34,5%	47,2%	53,7%	39,6%	46,2%
Political culture	65,4%	35,2%	17,3%	68,9%	39,0%
International	8,6%	9,1%	34,0%	2,8%	17,4%
Identities	31,0%	10,1%	10,5%	17,9%	15,2%
Economic	12,7%	10,3%	4,9%	47,1%	14,0%

*) Multiple causes per unit possible.

Overall, the data show that media coverage points at political institutions as the most significant cause of the democratisation conflicts selected for our analysis, followed by legal issues and law enforcement and political culture. Thus, the 'reality' created by the media portrays democratisation conflicts primarily as conflicts that unfold within, or spill over from, political institutions rather than, for example, economic conditions.

In line with the institutional focus of media coverage, judicial or legal causes come just after political institutions in terms of significance. It turns out that democratisation conflicts are not only about politics broadly conceived, but also have an important legal angle. Much of the media coverage on judicial problems originates from debates triggered by political violence, in some cases terrorism, and law enforcement.

Another important cluster of explanations is related to political culture, which emerged as a very important cause of conflict in media coverage, particularly in South Africa and Egypt. Conflict cases that stand out as being caused by a lack of democratic political culture are the Kenyan 2007 election and South Africa's service delivery conflicts. Together with identities (ethnic, religious, sexual etc.), cultural issues appear as the major driver of conflict.

In contrast, economic conditions are rarely addressed as causes of conflicts. This is particularly surprising, as some of the conflicts of our study – for example the post-election ethnic clashes in Kenya – arguably have their roots in economic inequalities and inadequate land reforms.

At this point it has to be emphasised that our data reflect 'media reality', i.e. a constructed reality that follows journalistic selection criteria and production constraints, but this media reality is not a one-to-one reflection of objective conditions. For example, while democratic transition is indeed first and foremost a transformation of political institutions, journalistic emphasis on political conditions might also reflect their own close relationship with power. Likewise, the focus of media coverage on cultural aspects of conflict corresponds with a self-perception of journalists as educators and agents of social change in most of our countries (see for more details section B.2). On the other hand, the lack of attention to economic issues can be seen as a severe deficiency of media coverage and might be the consequence of poor resources and training. Only South African journalists engage with the economic background of the conflicts they are reporting, in particular when it comes to service delivery conflicts.

What kind of solution to the conflicts covered in the news do the media propagate? Overall, almost three quarters (72.6%) of coded media items engage in a discussion of possible solutions to the conflict at hand, reflecting the urgent need for solutions in conflictual, often dangerous situations. *Table 5* presents different modes of conflict solutions, measured on a 5-point scale, with low scores indicating a preference for alternative [a] and high scores indicating preference for alternative [b]. These variables are about general approaches for dealing with conflict and not about specific policies.

The data suggest that discourses about conflict treatment promote institutional, as opposed to cultural, bottom-up solutions for democratisation conflicts. At the same time, there was no clear preference for either gradual, peaceful change, based on compromise and toleration on the one hand, or radical, violent change on the other.

Table 5: Media coverage: Preference for conflict solutions by country* [Means (N)]

Preferred strategy	**Egypt**	**Kenya**	**Serbia**	**South Africa**	**Total**
Evolution/gradual change [a] vs. revolution/radical change [b]	2,10 (21)	3,38 (85)	3,70 (20)	2,14 (35)	2,98 (161)
Compromise/cooperation [a] vs. no compromise/no cooperation [b]	2,45 (51)	2,83 (459)	3,26 (501)	2,16 (82)	2,96 (1093)
Peaceful [a] vs. violent action [b]	2,57 (37)	2,36 (146)	2,50 (14)	1,89 (44)	2,32 (241)
Toleration [a] vs. intolerance/ repression [b]	2,43 (14)	2,56 (48)	2,62 (13)	2,26 (31)	2,46 (106)
Institutional [a] vs. cultural approach [b]	2,17 (293)	2,18 (586)	1,88 (963)	2,23 (305)	2,05 (2147)

* Scale: 1 Strong preference for [a], 2 preference for [a], 3 combination of both [a+b], 4 preference for [b], 5 strong preference for [b]

Comparing preferences across countries, Serbia and South Africa come out as contrasting cases. While there is a clear preference for revolutionary change with little compromise and co-operation in Serbia, South African media promote evolutionary change based on compromise and co-operation. At the same time, there is a considerably greater focus on cultural solutions, whereas Serbian media emphasise institutional approaches to conflict resolution. These differences could be explained by the different historical experiences with democratisation in the two countries – pacted and gradual transition from apartheid to democracy in South Africa and fast, revolutionary regime change in Serbia – which over time shaped their political cultures in contrasting ways.

Conflicts are fought out between central conflict parties – either groups or individual leaders – and they way in which they are portrayed in the media can play an important role in the dynamic of a conflict. We measured the evaluation of conflict parties on a 5-point scale, where 1 indicates a strongly positive evaluation and 5 a strongly negative, while the midpoint 3 indicates an even mixture between positive and negative attributes. Overall, 76.2 % of units (newspaper articles, broadcast news items) included evaluations of at least one of the conflict parties, reflecting the high degree of contestation during democratisation conflicts. Correlating the evaluative scores of the two conflict parties gives an indication of the degree to which media portrayals create divisive images of ‘us’ and ‘them’.

Media coverage in Egypt stands out as the one with the sharpest division between ‘us’ and ‘them’, implying the juxtaposition of unanimous support of one of the conflict parties and demonisation of the opponent. Media coverage in Kenya and Serbia takes a middle position, while there seems to be no such divisive representations of conflict

parties in South Africa. With regard to conflict types, citizen conflicts over inclusion and exclusion of groups generate the sharpest 'us-them' divisions in media coverage, closely followed by conflicts over transitional justice. In contrast, election coverage features as a rather balanced arena of contestation, which could be explained by the high degree of regulation and political control over the media especially during election times.

Conclusion

The findings from our content analysis of media coverage in four countries – Egypt, Kenya, Serbia and South Africa – have shown significant variations. Several hypotheses are built into the very foundations of the MeCoDEM research project, especially its selection of cases. In fact, the selected countries and conflicts serve as proxies for diverse political contexts along the criteria of history, institutions and culture, type of democratisation conflict, regime type and stage of democratisation.

- Our data strongly reflect specific country contexts (and contexts of broader regions from which they come from, including the Arab Middle East, sub-Saharan Africa and post-communist Europe) to be a consistent factor that shapes the pattern of media coverage, reflecting the close interdependence between media and politics. However, the relationship between country context and media coverage is not a simple 1:1 reflection and multiple transformations of meaning in public discourses can tilt interpretations of political events toward unexpected directions.
- Regime type and the stage of democratisation matter when it comes to media framing of political conflicts because press freedom is an important aspect of democracy. As a result, countries that feature similar levels of democracy, or find themselves at similar points in democratisation, cluster together on several (but not all) relevant variables.
- In addition, media reporting also varied depending on types of democratisation conflict – which reflect the main arenas of political contestation – though less so than on country contexts. Our data show that elections, as a highly institutionalised type of conflict, were covered somewhat differently than other conflict types. Across all countries, the quality of media coverage is limited by bias, emotionalisation and – most importantly – polarisation. In particular, conflicts over the control of power trigger sharp polarisation, whereas elections – contrary to existing literature – seem to force media towards a more restrained style of reporting.

B.2 Journalistic ethics and work practices in conflict societies

The Work Package 'Journalistic ethics and work practices in conflict societies' was led by Prof. Irene Neverla, University of Hamburg (Germany). The research programme of this WP explores the journalistic cultures in the four countries under study (Egypt, Kenya, Serbia, South Africa) and their impact on journalistic performance in conflict situations. The empirical work of this WP focused on semi-structured interviews with journalists and editors. Sampling targeted the journalists who contributed to the media coverage that was content analysed in WP3 (see above). This close link between producers and their outputs provides insights into the congruence and discrepancies between ideals and actual performance.
(For a more detailed discussion of the theoretical underpinnings of this WP see Neverla, Lohner and Banjac 2015; for a mapping of the structural conditions of journalism in the four MeCoDEM countries see Lohner, Banjac and Neverla 2016a; for a comprehensive overview of empirical findings see Lohner, Banjac and Neverla 2016b and Lohner, Neverla and Banjac 2017).

In the following summary of findings, we focus on how journalists in transitional societies reflect on two roles that dominate western notions of professional journalism: providing information and acting as a watchdog who holds political power to account. We also introduce alternative notions of journalism that responds to the specific context in which it operates.

Journalism as information

Acting as an 'informer' and detached observer, producing factual stories and providing information of public interest has been described as the most central role of modern journalism (Christians et al. 2009). A great deal of the efforts of media assistance organisations active in transitional countries are devoted to establishing a journalism that is committed to objectivity, thus overcoming authoritarian traditions of propaganda and manipulated news. Journalists in most countries around the world have embraced this model of journalism, which is also reflected in our interviews when journalists describe themselves as a "conveyer belt, giving information to the public" (Kenya, #21), or providing "the most precise and accurate picture of what is happening" (Serbia, #13). Journalists also emphasise norms of objectivity and truthfulness, which is defined as covering all sides of the story, providing a forum for a broad range of ethnic, racial and religious source.

However, many journalists are aware of the ambivalence of these norms, especially in times of conflict. Journalists suggest that absolute objectivity is not always a tenable ideal and could be seen as detrimental or destructive to democratisation and conflict resolution. Objective information can serve as a trigger for violence, for example when information includes references to ethnic, religious or racial identities, which can have a polarising effect on already divided societies. This ambivalence was most evident during Kenya's 2013 elections, when journalists felt obliged to take extra precautions

not to elicit a repeat of the violence that characterised the 2007/2008 elections (see case study below).

Journalists are also aware that professional news values can be counter-productive in volatile circumstances. Among others, selecting topics according to their newsworthiness, as taught in journalistic textbooks, includes criteria of conflict, i.e. stories that involve contention and violence are more likely to pass editorial gatekeeping than those that lack novelty, controversy and casualties. A South African journalist refers to the saying "if it bleeds, it leads", reasoning that "peaceful protest action might be covered on page six or seven but a violent one will get coverage on page one or two" (South Africa, #1). Moreover, the very presence of journalists can even trigger violence, which might not have happen under normal circumstances. For example, South African journalists have observed that protests tend to be violent precisely because protesters know that without violent behaviour the protest is unlikely to receive media coverage.

While this preference for contentious and violent topics makes coverage on violent democratisation conflicts more likely, it considerably reduces the chances for reporting on peaceful protests. As a consequence, public discourse of the conflict might get entrenched in perceptions that stigmatise protesters as illegitimate and criminal, thus undermining the options for constructive conflict resolution.

Journalism as watchdog of power

The watchdog role of journalism is widely seen as essential for the viability of democracy. It is understood as part of a system of checks-and-balances that challenges the control of the centres of power over the flow of information. The journalistic watchdog role involves investigative journalism that seeks out information rather than just conveys what is passed on by political elites. According to our interviewees, the watchdog role means "highlighting the factures and failures" of society (South Africa, #6). It involves searching for "unpleasant topics … which irritate a part of the public" (Serbia, #4). The challenge to power is highlighted in the coverage of xenophobic violence in South Africa: "… when the government was building the so called refugee camps and whatever mess was happening in there we were able to show and also condemn the government for failing to deal appropriately" (South Africa, #4).

These quotes clearly reflect professional pride and the convictions that without the investigative engagement of journalists, political incompetence and policy failure would remain unnoticed.

However, some journalists challenged the watchdog role and debated whether it may at times contribute to the destabilisation of political system that struggles to manage the multiple issues of social, economic and political transformation. In South Africa a

journalist spoke of the media often being an ‘uber watchdog’ (South Africa, #18), while in Serbia journalists conceded that in the early years they “literally maltreated” the government in power at that time: “We did not give them the chance to show what they can, what they know, what they want, instead we were cutting them like instantly” (Serbia, #8).

Alternative perceptions of journalism

Faced with the conflicts and insecurities in their countries, many journalists look for alternative models, which might not replace the mainstream roles of western journalism but put them into second place.

Some of the journalists we interviewed see themselves as moderators or facilitators of public debate, like, for example, one South African journalist who during the xenophobic attacks tried “to get people talking and to start the debate” (South Africa, #2). The role to moderate is reflected in story-framing choices with central goals being to establish a culture of dialogue and moderate between conflict parties. A Serbian journalist explains why their media outlet decided to publish an interview with Milosevic’s daughter: “(…) it was important to establish a culture of dialogue, because without it, it would be only a matter of time when we would turn again into a populist and authoritarian government” (Serbia, #6).

In an openly interventionist facilitator role, journalists strive to act as an agent for social change. The relevance of the agent for social change role differs across conflicts and periods of transition. Journalists described themselves as post-authoritarian transition leaders, “fighters for democratisation, modernisation of the state” and for EU accession (Serbia, #6), as agents who “demand the rule of law and its implementation” (Egypt, #21), or convincing leaders to take a stance against terrorism and challenge the “ideology of those who engage in terrorist attacks in the name of Islam (Kenya, #4).

In many cases, emphasising alternative approaches to journalism involves a shift in agenda-setting practices that actively seek out themes and frames that help to build societies and moderate conflicts. In other cases, the challenges of polarisation and violence confront journalists with the uncomfortable trade-off where the demand to promote peace goes hand-in-hand with the need to give up on independence and critical reporting, as the case of Kenya demonstrates:

Case study: Kenyan 2013 election and the rise of ‘peaceocracy’

The 2013 Kenyan election took place in the shadow of the 2007 election which descended into widespread inter-ethnic violence. In the event, more than 1.000 people lost their lives and about 600.000 had been displaced. In this outbreak of violence, the media, in particular vernacular radio, had played a pivotal role and for the first time in the history of the International Criminal Court (ICC) a journalist/broadcaster were

prosecuted on crimes against humanity. In the run-up to the 2013 election the country was determined to prevent a similar outbreak of violence to happen again. Politicians and media agreed to subscribe to a broader 'peace narrative' which avoided content that might trigger conflict. In particular, any reference to ethnicity was removed from media coverage. This was further supported by international donors and media NGOs who launched a wave of 'peace programmes' designed to train the Kenyan media how to cover the election without contributing to electoral conflict.

As a result, the 2013 election was held without major incidents. However, journalists have since begun to think and write more critically about the trade-off between peace and free speech. Most obviously, the 'peaceocracy' of the 2013 election involved journalists and editors deliberately withholding important information and toning down criticism of any of the contenders. As one of our interviewees put it:

In the 2013 elections, there was a lot of self-censorship within the media because everybody was tip-toing around issues. Whether it was a good thing, I don't know. (Kenya, #1)

Many journalists now feel that they have lost credibility with their audience. They find it difficult to re-gain their independence in reporting on government affairs, as the reference to stability seems to restrain their ability to act as a vigilant watchdog.

Conclusion

Journalists in the four project countries are committed to recognised professional standards such as objective reporting and holding political power to account. However, as interviews moved on to more in-depth reflections, it became clear that these ideals are sometimes overridden by personal biases or editorial constraints. Many journalists felt that the political and economic circumstances of their countries make it impossible for them to be neutral or detached. Thus, many of them see themselves primarily as educators, promoters of social change or even political activists.

Our interviews also highlight the ambiguity of (western) journalistic norms in transitional societies. In particular, the watchdog role is frequently questioned, as journalists are aware that excessive criticism can undermine political stability and foster cynicism among citizens. Yet drawing the line between a vigilant press and an 'uber watchdog' is extremely difficult and it seems that most journalists are left to deal with these dilemmas alone.

The case study of the 2013 Kenyan election demonstrates that voluntary restraints might help to pacify a potentially dangerous situation; but the call for 'responsible' reporting can easily be instrumentalised by political elites to muzzle critical journalism. The juxtaposition of stability versus press freedom has a stifling effect on public

communication and might even prevent a more constructive way of addressing divisions in society.

B.3 Civil society, political activism and communications in democratisation conflicts

The Work Package 'Civil society, political activism and communications in democratisation conflicts' was led by Prof. Herman Wasserman, University of Cape Town (South Africa). The research programme of this WP explores the dynamics of democratisation conflicts from the perspective of citizens and political activists. The research aims to find out how civil society groups and activists interpret the causes and events of the selected conflict cases of the MeCoDEM research programme and what their communication strategies are to promote their causes and initiative change. The empirical research is based on semi-structured interviews and a collection of campaign material.
For a more detailed discussion of the theoretical background of this work packages and its findings see Pointer et al. 2016a and 2016b.

Background

Civil society is widely seen as an essential part of a viable democracy. A network of civil associations is said to promote the stability and effectiveness of the democratic polity through the effects on political culture and as a way of mobilising citizens on behalf of public causes. Civil society is often credited with resisting authoritarianism by creating voluntary associations that democratise society from below by pushing for change. It is for this reason that in the recent past international NGOs and donors have focused their efforts on strengthening civil society.

However, this is arguably a one-sided view as civil society may also be violent or supporting repressive agendas. This observation has led to the emergence of the concept of 'uncivil society' denoting manifestations of civil society that challenge liberal democratic values (Foley and Edwards 1996; Glasius 2010).

Civils society groups and the media are seen to have a close, even symbiotic relationship. Political activists rely on mainstream media to reach audiences and through popular mobilisation exert pressure on the government to take action. The contentious politics of civil society groups that challenges the state resonates with the media's watchdog role. From our interviews with journalists (see section B.2) we know that many journalists, especially in South Africa, regard it as their duty to 'give voice to the voiceless', which implies that in times of conflict the media would be an open forum for civil society groups to articulate their grievances. Moreover, imaginative political action – often a trademark of civil society groups – tie in with conventional 'news values' and provide the media with attractive news stories.

The findings presented here focus on how political activists interpret the conflicts they are involved in and their communication strategy, including their relationship with the media.

Communication strategies of civil society groups

In all four project countries, the primary target of the activism of civil society groups were governments, politicians on local and national levels and the police. This suggests that regardless of the particular forms of recent democratisation in the country, the form of governance and the manner for dealing with conflicts (e.g. through armed forces) is a central space of contestation. However, there are significant variations across countries. However, the constellation of activism in democratisation conflicts in Kenya presents itself somewhat differently. Kenyan activists primarily seek to influence international bodies to lobby for intervention, or they operate on a local level where they aim to change attitudes, in particular towards ethnic and religious groups, through civic education campaigns to overcome the fragmentation in Kenyan society.

Activism and mainstream media

With the rise of the internet and social media political activists have broadened their arsenal of media strategies. In fact, there is an explosion of creativity across a wide range of mediums in all four countries in the study.

While some activists stated that the media was an essential part of modern politics, others said that the media did not speak to the audiences they were trying to reach, so was considered marginal. For example, most people in poor communities do not have the means to buy newspapers or don't own television sets, so in these contexts media are largely irrelevant for local action.

However, in all countries civil society organisations are professionalising their media strategies and have learned to provide high standard input (press releases. Op-eds, video material) that can be directly adopted by journalists. Paradoxically, some activists observed that media coverage had declined when they started using professional press material, so they returned to the conventional strategy of building individual relationships with specific journalists and contacting them directly for particular campaigns.

In Serbia and Kenya, civil society organisations reported that while their activities were occasionally covered for free, they often have to pay for coverage.

While activists regard the media as important element of their campaigns, they are deeply dissatisfied with the quality of media coverage and in some cases even regard the media as adversaries. Media coverage is seen as superficial, lacking in context

and favouring the elites. South African activists said that coverage was episodic, focussing on actions, but not analysing or covering underlying issues that led to protest events.

Rather alarming are accounts of severe inaccuracies and instances of journalists vilifying individuals or groups:

- An Egyptian activist described how a journalist had changed the wording of his statement to be more inflammatory and refused to correct it. When the activist then withdrew the statement, the journalist said she would not deal with him again. (Egypt, #2)
- A South African activist was surprised that the media portrayed her as if she was involved in xenophobic attacks when instead she had been helping foreign nationals to escape the violence. (South Africa, #4)
- A Serbian activist involved in Milosevic's trial at The Hague complained that the media harassed her 'beyond extreme levels'. (Serbia, #11)
- In Kenya, media confused the identities of people who were victims of violence with witnesses in court cases, leading to victims being chased and trailed. (Kenya, #16)

Social media and political activism

Even though there has been a great deal of attention on social media and their potential to mobilise citizens, the perception of civil society actors we interviewed was more mixed.

Of the four countries of our study, only Egyptian interviewees unanimously emphasised the importance of social media as a tool for mobilising supporters. Many organisations use Facebook for both building organisations and for publishing information that would otherwise have been difficult to disseminate. However, the benefits are not always straightforward. For example, one Egyptian activist reported that social media helped both to build and to demolish the organisation, as internal disagreements were aired on their Facebook page that had 70,000 'likes'. (Egypt, #3)

A major barrier to employing the internet and social media for citizens' empowerment and strengthening civil society is economic underdevelopment. South African activists barely use social media because internet access is expensive and poor citizens do not have the money to purchase data.

Besides limited access, many activists are also concerned about the lack of controls that makes social media a fertile ground for spreading hate speech and misinformation. However, it was also emphasised that even though during the 2013 Kenyan social media were full of violent speech, it did not spill over into physical violence and Twitter was also used as an effective tool to counter hate speech.

On the streets

In spite of the opportunities modern media technologies offer, it is often overlooked that most mobilisation takes place in physical spaces. Mediated campaigns might reach large audiences, but they are less effective in building loyalties and forging the kind of personal networks that keep civil society groups alive.

We found that cultural expressions of protest and of belonging are essential for communicating in times of conflict. For all bottom-up movements, (re-)claiming public spaces – streets, places, buildings – is an important symbolic act to make oneself visible. In many of the conflicts we analysed, these places have become contested arenas in the struggle for legitimacy and the future vision for society. In the struggle for recognition, creative forms of communication are important in all four countries, including music and songs, poetry and theatre, dance and street art. A video produced by MeCoDEM members documents the symbolic forms of communication employed by citizens in various conflict situations (Aiello, Parry and Wege 2016).

Religious sermons are commonly used to rally support in Egypt and Kenya, although this frequently contributed to highlighting divisions between communities. In the aftermath of Muslim-Christian violence in Egypt that involved the burning of churches, activists used banners that combined the crescent and the cross to symbolise unity between religions. In Kenya, a particular strategy for working with communities that had been violent towards each other was to host football matches to allow tribal 'fighting' in a fun and constructive way.

Conclusion

The relationship between civil society groups and the media is highly ambivalent. On the one hand, political activists rely on the media to get their message across to a large audience, thereby increasing the pressure on the government to change policy; on the other hand, political activists often see the media as adversaries rather than allies. In many conflicts of our study, for example the service delivery conflicts in South Africa or the Gay Pride parade in Serbia, the media are placed behind the police lines and are therefore seen as part of 'them'.

Internet and social media have become important platforms of communication for the well-educated, young segments of society, usually located in urban centres. But for activism that promotes the grievances of poor communities, modern communication technologies are hardly an option. Instead, cultural expressions ranging from wearing organisational t-shirts to artistic activities and sport are important forms of communicating belonging, expressing grievances and exploring possibilities of overcoming divisions.

B.4 Governance, communication capacity and conflict management

The Work Package 'Governance, communication capacity and conflict management' was led by Dr Nicole Stremlau, University of Oxford (UK). This work package focuses on communication as a key element of democratic governance. Effective communication is assumed to contribute to the consolidation of emerging democracies by enhancing transparency and improving state-citizen relationships. The research investigates how government officials respond to protest and popular unrest and how this might affect the dynamics of conflict events.

The empirical research is based on semi-structured interviews and a collection of conflict-related documents issued by governments.

(For a more detailed discussion of the theoretical background of this work packages and its findings see Iazzolino and Stremlau 2017; Stremlau and Iazzolino 2017).

The findings presented here focus on how political authorities communicate with their constituencies in situations of conflict. In particular, we explore the narratives and ideologies that inform the communication strategies of different actors and the role of both traditional and new media as it emerges from the expectations and experiences of our interviewees.

Us versus 'the West'

One of the recurrent themes that came up throughout the interviews in all four countries is the country's position vis-a-vis the rest of the world, often meaning 'the west'. The tensions underlying this narrative are concerned with conflicting values between openness and closure, but also with a strategic approach to international relations.

In Serbian interviews, this tension became most evident in the context of the extradition of Milosevic to The Hague and the independence of Kosovo (part of the 2008 Election case study). There is widespread mistrust of Western interference and the democratisation process as a whole, especially among nationalist politicians. As one interviewee said: 'I think that democracy is just a cover for some other interest … We are currently in the process of being conquered'. (Serbia, #4). With the independence of Kosovo, many Serbian interviewees felt that Serbia had lost parts of its heartland as part of a sell-out to the West.

The conflict over the Pride Parade in 2010 brought up the 'us versus the West' narrative again. While progressive and pro-European groups used their support for the LGBT community to demonstrate their commitment to western values, nationalist politicians saw the conflict as a more global, even mythical conflict between western, i.e. decadent values and the Slavic cultural roots of Serbia which the countries shares with Russia.

In Kenya, the complex situation during the 2013 election and the subsequent prosecution of Uhuru Kenyatta and William Ruto by the ICC opened up similar conflicts between a commitment to universal human rights and the desire for national autonomy. During the election campaign, Kenyatta successfully used an anti-western rhetoric to mobilise electoral support, and it was only a small urban community of Twitterati who campaigned in favour of the ICC proceedings.

Even in South African interviews we encountered some of the 'us versus the West' sentiments, when interviewees questioned the universality of the model of Western representative democracy. As an ANC functionary pointed out: 'Democracy itself … is not an African concept. Democracy obviously has to be Africanised.' However, while Serbian nationalists regard democracy as a 'Trojan horse' to further erode Serbian national sovereignty, South African interviewees emphasise the importance of the cultural roots of democratic governance. Though, the call for an 'Africanised' form of democracy might itself be a Trojan horse, as some of its proponents emphasised patron-client relationships and the claim that leaders should be exempted from scrutiny as part of this African model.

Leveraging grievances

There is consensus among political leaders across the four countries that the conflicts under examination express broader dissatisfaction and that any resolution of the conflict would have to address these root causes: widening socio-economic inequality in South Africa, inadequate land reform in Kenya or the persistence of a 'deep state' in Serbia and Egypt. However, in all countries political leaders continue to mobilise the divisions that exacerbate these conflicts. For example, in Kenya tribalism was largely recognised as the discourse used, often cynically, by leaders to mobilise their supporters and increase their political weight while negotiating in private. Likewise, leaders in South Africa were accused of politicising xenophobic violence to divert the attention from the root causes of inequality and lack of economic growth for the majority of citizens.

Some interviewees also suggested that it is not leaders that make conflict, but it is rather conflicts that make leaders. In many of the conflicts under study, the issue was used as a political pawn around which an internal struggle of power was played out. Conflicts are often used to strengthen existing shadow structures of power, for example in Serbia where unelected corporatist networks that operate away from public scrutiny behind a formal democratic facade. In South Africa, community leaders were seen as seizing protest movements for their own ambitions, which in some cases even fuelled violence even further.

Overall, there seems to be a striking lack of effective conflict communication that involves all conflict parties. In the Kenyan case, local and informal leaders are often more trusted and respected than the state apparatus, but there is little effort to link the

two levels into a more comprehensive and efficient strategy. South African interviewees point at a lack of an effective 'early warning' system, which again indicates a lack of communication and listening between different stakeholders. As was pointed out, there had been a plethora of evidence for a potential outbreak of xenophobic violence gathered by experts, academics, journalists and others. But neither the national nor local authorities had been willing to pick up the signals and develop preventative measures.

Role of the media

Not surprisingly, political actors' perception of the media is highly ambivalent. The opening of the political arena to multi party competition also means that control over the media is highly contested. As journalists struggle to adopt a more professional approach to their work (see section B.2), political actors struggle to see journalism as a profession that doesn't follow the political logic of ideological alliances and one-way dependency. The struggle for control over the media is often seen as a zero-sum-game, as one Serbian interviewee analyses the situation: '… it seems that everything is interpreted in a manner in which "you are either our ally or our enemy because it is impossible that you are just trying to do your job".' (Serbia, #18)

As a consequence, most political actors see the media as a hostile force who are deliberately faking news and distorting the public debate. But there is also self-reflection and some interviewees admit that both politicians and media are involved in a vicious circle of mutually reinforcing political radicalisation and polarisation.

Given the volatile situation in transitional societies, discussions about a role of the media that is supportive of development and conflict resolution is legitimate and important. However, some views of political officials demonstrate that discourses of developmental journalism can easily be used to bring the media in line with government policy. For example, ANC functionaries accused the media of being anti-government and demanded the media to take on a more developmental role. As one interviewee explains, this means that the media 'should understand the objective of the ruling party in South Africa'.

Apart from partisan interests, there is widespread concern that with the commercialisation of the media there is too much emphasis on negative news. In complex conflict situations, like for example the 2007/2008 post-election violence in Kenya, media coverage is seen as simplifying the underlying issues by framing the conflict as 'tribal'. This simplistic frame has even been picked up by the international media, thus further fanning the violence. Many political officials therefore look out for ways of spreading positive news. For example, in Kenya government officers work together with civil society organisations using vernacular radio stations to pass on pacifying messages and involve local influencers and opinion makers to appeal to their

communities. Radio played a similar role in South Africa during the xenophobic violence.

Social media are only beginning to attract the attention of political officials. Scepticism and concern dominate the perception of most of our interviewees. Social media are seen as breeding grounds for conspiracy theories and hate speech. While social media are mainly seen as a space that is occupied by oppositional voices, the situation changed during the 2015 conflict over the Ombudsman in Serbia when the ruling Serbian Progressive Party used so-called astroturfing, i.e. coordinated trolling, to hijack the debate on social media. The astroturfers were mostly techno-savvy youth from the SPP who acted as a stand-by force to attack online targets with comments when instructed by their political employer.

Conclusion

Despite obvious differences across our four project countries, we observed a general reluctance of established elites to surrender their grip on power and their control over the media. In all four countries, political elites have developed powerful narratives to make sense of the transition. One important element of this narrative is the juxtaposition of 'us' versus 'the West'. In some cases this narrative works as a division that polarises more progressive forces who aim to adopt western values and forms of representative democracy on the one hand and conservative and nationalist groups on the other who aim to preserve traditional values against an 'international plot'. However, there are also more general concerns beyond partisan divisions about the need of one's country to find its own path toward a more democratic society.

In the democratisation conflicts of our study the media appear as actors with their own agenda, and their relationship with the government can be tactical rather than strategic. Social media are only slowly entering the calculations of political elites. There is some irony in the fact that ICTs, often hailed as instruments to open and expand public debate, are now being used by political factions who in fact challenge the notion of checks and balances and who aim to undermine the search for truth.

B.5 ICTs and democratisation conflicts

The Work Package 'ICTs and democratisation conflicts' was led by Prof. Christian Christensen, Stockholm University (Sweden). In this work package, ICTs are examined both as causes and possible solutions of conflicts and a tool that can be employed for organising protest, holding government to account and public deliberation.

The work package is designed as a cross-cutting portfolio that works closely together with other work packages and supports their analyses. One of the key contributions of the 'ICT' work package is the online platform Mecodify (see

http://www.mecodem.eu/mecodify/), an open source tool for analysing and visualising big data, extracted from social media sites like Twitter.

For a more detailed discussion of the conceptualisation of ICTs and the application of Mecodify to analysing democratisation conflicts see Al-Saqaf and Christensen 2017; Christensen 2017.

In this section, one of the MeCoDEM conflict cases – the 2015 State of the National Address (SONA) from South Africa – is presented to discuss the role of social media in the dynamics of conflict. The case also draws on issues of government communication that have been covered in the previous section (B.4).

Background

Recent scholarship has emphasised the interconnectedness of so-called 'old' and 'new' media. As communication technologies develop, different modes and platforms that used to be separate now converge into a 'hybrid media system' (Chadwick 2013) where it becomes increasingly impossible to distinguish between mass and interpersonal communication, top-down and bottom-up interactions, online and offline platforms, journalism and non-institutional forms of investigation and opinion entrepreneurship. The concept of 'media ecology' (Scolari 2012) captures the interdependence of different media. Like in the ecosystems of the natural world, changes in some elements – technologies, economics, user behaviour etc. – not only affect these elements, but the system as a whole.

However, the pattern of new media ecologies varies significantly depending on economic and technological development, power relationships and general communication cultures. In the context of the MeCoDEM project, some of the conflict cases took place before the take-off of social media, while in other cases accessibility of online media varies hugely across different segments of the population. Thus, our analyses focus on the extent and how the media technologies that existed in particular places and particular times interacted and what the consequences might have been for public communication in a particular conflict event.

The South African 2015 SONA conflict case not only highlights the complex interaction between different communication platforms; it is also an example of failed communication between government and citizens. Furthermore, the case study illustrates the analytical devices offered by the Mecodify software. For the SONA case analysis, over 100.000 tweets were analysed over a period of one month.

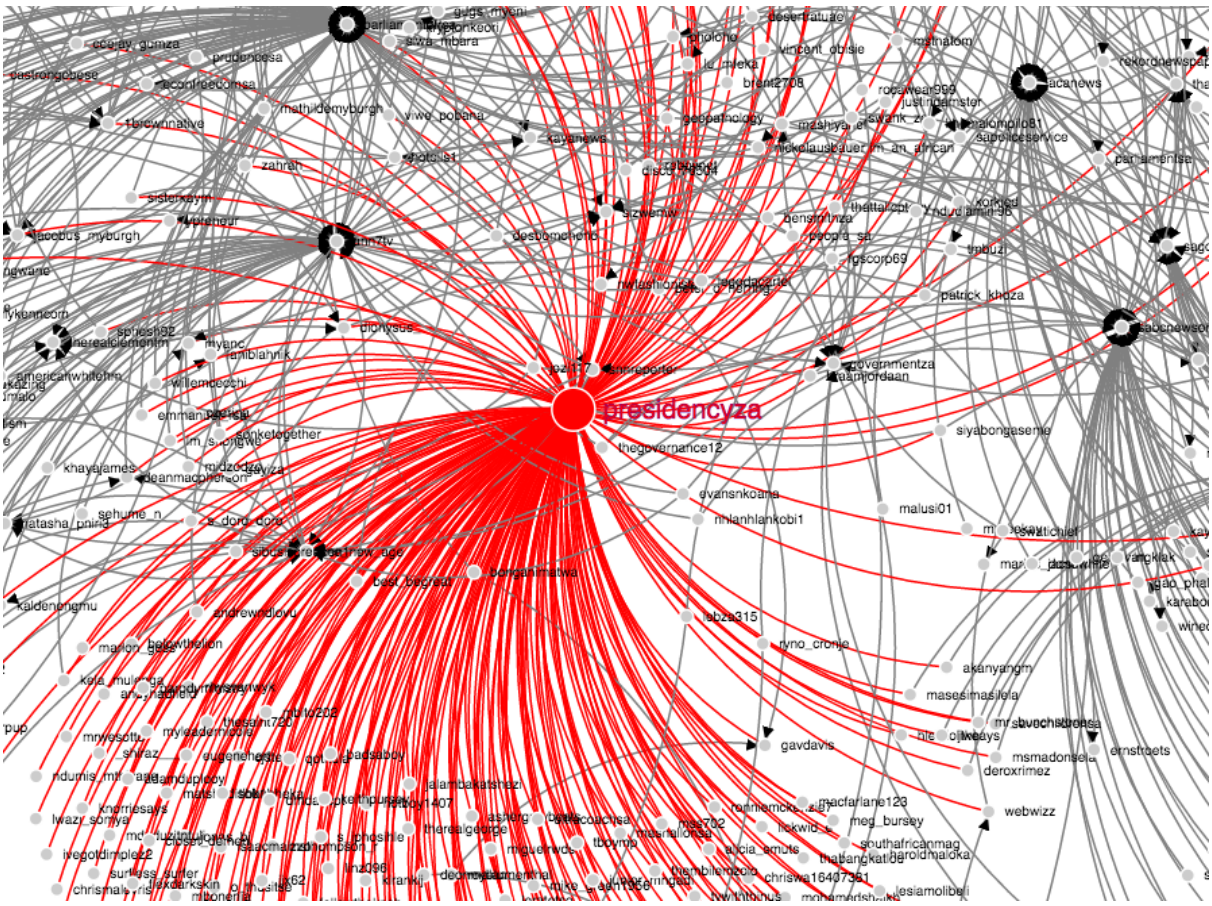
Case study: South Africa, State of the Nation Address (SONA) 2015 and the breakdown of communication between government and citizens

The State of the Nation Address is an annual event in South African politics where the president outlines his/her policies for the coming year. The 2015 event took place amidst massive corruption allegation against President Jacob Zuma. Prior to the delivery of the Address in Parliament on 12 February 2015, President Zuma issued an invitation from his official Twitter account to all citizens to suggest policies and to engage in a conversation about the future of the country.

A network visualisation of responses to and from @PresidencyZA reflects an almost entirely unidirectional mode of communication. In the Figure below, red edges constitute tweets directed to @PresidencyZA while blue lines indicate tweets directed by @PresidencyZA to others. As Figure 2 shows, there is virtually no response from the President to any of the tweets they have received.

Mecodify allows researchers to track communication flows down to individual tweets, thus serving as a bridge between quantitative (big data) analysis and in-depth analysis of the actual discourse. Following the tweets that followed President Zuma's invitation it becomes clear that citizens became increasingly cynical as they realised that there wouldn't be any response from the President. While early tweets still included well considered suggestions, later contributions made ironical remarks about this 'listening' exercise and the topics started to crystallise around the corruption allegations against President Zuma using the hashtag #paybackthemoney.

Figure 2: Flow of Twitter communications between President Zuma's twitter account and others



As President Zuma delivered his Address on 12 February, MPs from the Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF), a radical opposition party, interrupted his speech to ask when he would be paying back the public money spent on his Nkandla home. Police and security personnel then removed EFF MPs from the National Assembly, leading to the MPs of the Democratic Alliance (DA) to walk out in protest. In an attempt to control the messages sent out from the event, which was broadcast life, signal blocking devices were used to interrupt any communications going out from the National Assembly.

Far from controlling communications, the suppression of communications actually triggered intense social media activity, thus further increasing demands for President Zuma to respond to the corruption allegations and even to step down. There was no response from President Zuma to the events except an image issued on his Twitter account showing Mr Zuma playing golf.

Conclusion

The 2015 SONA case illustrates the risks for politicians when using social media in a top-down manner without the willingness to engage with citizens. Since President Zuma's announcement to listen turned out to be an empty democratic ritual it catalysed frustration and resentment among citizens and pointed at wider representational

failures of contemporary South African democracy. At the same time, the heavy-handed attempt of the government to control the disruptive action of the EFF in parliament was amplified by social media, thus further deepening the gap between South African citizens and their government. The case implies that using a communication platform that is intrinsically interactive without the willingness to engage in a two-way dialogue violates the expectations of the online community and is bound to fail.

Thus, governments' engagement with citizens on Twitter represents both opportunities and threats to democratic dialogue. On the one hand, social media represent a potential for governments to listen to previously unheard voices and represent those voices in decision-making that affects citizens. On the other hand, poorly performed communication campaigns can result in disillusionment among citizens and further entrenchment of the position of elite groups in society.

4.1.4 Impact and Dissemination Activities

The project fills an important gap in the literature by integrating strands of knowledge from media and communication studies, conflict research and democratisation studies. There is wide agreement that media, both traditional and digital, impact on the course and outcome of post-transitional conflicts. MeCoDEM is the first scientific project that provides comprehensive and comparative evidence for the interplay of public communication and democratisation conflicts.

Findings from the project are highly relevant for a range of stakeholders that have been investigated in the course of the project, in particular journalists in emerging democracies, civils society actors and policy makers. Moreover, MeCoDEM research provides important knowledge to inform interventions by media assistant organisations and other international NGO who are involved in supporting good governance and strengthening democracy.

During the three years of its duration, the MeCoDEM project has been involved in a large range of initiatives and events to engage with both the academic community and key stakeholders of the project. Naturally, these activities intensified towards the end of the project when first results were available.

The following sections provide a brief overview over our engagement activities, divided in

A. Impact activities: outreach initiatives to address the key stakeholders of the project: journalists, civil society actors, policy makers, international NGOs;
B. Open source resources: products generated by the project for use by a larger audiences;
C. Dissemination: outputs that are primarily aimed at the academic community.

A. Impact activities

The Work Package ‘Dissemination and Impact’, led by Prof. Barbara Thomass, Ruhr University Bochum (Germany), was responsible for overseeing and coordinating the dissemination activities of the project. A detailed impact and dissemination strategy was developed that identified key target groups and formats of engagement.

The dissemination strategy of the MeCoDEM project is informed by existing literature on development interventions of media assistance organisations and democracy support organisations (see for an overview see Drefs and Thomass 2015). We also conducted background talks with members of media assistance organisations who are either active on an international level or specifically in the countries studied in the MeCoDEM project (Egypt, Kenya, Serbia and South Africa).

A.1 Bridging dialogues

Initially, our plan was to conduct workshops with journalists in each of the four countries focussing on journalistic ethics in conflict situations. However, based on our research in the area of international media assistance it became clear that this format was not appropriate for engaging with journalists. Conventional workshop formats usually follow a knowledge-transfer logic whereby a (western) specialist passes on knowledge to particular target group. This would have contradicted our understanding of our understanding of our relationship with research participants and stakeholders as a partnership where both sides benefit from each other's knowledge and expertise. Our expert talks with media assistance organisations confirmed this view. These organisations are currently in a process of replacing the format of training workshop, which has been the 'gold standard' for decades of media development, by more longterm, collaborative forms of intervention.

While a three-year project does not allow for establishing longterm engagements, we revised the workshop format into one that was labelled 'bridging dialogue'. The aim of these dialogues was to bring together different stakeholders who have been personally involved in one of our conflict cases, sometimes on opposite sides of the contestation. This direct involvement ensured a focused and honest discussion of the issues and dilemmas of a particular situation and helped to prevent the discussion from drifting off into abstract considerations which are detached from real-world conditions. The role of the MeCoDEM researcher was to act as catalyst and moderator. Selected findings from the MeCoDEM project were used to kick-start the discussion. Wherever possible, we used findings which the participants had themselves contributed to as interview partners in one of our empirical work packages.

We conducted two bridging dialogue events:

South Africa (Cape Town, 22 February 2016)

This event brought together journalists and members of civil society groups who had been involved in service delivery, or community, protests that are related to the inadequate provision of services by local municipalities, most often water, sanitation and housing. Researchers of the Cape Town team were also involved and reported about their fieldwork. In total, 20 persons attended the event.

Issues covered in this event:

- The relationship between protesters / activists and journalists.
  Members of civil society groups argued that journalists do not try hard enough to hear what activists have to say with the result of inappropriate coverage. It was pointed out that there are only few journalists specialized in community issues and that there are hardly any opportunities where journalists and activists engaged in a dialogue.

Journalists reflected on the importance of forming personal relationships with protesters, but also felt uneasy about losing a certain distance that is essential for covering conflicts in a balanced and fair way.

- The police as an important player in protests.
  The role of the police during protests was perceived as increasingly problematic. There have been incidents where the police had threatened protesters. This, however, did not get covered by the media. At the same time, journalists often rely on the protection by the policy, especially in violent protests.
- The importance of community media.
  Community media were discussed as an answer to the dominance of English language in South Africa's mainstream media. South African citizens were said to rely heavily on community media for information on community issues. It was agreed that future research should focus more on community media, which for practical reasons was not possible within the MeCoDEM project.

<u>Lessons learnt from this impact event:</u>

The event showed that it is of great value and importance to bring together representatives of groups who would otherwise not get in touch – here journalists and civil society actors. To meet in a neutral environment where people were offered space to reflect on past events based on systematic research seemed to have raised the participants' understanding for each other. By describing their own room to manoeuvre and its limitations and by voicing frustrations helped them to understand their own communicative behaviour during conflict situations. After a while into the discussion the focus shifted and the participants started to actively ask representatives of the other group for suggestions for improvement. There seemed to be increased interest in getting to know the other groups' perspective.

The dialogue event was also extremely useful for MeCoDEM researchers, as it provided feedback and background information that will help to interpret the data that have been collected on community protests.

However, it has been a challenge to bring together a reasonable number of participants. Despite considerable efforts, turnout was much lower than expected and there were a couple of last-minute cancellations and no-shows, mostly from journalists. Apart from busy work schedules, people might be reluctant to engage in a dialogue that might push them out of their comfort zone. As a project that runs only over three years with an even shorter presence on the ground through fieldwork, we did not have the resources to build sustainable trust relationships to overcome these concerns.

Serbia (Belgrade, 15 March 2016)

This dialogue event brought together journalists, civil society groups and government officials who have been involved in the 2010 Pride Parade conflict. In total, nine persons participated.

Issues covered in this event:

- (Il)legitimacy of voices.
  One of the findings from the content analysis was that the media had defined militant groups as one of the conflict parties, but had not given them a voice as sources in their coverage. This finding sparked a discussion among the participants about their perception of what voices were considered legitimate or illegitimate at the time of the conflict. In the event of violence against Pride Parade marchers, journalists saw themselves in the dilemma between giving voice to what they perceived as hate speech and their commitment to covering all sides of the conflict. The debate reflected uncertainty about the norms that should guide public communication in the country.
- Repercussions.
  The question came up to what extent the 2010 conflict continues to have an effect in Serbia today. The participants noted that the atmosphere had been less charged at the past Pride Parades and that the violence had decreased. It was assumed that the drastic government response at the time with many violent forces being put into prison might have had a deterrent effect. Another reason considered for the decrease in violence was that hooligans and right-wing extremists perceive themselves well represented by the current conservative government.

<u>Lessons learnt from this dialogue event:</u>

Similar to the dialogue event in South Africa, Belgrade participants regarded this event as very beneficial. The group included not only different stakeholders, but also proponents of different ideological camps (in favour and against tolerance towards same-sex relationships). The discussion across these divides helped to develop an understanding why the public debate had become so polarised.

The participating activist seemed to have gained a new perspective of the communicative situation during the conflict. At the time of the conflict he had felt constant pressure by hostile public opinion. In view of the findings from the content analysis he realized that the media coverage was actually quite favourable towards their cause. This awareness had not been there while the conflict was on. The bridging dialogue made him notice that activists could have made better use of the media attention in order to raise awareness of gay rights.

The direct interaction between researchers and stakeholders revealed that there was great interest in other parts of the MeCoDEM research and it was agreed to organise a follow-up event once results are available.

However, it was difficult to achieve a reasonable number of participants and it became clear that it would be important to organise a series of dialogue events to build up interest and trust.

A.2 Open thematic workshops with regional focus

Following the experience of the bridging dialogue events in Cape Town and Belgrade, we chose a somewhat different approach for the workshops linked to our research in Kenya and Egypt to increase the number of participants. In both cases we cooperated with established institutions and a more conventional symposium format with prepared presentations.

Kenya (Nairobi, 24 August 2016)
Workshop 'Communicating in troubled time: A conversation on media and democracy ahead of the 2017 election'.
(http://riftvalley.net/event/communicating-troubled-times-conversation-media-and-democracy-ahead-2017-elections#.WQfyNBPyuM8)

For this event was organised by Dr Nicole Stremlau (University of Oxford, UK) in cooperation with the Rift Valley Institute (RVI), an independent, non-profit organization, founded in Sudan in 200 and currently working in seven countries in Eastern and Central Africa. The RVI works with institutions in the region to develop and implement long-term programmes that combine action-oriented research with education and public information.

We invited the key stakeholder of the MeCoDEM project – journalists, civil society activists, government officials – with a focus on those who had been involved in election communication in 2013 and/or 2007. We also invited research students. Besides speakers from the MeCoDEM project, the programme included a large number of local speakers, which obviously contributed to a very good turnout. The focus on the upcoming election made this event particularly valuable for communication practitioners who are often less interested in retrospective analysis than in recommendations and strategies for future action.

The event also attracted several of Kenya's Twitterati and #mediaintroubledtimes became the third most popular trending hashtag in Kenya on that day. It was also an important way to bring in people from the diaspora, including one of Somalia's presidential candidates who participated from Finland.

Overall, we had 14 speakers and more than 100 participants who engaged in a lively discussion throughout the day on a topic that is of vital importance for the country.

Even though the event lacked the intimacy of the 'bridging dialogues' we organised in Cape Town and Belgrade, the workshop brought together different stakeholders who often find themselves in opposite camps of the political debate. The discussions during the day helped to develop ideas and strategies for the next election campaign to safeguard both peace and an independent press.

Egypt (Berlin, 8 – 10 December 2016)
Workshop 'Dynamics of change: Media and the public sphere in Egypt'

Initially, our plan had been to hold a local dialogue workshop in Egypt with media assistance organisations and democracy development organisations. However, due to Egypt's increasingly repressive NGO legislation and the tense situation in the country, it was not possible to put this into practice. Against this background, cooperation with the Arab-German Young Academy of Sciences and Humanities (AGYA) appeared like a good compromise solution for organising an event with a thematic focus on Egypt outside of Egypt.

The workshop offered the opportunity and space for actors from academia, media, civil society, and politics to discuss relevant issues in connection with Egyptian media in times of transformation and conflict. The majority of attendants were from Egypt, e.g. Egyptian journalists (Al-Ahram newspaper, International Consortium of Investigative Journalists, Mantiqti newspaper etc.), Egyptian scholars (Cairo University, University of Maryland, American University in Cairo) or Egyptian politicians (MP). Beyond that, there were also experts from academia and media organisations from other countries such as Germany, UK, Tunisia or Lebanon. All in all, more than 60 people attended the event.

Participants from Egypt particularly valued the opportunity to meet outside Egypt and to discuss issues related to Egypt's media and public sphere freely. This created a sense of "being in the same boat" and created an atmosphere of trust and openness during the workshop. For members of the MeCoDEM Egypt team the event also opened up opportunities for future cooperations.

A.3 Dissemination event with ICT focus

Brussels (18 November 2016)
Workshop 'Social media, conflict and democracy: Utopian visions, dystopian futures and pragmatic politics'

This workshop was organised by Prof. Christian Christensen (Stockholm University) in cooperation with two other EU-funded projects, INFOCORE and VOX-pol. The thematic focus was on the role of social media in conflicts and security threats. We invited Brussels-based policy makers, journalists, NGOs and academics from local universities. In total, ca. 80 people participated in this workshop.

The workshop presented main results from the three projects. Two external expert speakers – Wael Abbas (Egyptian journalist and blogger) and Lucinda Armstrong (EC DG Home) provided additional insights from the perspectives of political activist and policy maker.

A podcast of the event can be downloaded at http://www.mecodem.eu/ictconflict/,

A.4 Other dissemination events for non-academic audiences

Berlin (3 – 4 November 2016)
FoME Symposium 'Observer, Agitator, Target – Media and Media Assistance in Fragile Contexts'

FoME (Forum for Media and Development) is a network of 16 German Media assistance organisation. The symposium brought together a broad range of international NGOs active in the field of media development, conflict management and transitional justice (among others BBC MediaAction, Foundation Hirondelle, Reporters Without Borders, Open Society Foundation, etc.). Since the theme of the 2016 symposium is at the centre of the MeCoDEM research programme, Prof. Barbara Thomass got in touch with the planning group to organise the representation of MeCoDEM at the event.

Prof. Katrin Voltmer gave the keynote entitled 'Media and conflict in transitional democracies: Polarization, power and the struggle for recognition', and a panel on 'Facing ethical dilemmas: Journalists and media development actors in conflict societies' was organised by MeCoDEM with contributions by Ines Drefs and Dr Gamal Soltan.

The event was attended by ca. 150 participants and was an excellent opportunity for networking. Contacts established at this symposium will be further developed into future cooperation.

The documentation of the symposium can be downloaded at http://fome.info/publications.

Cape Town (14 December 2016)
MeCoDEM Research Showcase

Following the final Consortium Meeting in Cape Town, Prof. Herman Wasserman organised a day-long symposium to showcase main findings from the MeCoDEM project. We also invited South African scholars and political activists to contribute to the programme. The event was accompanied by a photo exhibition by Tim Wege on protests and social struggles in South Africa and an exhibition by the political cartoonist Brandan Reynolds. The symposium was attended by about ca. 60 participants.

In addition, MeCoDEM researchers presented project findings at a broad range of non-academic events with a particular focus on ICTs and media development.

B. Open source resources

The project has created two open source resources that are available from the project website for use by the general public:

Mecodify
Mecodify is an online platform that can be used to analyse and visualise Twitter communications. The Mecodify interface is easy to use and includes a broad range of analytics to track patterns of large volumes of data, but also to identify individual influential tweeters. The tool is available from the MeCoDEM website at http://www.mecodem.eu/mecodify/.

Literature data base
The project has compiled a specialist bibliography focusing on the themes of media, conflict and democratisation. The bibliography is continuously updated and is organised along a structured tagging system that makes it easy to search for items along themes or geographical regions.

C. Dissemination (academic)

MeCoDEM members have presented findings of the project at a large number of national and international conference covering different disciplines, in particular communication studies and political science, but also regional studies. As a result, the project has gained a strong international reputation. In total, 60 conference presentations were given in the course of the project, and 4 workshops/symposiums and 5 panels at international conferences (ECREA, IAMCR, IPSA) were organised.

An important part of the publication strategy is the MeCoDEM Working Paper Series that is edited by Dr Katy Parry (Leeds). The papers published in this series are partly revised versions of deliverables, partly additional papers on key concepts and issues related to the theme of the MeCoDEM project. All papers published in the Series are peer reviewed and thoroughly revised based on the feedback received. The Working Paper Series has an ISSN number and is publicly available through the project website. There are now 20 working papers available, which enjoy a high number of downloads and thus serve as a fast way of communicating results to a wide audience, both academic and non-academic. Moreover, they are important building blocks for future publications.

Given the long time it takes between submission a journal article and final publication, publications in peer reviewed journals have only started (Ejdus and Bozovic 2016;

Pinfari 2016). Several other journal articles are currently under review. It is expected that the project will produce about 20 journal articles.

Currently, work is under way to finalise a project book that will serve as showcase of key results of the project. Expected publication date is 2018.

Further monographs are planned with thematic or regional focus, probably including pivots, i.e. shorter book formats of about 40.000 words which offer a flexible and fast way of publication and are available online only.

Currently team members are working on two special issues, one on the 'Political aesthetics of democratization conflicts' (to be submitted to Media, War and Conflict), and another one perceptions of democracy (to be submitted to Journal of Democracy).

We will also continue publishing in non-academic outlets, such as The Conversation, Open Democracy or The Round Table (all online platforms) to ensure a wide audience as possible.

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4.1.5 Website and contact

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