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Constructive coverage of negotiations

Kurzfassung: Ausgehend von der Eskalationsdynamik von Konflikten und den Prinzipien einer kooperativen Konfliktbearbeitung entwickelt der vorliegende Aufsatz Empfehlungen dafür, wie die Medien über Verhandlungen konstruktiv berichten und der friedlichen Streitbeilegung eine Chance gegeben können. Um dies zu gewährleisten und vernünftige Gemeinsamkeit zwischen den Verhandlungsteilnehmern und der Öffentlichkeit herzustellen, muss die Berichterstattung schon im Vorfeld der Verhandlungen einsetzen, den Verhandlungsprozess kritisch begleiten, die Öffentlichkeit über Verhandlungsergebnisse umfassend informieren und die Gründe darlegen, warum die erarbeitete Konfliktlösung für alle Konfliktparteien akzeptabel ist bzw. sein sollte. Während des Verhandlungsprozesses auftretende Schwierigkeiten dürfen nicht zum Anlass genommen werden, die Flinte ins Korn zu werfen, und allfälligen Regelverletzungen seitens einer der Konfliktparteien ist nicht mit Schuldzuweisungen, sondern mit Argumenten entgegenzutreten.

Abstract: Starting from the escalation dynamics of conflicts and the principles of cooperative conflict resolution, the present article develops recommendations for how media can report constructively on negotiations and give peaceful conflict settlement a chance. To ensure this and create reasonable commonality between negotiators and the public, coverage must begin already before negotiations, and it must critically accompany the negotiating process, comprehensively inform the public on the outcomes of negotiations and explain why a proposed conflict resolution is or should be acceptable for all involved parties. Difficulties arising during the negotiation process must not be taken as opportunities to throw in the towel, and any rule violations by conflict parties should not be met with accusations of guilt, but rather should be countered with rational arguments.

Peace Journalism is when editors and reporters are aware of their contribution to the social construction of reality and of their responsibility to give peace a chance (Kempf 2012: 2).

1. Introduction

Not only conflicts themselves – the incompatibility of actions, intentions, interests and intended actions – but also negotiations through which conflicts should be settled, are basically open to being understood as either cooperative or competitive processes (Deutsch 1973, 2000).

From wage negotiations between unions and employers associations to coalition negotiations in which a compromise is sought between party programs and election promises of the involved parties, cabinet negotiations in which the interests of various portfolios come in contact, negotiations between member states for the purpose of decision making on the EU level to peace negotiations to end military conflicts – just to name a few examples: Participants in negotiations are individual negotiators or negotiating delegations that represent group interests and must communicate the results of negotiations to group members. Without their agreement, even the best solutions are no more than wastepaper.

Even if negotiations are held in camera, journalism and the media make an essential contribution to constructing the societal milieu where negotiations and the implementation of their solutions take place. The quality of their coverage has a not to be neglected influence on how conflict is publicly perceived, whether or not the option of peaceful dispute resolution can be agreed on and whether or not the results of negotiation find acceptance.

As long as media coverage is oriented to the (presumptive) news factors of negativism (“bad news is good news”) and simplification, however, distortions are literally pre-programmed and detract from the acceptance of conflict solutions. Even quite normal democratic decision-making processes are then sometimes stylized to bitter power struggles. The incompatibility of positions taken by conflict parties shifts to center stage, justified interests that should be harmonized are blocked out, and the respective opposed parties are accused of unfair motives.

In the following, recommendations are presented for what constructive coverage can set against this, and how media can support cooperative conflict settlement.¹ However, the greater a conflict’s escalation, the longer it lasts

1 Methodological comment: The recommendations discussed here do not follow from the examples and counter-examples with which they are clarified. They do not rest on (methodically unacceptable) generalizations of empirical observations, but rather their justification is of an analytic sort. Starting from social-psychological conflict theories and the principles of cooperative conflict settlement, several aspects of news selection and framing of negotiations are examined for whether they are conducive or detrimental to peaceful dispute resolution. No claim is made to completeness.

Nor are they recommendations recipes that can be schematically followed. If reportage wants to give peace a chance, it must always consider as well whom it addresses, how to address them and what kind of discourse it thereby becomes involved with: a problem-solving discourse (peace discourse) or a coercive discourse (war discourse).

and the less negotiating partners are actually interested in resolving their conflict, the more difficult it will be to reach compromises. And if negotiations fail to reconcile conflict parties' justified interests, even the best coverage can do nothing should the implementation of negotiated agreements – as can hardly be expected to be otherwise – meet with resistance and/or is boycotted. All that then remains is to press for the resumption and deepening of negotiations. In particular, international negotiations to end wars run the risk that the key objective to end violence can become so dominant that the need to resolve underlying conflicts will not be met.

Whether negotiations (can) bring about a just conflict settlement – or at least a compromise acceptable to all conflict parties – basically depends on how negotiations are conducted. Accordingly, constructive coverage of negotiations must from the start critically accompany the negotiating process. And not just in highly escalated conflicts. Constructive coverage must already be anchored in society and its media system during peacetime, only then will it have a real chance to achieve lasting results even in wartime (Bläsi 2006, 2009).

2. Cooperative conflict processes

According to Deutsch (1973, 2000), constructive conflict processes result from the process of cooperative problem solving, which defines the conflict as a problem to be solved in both parties' interest, from the process of cooperative commitment, which goes hand in hand with problem resolution becoming a common goal, and from the process of cooperative misperception, which helps reduce prejudices and facilitate trustful relations among conflict parties.

The process of cooperative problem solving helps establish open and honest communication which makes it possible to advance beyond ostensible dispute issues to the underlying interests of conflict parties, to work out an appropriate definition of the problem to be solved, to profit from the opponent's knowledge, and to avoid misunderstandings. It encourages recognition of both parties' perspectives and interests and willingness to search for solutions acceptable to both sides. It leads to a trustful, well-meaning attitude on the part of conflict parties toward each other which increases sensitivity for the recognition of commonalities and reduces the importance of differences.

Thereby enabled, positive experiences of relationships between conflict parties create social commitment to the cooperative process that can be strengthened through already achieved successes, procedures and institutions, and also through common commitments to third parties.

As with competitively conducted conflicts (see below), however, here characteristic forms of misperception and misjudgment also arise – though with reversed signs. Cooperation tends to weaken the perception of incompatibilities and strengthen awareness of the other party's good will. These typical changes often have the effect of containing conflict and making escalation less likely. However, *cooperative misperception* also carries the danger that conflict objects will be overlooked, or that conflict parties will agree to "premature cooperation" and will not reach a viable agreement, because they have not dealt sufficiently with their incompatibilities, or have not thoroughly worked through the disputed issues (Deutsch 1973, 2000).

If the resulting disappointment is blamed on the opponent, the escalation spiral begins again with much greater vehemence. The unrealistic expectations for the Oslo Agreement, which in the end was no more than a declaration of intention to work out a peace solution for Israel/Palestine, is precisely a textbook example for this: Euphoria over the supposed onset of peace, disillusionment, search for guilty parties, revival of old enemy images (Mandelzisz 2003, 2007) and return to a policy of accomplished facts.

Already from this, there results a first guideline for how media coverage can support constructive conflict settlement: By foregoing overly optimistic expectations and – particularly in long-lasting, highly escalated conflicts – excessive euphoria, as when people believe that reconciliation of hostile societies were guaranteed just by signing a treaty.

Reconciliation is a drawn-out process that can take decades and requires not only political-structural but also far-reaching social-psychological changes: developing a new understanding of the past, admitting own guilt and changing collective memory, going as far as creating a common historical narrative (Asmal et al. 1996).

Reconciliation presupposes coexistence. Compared with reconciliation, coexistence is a far more modest goal and certainly not the ideal of harmonious relationships between two societies. By giving both sides legitimacy, rejecting violence and making opponents meet on the same eye level, however, it represents a necessary intermediate stage on the way to reconciliation, for which personal convictions, attitudes and emotions play as important a role as political structures and institutions (Bar-Tal 2004, 2005):

- o *Non-violence*, i.e., the will of both societies to end violent confrontation, accept peaceful conflict resolution and strive for positive relations;
- o *Legitimacy*, i.e., recognizing the opponent and his right to contribute his positions and interests to the conflict resolution process;

- o *Pluralization and personalization*, i.e., regarding members of the other society as quite normal people with legitimate but different needs, justified claims, wishes and hopes;
- o *Equality*, i.e., recognizing the other as a partner with equal rights and supporting the principle of equal treatment and equal rights;
- o *Reduction of negative emotions*, such as anxiety and hatred, and the development of positive emotions like hope and trust.

Even if the negotiating climate is already marked by these principles, this still does not mean that it finds widespread recognition on the sides of hostile societies. Depending on the degree of conflict escalation and the hardening of the conflict parties' (previous) positions, we can still expect that on both sides there will be hardliners trying to hold onto the status quo, denigrate the peace treaty as a defeat or betrayal, defame the process by which it came about as an imposition or extortion, etc., and exploit disagreements that arise after concluding a treaty as occasions to boycott the peace process.

Accordingly, already ahead of negotiations, there is an urgent need to reject violence; not to a priori negate the possibility of constructive conflict settlement; to appreciate willingness to negotiate; not to a priori denounce negotiated results as "lame compromises", and not to demand the creation of accomplished facts and/or draw red lines. At the same time, it should be made clear that negotiations are not a matter of "good" vs. "evil", nor of victory vs. defeat, but rather of *cooperative problem solving in the common interest*; and the public should be prepared to understand that the positions with which conflict parties enter into negotiations have only a suggestive character and will not be realizable one to one.

If negotiations come to a standstill, are prematurely broken off, or the agreement reached is not ratified by the conflict parties, constructively oriented coverage will not take this as a reason for recriminations, but rather attribute problems to the fact that negotiators have not (yet) devoted enough effort to overcoming unresolved contradictions; and it will seek reasons for why the results achieved so far could not be ratified, and press for a continuation or respectively resumption of negotiations.

After successful conclusion of negotiations, constructive coverage can be measured in terms of whether it succeeds in working toward a reasonable commonality between the negotiators and the public and in making negotiation results transparent; whether it succeeds in critically acknowledging the acceptability of negotiated results, in assessing whether and how they meet the conflict parties' needs, why they are, or respectively ought to be, acceptable for all conflict parties, and last but not least, what control mechanisms are envisaged for checking compliance with the terms of agreements.

3. Constructive negotiation

A basic principle of conflict resolution (Lorenzen & Schwemmer 1975), conflict management (Fisher & Ury 1984, Glasl 1992) and conflict mediation (Besemer 1993, Mattenschlager & Meder 2004, Menkel-Meadow 2018) is that conflict parties should make their positions (intended actions and aims) accessible, and examine underlying interests until they find mutually compatible ones from which consistent goals and action options can be derived and ultimately adopted as common positions.

Just as actions can be understood as means to achieving aims (intentions), aims can be understood as means to achieving higher-level aims (interests), and these again can be means to achieve still higher level aims, etc. If one follows the chain of reasoning back in this way, then conflicts can sometimes prove to be false conflicts where conflict parties believe in the incompatibility of their intended actions and/or aims, though this is actually not the case (Mitchell 1981). Some conflicts can be resolved rather easily through a simple change of means. The settlement of other conflicts may require a change of intentions, which is clearly more difficult, because aims are what one really wants to accomplish with one's actions. And with still other conflicts, again, even that may not suffice (Hoyningen-Huene 1983), and resolution will require fundamental changes in the conflict constellation – whether through changing objective reality (e.g., by eliminating deficient situations and/or reducing structural violence), or through change in the subjective interpretation of this reality, so that other aspects of the situation become action-relevant. The latter are the most difficult types of conflict to resolve, because they involve fundamental values, and thus a solution requires that orientations previously accepted as self-evident must be put in question (ASPR 2003).

Moreover, it is to be expected that latent conflict constellations may become visible in the course of the negotiating process. Conflict constellations which the conflict parties were not aware of may become evident, and/or proposed solutions may produce new conflict constellations, for example, if the presumed conflict solution is achieved at the expense of third parties. Although the resulting increase in complexity of the conflict formation²

² While a *conflict formation* (Galtung 1998) involves a *multiplicity of parties*, aims and conflict objects, a *conflict constellation* (Kempf 1996) is the sum of two parties' respective conflict- and/or solution-relevant rights, aims and actions.

is incompatible with the wish for rapid conflict settlement, the negotiating partners will only be able to reach a sustainable agreement if they take all relevant aspects into account.

Particularly during the first weeks/months of the Covid-19 pandemic, the complexity of the conflict formation increased with literally epidemic speed. At the start (at least in Germany) the common interest was to slow the spread of the virus and prevent the health system from collapsing. The conflict centered on the question of what measures are suitable or even imperative to achieve this, as well as what immediate follow-up costs these measures will have for the labor market, and how they can be cushioned. With the imposition of contact limitations, school closings, limits on travel, shutting down cultural institutions (theaters and museums), stores, restaurants and hotels, etc., it quickly became clear, however, that not only do the economic follow-up costs reach far deeper (threatening recession), but also the interest in limiting the pandemic came in conflict with a multitude of social and cultural interests and democratic liberties.

Negotiations within the federal government, between Berlin and the states, and finally also on the EU level, did not get out of hand due to a range of factors, such as the conception of the crisis as a common problem that can only be solved by the relevant parties acting together, the subordination of political party interests and personal profiling wishes and the focus on factual issues, as well as readiness to give up positions (such as, e.g., the rejection of a common indebtedness of EU countries), and the creative search for sustainable alternatives (e.g., to the corona bonds that were called for by Southern European countries).

By and large, cooperative conflict management found support, among other things, because public service media largely refrained from polarizing reportage, made the complexity of the conflict situation transparent, concentrated coverage on factual issues, gave exceptional amounts of space and airtime to not only experts on virology and epidemiology, but also economics, social sciences and humanities. They reported with empathy on groups whose justifiable interests were impinged on by the crisis, and simultaneously distanced themselves from pandemic deniers, conspiracy theorists and parties exploiting the crisis to further their own particular interests and/or incite the public.

We can learn a lot from this for constructive coverage of negotiations: Courage to cope with complexity and abstain from simplifying the conflict formation, concentrate on factual issues and refrain from dramatizing contradictions and polarizing the public, feel empathy for people affected by conflict, as well as maintain a wise distance from populists who would escalate it.

Productive indeterminacy, as conceived by Henry Kissinger, can of course facilitate quickly reaching agreement, but if negotiating partners leave each other uncertain about how to understand their reasoning and suggested solutions, it will sooner or later become the motor for renewed conflict escalation. At the latest when conflict parties' expectations are disappointed and they accuse each other of breaching their agreement.

It does no good for negotiators to agree on an issue when it really means quite different things for them. Lorenzen & Schwemmer call avoiding this the first stage of reasonable commonality.

It is no coincidence that written and verifiable documentation of negotiation results is a basic principle of conflict mediation. Where the first stage of reasonable commonality is violated, negotiations themselves already sow the seeds for new conflicts, and even quite normal democratic decision-making processes run the danger of getting out of hand, if they are based on productive indeterminacy.

Thus, for example, in a counter-move to establishing the seat of the European Central Bank (ECB) in Frankfurt/Main, agreements were made which led France to hope it could appoint the first ECB president, while the German side understood them only as denying its claim to appoint a German to head the ECB. When the French brought Claude Trichet, president of the Bank of France, into play as a counter-candidate to Wim Duisenberg, a Dutchman favored by Germany, this aroused much ill-will, dramatized by the media of both countries as an embittered power struggle. Factual issues like the two candidates' respective qualifications and their monetary policy positions (cf. Plontz 2006, Kempf 2008: 46, 62ff., 110ff.).

Ultimately, the conflict was settled by cutting in half the ECB president's eight year term of office. During the first four years, Wim Duisenberg held the office, and during the second four years, Claude Trichet. But the German-French relationship was lastingly damaged.

For constructive coverage of negotiations, there follows the recommendation to identify productive indeterminacy, clear up misunderstandings, respond to disappointed hopes with empathy, not attribute disappointment to the opponent's alleged malice, but rather to the agreement's lack of clarity, and commit negotiators to precise formulations of negotiated agreements.

Furthermore, it is counterproductive if negotiators expect the other side to comply with conditions they themselves are unwilling to accept. Lorenzen & Schwemmer call avoiding this mistake the second stage of reasonable commonality.

The bitter dispute over a two-state solution for Israel/Palestine can serve as a negative example: While Israelis insist on their own self-determination and demand recognition of Israel's right to exist, to this day they refuse to grant Palestinians their own state. For a long time by denying that the Palestinians are a people at all, and since this can no longer be maintained, in violation of their own Proclamation of Independence³, which enshrines the self-determination of peoples as a universal right. Quote: "Like all other peoples, it is the natural right of the Jewish people to determine their own fate under their own sovereignty in their own sovereign state" (my emphasis WK).

If the second stage of reasonable commonality is violated, the failure of negotiations is pre-programmed, and even if negotiations reach agreement, this will and can be no just result, and the conflict parties will at most gain only a pause to catch their breath.

As hard as it can be to persuade conflict parties to give up double standards, there is no alternative to exposing double standards of every sort, revealing their negative consequences and obligating negotiators to maintain reasonable commonality.

Finally, it is unacceptable for negotiators to leave their contracting bodies or respectively the public in the dark about how the terms they have agreed upon should actually be understood. Lorenzen & Schwemmer refer to avoiding this as the third stage of reasonable commonality.

The Brexit negotiations between Great Britain and the EU are a glaring example of what can happen if achieving a reasonable commonality between politics and society is neglected. This began already when the British electorate was to vote in a referendum on Brexit, before they had any idea what the consequences would be, while the British government categorically refused to hold a second referendum when the Brexit treaty was negotiated and the voters could – at least partially⁴ – have known what to expect.

When the Brexit treaty negotiated by Theresa May did not achieve a parliamentary majority, the EU rejected any re-negotiations, and radical exit supporters threatened with a treaty-less Brexit. The conflict turned into an (as well intra-party) power struggle between Brexit supporters and Brexit opponents, which divided the British public, turning many in Great Britain against the EU,⁵ and also many Europeans against Great Britain.

When Theresa May stepped down, and Boris Johnson assumed the office of Prime Minister, only a few days were needed to renegotiate the so-called Backstop and reach an alternative agreement.

If the media had comprehensively informed the public on what specific provisions the Backstop foresaw, what common (British and European) interests stand behind them (e.g. avoiding a resurgence of the Northern Ireland conflict), which British interests would suffer (e.g. exit from the European Customs Union, where Great Britain would have no voting rights after the completion of Brexit), and with which European (respectively Irish) interests (e.g. avoiding a customs border between the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland) a creative revision of the agreements would have to be compatible, then public opinion could have exerted pressure on policies to approach the problem and solve it reasonably. A problem solution could in this way have been achieved much earlier and without impairing the British-European climate.

Even reasonable consultations are, however, no guarantee for a just conflict resolution. To achieve justice, it does not suffice that negotiating partners agree de facto on common positions. Mere factual conflict resolution that only reconciles the particular interests of conflict parties participating in negotiations and/or is reached at the cost of third parties, in the end only mean a shift of conflict. Interests need to be justified, and a conflict settlement can only claim to be just if the interests, goals and actions on which the negotiators finally agree can be justified by *universal* norms (Lorenzen & Schwemmer 1975), and if they meet not only the needs of the parties at the negotiating table, but also those of all others affected by the conflict and/or the proposed solution.

The (exclusive) use of universal norms ensures that only such interests, goals and actions will be upheld which comply with Immanuel Kant's *categorical imperative*: Only those reasons should guide action that can "always be regarded as a principle of universal legislation" (cited from Willaschek et al. 2015: 1152). In ordinary language: "What you do not want others to do to you, do not do to anyone else". And it also means that every norm that one cites as a reason should as well hold for all other interests, goals and actions (especially one's own). Lorenzen & Schwemmer refer to this as the principle of practical reason.

Besides the necessity to be sensitive to structural violence (Galtung 1969), such constructive conflict management also has consequences for the negotiating climate. It requires that no participant should have to fear any sanctions for presenting his aims and interests – including the aims and interests of third parties who

3 Cf. https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Israelische_Unabh%C3%A4ngigkeitserkl%C3%A4rung (last download 21.6.2020).

4 The structuring of future economic relations between Great Britain and the EU is still not yet regulated in the Brexit treaty.

5 At this point in time a second Referendum would probably have produced an overwhelming majority comparable to the later election of Boris Johnson as Prime Minister.

themselves cannot participate in negotiations. It requires that every participant should bring his aims and interests to the awareness of all other participants. It requires that they should be ready to take notice of the aims and interests of all other participants, and it requires that every aim or interest desired by a participant will be included in the negotiations and that no aims or interests will be labeled *from the start* as “indispensable” or “unworthy of pursuing” (Kempf 1978).

We can consequently make the following recommendations for constructive coverage of negotiations: The positions and interests of *all those* affected by the conflict should be presented; none of their positions and interests should be rejected from the start, and their advocates must not be defamed; all conflict-relevant positions and interests should be put up for debate, and none should be judged from the start as indispensable; the compatibility vs. incompatibility of positions and interests of all conflict parties should be critically examined, and in the case of their incompatibility the underlying interests should be explored; common and/or compatible interests are to be acknowledged, and mutually compatible goal settings and action options derived from them should be regarded as *proposed* solutions; the justification of acknowledged interests should be made transparent, and there should be an examination of whether the action options that follow from these interests are suitable to satisfy them and/or whether they conflict with other, likewise justified interests. Solution proposals that can stand up to an (in this sense) critical examination should be acknowledged as (possible) solutions, and if not, one should advocate continuing and deepening negotiations.

Whether the proposed aims and interests are in the end permanent, and what action options negotiators will ultimately agree on is a question of how well they can be justified and how convincing the justifications are. That only universal norms should be used for justification (see above) is an essential precondition for their persuasiveness. Since universal norms apply for everyone, they can also be employed to justify one’s own aims and interests. And the justification of one’s own aims and interests can be acknowledged by others for the same reason.

In political practice, however, universal norms – such as constitutional principles and/or basic rights codified in the UN Human Rights Declaration – are all too often only drawn on to justify one’s own positions, while they are blanked out as soon as it comes to justifying those of the opponent (see above).

4. Competitive conflict processes

There is only fragile openness for a cooperative approach to conflict. Since own actions are interpreted from the intentions pursued, and opposed actions, in contrast, are experienced from their effects (such as their blocking us from reaching our goals), there is a divergence of perspectives between parties which hinders a complete view of the conflict constellation and can only be overcome through empathy. If communication between conflict parties is malfunctioning or their trust in each other impaired, the perspective is narrowed to own rights and intentions and their being threatened by opponents’ actions, which are also seen as a threat to shared goals and intentions and the common good.

This – actual or presumed – competitive situation implies the necessity to impose own aims on others. Thereby the imposition of one’s own goals becomes a goal in itself and conflict risks taking a destructive course.

In a first step, constructive coverage can work against conflict turning into a competitive process by filling in the “blind spots” of conflict perception (Reimann 2019) that result from the divergence of perspectives, and portraying the aims, rights and interests of all conflict parties in a fair, impartial way.

Destructive conflicts have a tendency to spread and escalate. They take on a life of their own and often persist even after the original conflict issues have become less important or are forgotten (Deutsch 1973, 2000; Creighton 1992, Glasl 1992). Parallel to the expansion of conflict there occurs an increasing fixation on power strategies, on the tactics of threat, pressure and deception.

According to Deutsch (1973), on the level of the conflict issues, the tendency to escalate conflict is due to principle of competition that tempts parties to strive for victory; on the level of attitudes, it is due to misperception of the opponent’s actions and intentions, and on the behavioral level, it is due to social commitment that makes victory over the opponent the primary aim.

The competitive process suggests that a satisfactory solution can only be imposed at the expense of the opponent and against him. Thereby conflict is transformed into an autonomous process that favors the use of increasingly harsh and violent means to impose one’s own goals and leads to a suspicious and hostile attitude toward the opponent. The perception of contradictions between conflict parties is sharpened, and that of commonalities is reduced. Existing opportunities for communication are not taken advantage of, or they are exploited to intimidate or deceive the opponent. The opponent’s statements are doubted, and available information is misinterpreted in line with existing prejudices.

In a second step, constructive coverage can counteract the overturning of conflicts and/or try to steer already overturned conflicts back to cooperative paths by emphasizing commonalities of conflict parties: shared rights and interests, the common benefits resulting from their relationship and the shared interest in not endangering this relationship.

In a third step, by focusing on previous successful conflict management, it can encourage hope that the present conflict can also be settled.

With inter-group conflicts, the above-mentioned antagonism is further intensified by the process of social commitment to one's own group. Competition between groups strengthens their inner cohesion and leads to increased identification of group members with their group and a move to conflict-oriented leadership. Group members who stand out in combat gain influence. Willingness to compromise and mediation attempts are denigrated as betrayal, and ongoing entanglement in conflict binds group members to the conflict strategy by justifying their previous involvement. At the same time, competition shifts the perception of the out-group toward an over-emphasis on their difference from the in-group and an increase in negative blanket judgments of the out-group.

The farther this process goes, the more group pressure will be exerted on journalists who dissent from the mainstream and try to report constructively (Bläsi 2004, 2006). To withstand this pressure without switching sides to the opposing camp is a great challenge.

Escalation level	Cooperation	Divergence of perspectives	Competition	Struggle	War
Conceptualization of the conflict	Win-win orientation	Bias towards win-lose, but win-win is still possible	Win-lose (possibly defused by rules of fairness)	Win-lose (exacerbated by strategies of threat)	Zero-sum orientation, violence as an appropriate means of conflict resolution, emphasis on military values, reverting from win-lose to lose-lose
Assessment of rights and goals	Mutual respect for the rights of all parties involved and emphasis on common interests	Focus on own side's rights and needs (including common interests), but the other's rights disappear from view	Focus on own side's rights and needs; however, common interests disappear from view	Emphasis on own side's rights and needs, while at the same time questioning the rights of the opponent and condemning his intentions	Idealization of own side's rights and needs, while at the same time denying the rights of the opponent, demonizing his intentions and denying common interests
Evaluation of actions	Consideration of the benefit for each of the parties	Focusing on own side's benefit (also from the mutual relationship)	Focusing on own side's benefit	Justification of own side's actions and condemnation of the actions of the opponent	Idealization of own side's actions and demonization of the actions of the opponent
Emotional involvement	Empathy and mutual trust	Conflict between threat and trust	Focusing on threat to one's own side, while threat to the opponent disappears from view, mutual trust is lost	Emphasis on own side's strength and the opponent's dangerousness create an unstable balance between threat and confidence in victory, the threat to the opponent, on the other hand, is actively denied and mistrust arises	The balance between threat and confidence in victory still exists, distrust is also directed against neutral third parties who try to mediate in the conflict, indignation about the war turns into indignation about the opponent
Identification offers	All-sided	Self-centered	Dualistic	Antagonistic	Polarized

Table 1: Change in cognitive-emotional conflict perception in the course of conflict escalation (according to Kempf, 1999: 3)

The process of *competitive misperception* intensifies conflict and literally becomes a motor of conflict escalation (cf. Table 1).

With escalation to war, conflict perception narrows completely to the logic of violence. The conflict becomes a zero-sum game with only one goal: to win at any price. The alternative of peaceful conflict settlement is rejected, suspicion of the opponent intensified. Common interests, which could form the basis of constructive conflict settlement, are disputed; the possibility of cooperation with the opponent is rejected as out of the question. The (justified) outrage at war is transformed into (self-righteous) outrage at the enemy: The common suffering that war brings to both sides must not be admitted; just as little the common benefits that peaceful conflict settlement could bring (ASPR 2003).

5. Competitive negotiation

The more a conflict is already escalated, the more negotiations are also burdened by competitive misperceptions.

Already Blake & Mouton (1961, 1962) showed that negotiations in strongly competitive groups are characterized by (1) a tendency to over-estimate the proposals of one's own group and reject opposed proposals, (2) a tendency towards mutual misunderstandings, in that common values are ignored and differences are over-emphasized, (3) a tendency to value one's own victory more than agreement, so that negotiators who display willingness to compromise are regarded as traitors, and unyielding negotiators are celebrated as heroic fighters, (4) a tendency to disqualify neutral third parties, if they make recommendations that are not to their own group's advantage, as well as (5) a tendency to block negotiations instead of making efforts to find a mutually satisfactory solution.

Particularly in experimental negotiation research, these findings have since then often been confirmed, elaborated and further differentiated. Conflict parties tend to the erroneous assumption that their own interests are incompatible with those of opponents (Thompson & Hastie, 1990; Thompson & Hrebec, 1996). The resulting win-lose situation intensifies even more, if it is conceptualized so that not only are possible wins at stake, but losses are a threat (Kahnemann & Tversky, 1979). Negative framing of the conflict situation reduces the conflict parties' willingness to compromise (Bazerman et al., 1985; Bottom & Studt 1993; Lim & Carnevale, 1995; DeDreu & McCusker, 1997; Olekalns, 1997), and fixation on the respective own win versus loss has the result that chances are missed for conflict outcomes with mutual benefits (Bazerman et al. 1985; Thompson & Hastie, 1990. Thompson & DeHarpport, 1994; Fukuno & Ohbuchi, 1997).

The possibility of a favorable conflict outcome is over-rated by conflict parties (Bazerman & Neale, 1982; Kramer et al., 1993; Lim, 1997; Bazerman et al., 1999), and they cling to a confrontational conflict strategy, even when a strategy change would be advisable (Bazerman & Neale, 1983; Bizman & Hoffman, 1993; Keltner & Robinson, 1993; Bazerman, 1998; Diekmann et al., 1999). The opponent's perspective is ignored (Samuelson & Bazerman, 1985; Bazerman & Carrol, 1987; Carrol et al., 1988; Valley et al., 1998), and the opponent's concessions are devalued (Ross & Stillinger, 1991; Curhan et al., 1998).

Facts that strengthen one's own position remain more firmly fixed in memory (Thompson & Loewenstein, 1992), and ethical standards for evaluating conflict behavior are subordinated to own interests (Messick & Sentis, 1979; Babcock & Olson, 1992; DeDreu, 1996; Dieckmann, 1997; Dieckmann et al., 1997). The conflict parties judge themselves to be ethically superior (Tenbrunsel, 1998) and justify questionable modes of behavior as self-defense (Shapiro, 1991).

They over-estimate their own possibilities and attribute failure to the opponents' lack of fairness (Kramer, 1994). They exaggerate ideological differences and perceive the opponent as more extreme than he actually is (Robinson & Keltner, 1997). Even the attempt to reach a negotiated solution is dismissed as unethical whenever sacred values are at stake (Tetlock et al., 1996).

Already after a few interactions (Thompson & Hastie, 1990; Pinkley, 1990; Messick, 1999) "asymmetrical conceptualizations" of the conflict situation converge to form collective scripts with "interlocked roles" (Pruitt & Carnevale, 1993) and create a social reality which confirms the conflict parties' expectations. Conflict parties act as if their assessment of the opponent corresponds to the facts, and opponents often behave in ways that seem to confirm this judgment.

In competitive conflicts, negotiations are far removed from the ideal of cooperative conflict settlement, and for coverage of negotiations there arises the question of how to deal with them. Posing the question of guilt and looking for a villain are of little help and are even inadvisable when it comes to steering negotiations toward cooperation. Resorting to an attack vs. defense discourse only deepens the chasm between combatants, and hardens competitive misperceptions that handicap negotiations.

For conflict parties to be at all willing to take part in negotiations is already a great accomplishment, and for all criticism of how negotiations are conducted, it is necessary to maintain hope for a viable negotiating outcome and to step-wise reduce competitive misperceptions.

6. Peace negotiations

As we understand it, peace means neither the mere absence of war nor an ideal state of freedom from conflict. Rather, peace is a specific form of dealing with conflicts in which each party refrains from imposing his positions and interests until consultations (negotiations) have led to a consensual solution of the conflict, and each party is ready to take into consideration the positions and interests of all other parties – including those who cannot themselves participate in consultations (Kempf 1978).

Particularly in long lasting, highly escalated conflicts, competitive misperceptions harden to form societal beliefs that, among other things, include belief in the justness of one's own concerns and one's own victim role, de-legitimation of the enemy and trust in the pursuit of personal and national security through a policy of strength, as well as in peace as the ultimate goal of war. They thus form an interpretation frame (war-frame) which literally makes every interaction between conflict parties seem like a further episode in the struggle between good and evil (Bar-Tal 1998, ASPR 2003).

Already before peace negotiations, there is thus an urgent need to reduce competitive misperceptions, and to preserve a critical distance from creating accomplished facts.

Hardliners who interpret conflict in a war-frame develop virtually opposite world views. What one side believes, the other rejects as de-legitimation and demonization and perceives it as double standards.

Thus, for example, in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, hardliners on both sides are convinced that continued violence deepens the cleft between the two societies, as well as that a solution for the conflict can only be found through negotiation and must take into account the needs of both societies (cf. Figure 1). However, they emphasize the life needs of their own population more strongly than those of the other side, and they hold opposing views concerning the question of who must be forced to yield, whose policy prevents peaceful conflict settlement, whose warfare pursues legitimate goals (self-defense vs. liberation) and whose use of force should be condemned.

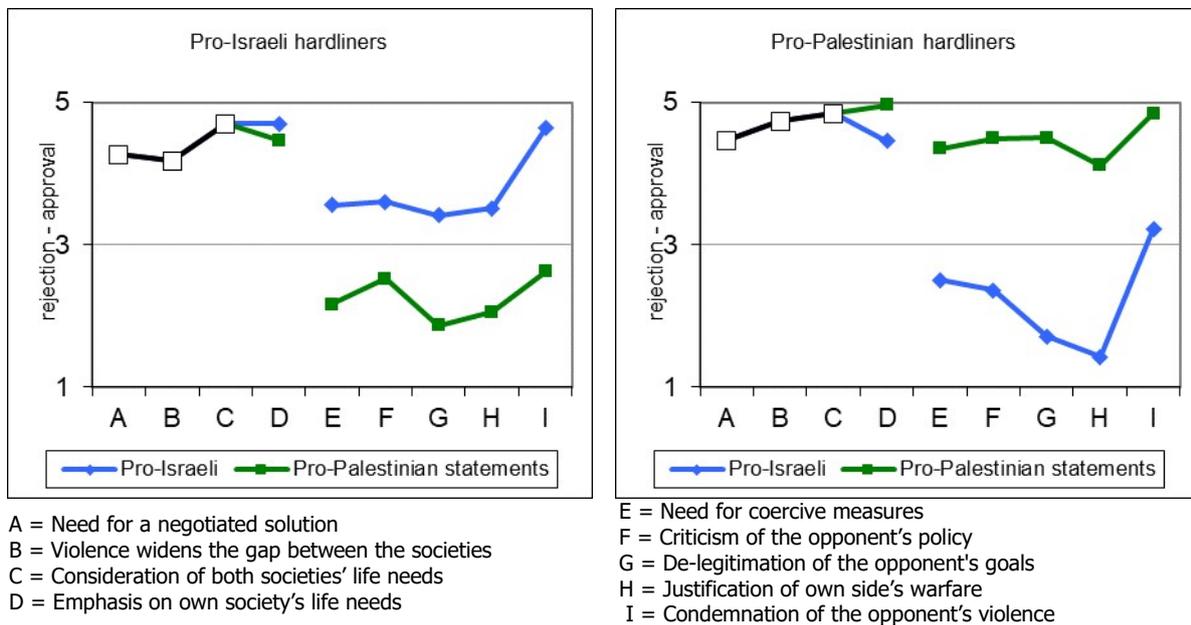


Figure 1: Positioning of pro-Israeli and pro-Palestinian hardliners on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict (based on Kempf 2015: 209f)

Under these conditions, it is extremely hard to achieve a constructive negotiating climate where no participant needs to fear sanctions for presenting his aims, interests and intended actions to all others, and where he is prepared to take account of those of all other negotiating participants. A climate where all stated aims, interests and wishes for action are included in negotiations and are not established from the start as "indispensable" or rejected as "unworthy to be pursued" (see above). Without the guidance of a neutral mediator who enjoys the trust of all conflict parties, this can hardly ever be realized.

And it is no less difficult to bring the members of hostile societies closer to a view of their conflict (peace-frame) which concedes the justification of (at least a few) of the other side's concerns, recognizes the mutual victim role, refrains from de-legitimizing the opponent and tries to achieve personal and national security through a peace solution.

The frames on the basis of which conflicts can be interpreted represent more than just cognitive interpretation patterns. They are also emotionally anchored, and indeed in an ambivalent manner, which simultaneously promises security and creates insecurity: The escalation-oriented war-frame offers security, because established behavioral patterns can be continued, but it also creates insecurity, because a resort to violence is likely. The de-escalation-oriented peace-frame offers security, because it promises an end to violence, but it also creates insecurity, because new behavioral patterns must be tried whose effectiveness is still uncertain (Kempf 2015).

Depending on how they deal with this ambivalence, members of hostile societies either welcome a peace solution or oppose it. The above named societal beliefs, which have become part of the societal ethos and the psychic infrastructure that hitherto enabled conflict parties to endure conflict, bind society to the previous conflict strategy (Bar-Tal 1998) and leave little scope for cooperative conflict settlement. Hostile societies are, however, not as homogeneous as the concept of societal beliefs seems to imply.

Even if societal groups willing to make peace should (still) constitute only a minority, and even more so than when reporting on only slightly or moderately escalated conflicts (cf. Reimann 2019), constructive coverage of peace negotiations needs to adopt the same principles that are characteristic of constructive conflict management itself: commitment to peace, empathy and sensitivity, honesty and openness, as well as completeness of the representation of all conflict-relevant positions and interests of those involved in the conflict.

The freedom of opinion and press required for their realization is, however, limited by the public climate with regard to the conflict, which among other things is determined by the degree of conflict involvement of one's own country, the existing (or also non-existent) diversity of opinions, the degree of polarization and emotional passion of political discourse, as well as the possible negative consequences for mainstream dissenters (Bläsi 2004, 2006).

Even without censorship, group pressure all too often induces self-censorship – and not just in the conflict region. Even international media not infrequently take sides, going as far as uncritically disseminating propaganda, trying to silence the other side and block discussion of its concerns.

A current and topical example of this is the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) movement initiated by Palestinian civil society, which attempts using non-violent means to exert pressure on Israel to change its Palestinian policy. Although – or also precisely because – the demands raised by BDS⁶ are covered by international law (ending the occupation), UN resolutions (return or compensation of refugees) and/or even by the Israeli Proclamation of Independence (equal rights of Palestinian citizens of Israel), a dispute over these issues has (in the meantime even by parliamentary resolution of the German Bundestag⁷) been successfully warded off by accusing BDS of Israel-related Antisemitism.

Of course, BDS tactics are not unproblematic, and clearly some demands – especially the right of return for refugees – cannot be realized one-to-one and require intensive negotiations to arrive at a viable compromise. But they are legitimate as an (initial) negotiating position, and in the interest of constructive conflict resolution they must not be sanctioned (see above).

For constructive coverage of negotiations – already before, but also during negotiations and after their constructive conclusion – this entails a need to withstand group pressure, resist influencing attempts (from any side), oppose demonization of one or the other party and strengthen civil society.

7. Peace processes

Most (German) journalists have probably read neither the BDS appeal nor the Israeli Proclamation of Independence and seamlessly spread the defamation of BDS. Or they remain silent in order to avoid being accused of anti-Semitism themselves, and/or to preserve a sort of standoffish neutrality that can hardly be regarded as support for peace processes.

Studies of German press coverage (*Frankfurter Rundschau* or respectively *Berliner Zeitung*) of the (in the end failed) Israeli-Palestinian peace process between 1993 and 1997 (Annabring 2000) and the (still viable) Northern Ireland peace accords of 1998 (Good Friday Agreement) (Hamdorf 2001) can serve as an example.

6 Cf. <http://bds-kampagne.de/aufwurf/deutschlandweiter-bds-aufwurf/> (last download 21.6.2020).

7 Cf. <http://dip21.bundestag.de/dip21/btd/19/101/1910191.pdf> (last download 21.6.2020).

Thus the news factors criticized by Galtung (1998) – negativism, personalization and elite orientation – remained largely unchanged in the coverage of the Israeli-Palestinian peace process by the *Frankfurter Rundschau*: Negative contexts prevailed over positive ones, clearly more was reported on Israeli society (elite-country) than on Palestinian (non-elite), and on both sides elite actors were clearly favored by news coverage. Members of civil society ready for reconciliation were – on both sides – almost completely ignored. Only on two points were recognizable attempts made to support the peace process: In an obvious effort to build trust in the Palestinian elite, which was represented almost exclusively by the person of Arafat, it was presented about as often in positive as in negative contexts; and with obvious concern for neutrality, non-elite members of the Israeli (elite) society were just as rarely covered as non-elite members of the Palestinian (non-elite) society.

As a kind of side-effect of this half-hearted attempt to cover the peace process with detached neutrality, but not really supporting it, Palestinian society was split up into an elite (Arafat), towards which trust was encouraged, and a population that remained unknown, possibly violent and threatening. Thus the *Frankfurter Rundschau* persisted for years in the expectancy that at any moment the Israeli-Palestinian conflict could break out again with renewed fury, which ultimately happened after the peace process had stagnated for years.

A report on the Northern Ireland peace accords in the *Berliner Zeitung* of April 11, 1998 is marred by similar deficiencies. Although the report displays much sympathy for the peace agreement, it is clearly dominated by escalation-oriented aspects, and gives no hints of relevant information that could give the peace process a positive perspective. The real issues remain largely unexplored, the civilian population (and their readiness for peace) receives no attention, and the arduously reached achievements of negotiators are largely put in question. Already the article headings express an ambivalent attitude to the peace process and imply that readers should share this ambivalence.

While the title thematizes the peace treaty as a possible solution of the conflict, any win-win orientation is already rejected in the following boldface headings: "The Northern Irish wall is shaking, but still does not fall". After the first paragraph honors the peace accords as an historic event and new chance for the region, the subheading follows, "No Handshake", which conjures up antagonism between the Northern Ireland conflict parties and suggests the tenor for the rest of the article, which after paragraph 6 is summed up in a further subheading: "Deep mistrust remains".

Constructive coverage after a peace agreement is reached thus turns out to be a tightrope walk between overly optimistic euphoria (see above) and wait-and-see detachment. A tightrope walk that can only succeed if it takes into account the heterogeneity of the hostile societies and does not draw a dividing line between, but rather cuts across them, "between all those who want to live in peace and those who ideologically and emotionally rely on violence" (Grossmann 2014).

As well after the conclusion of a peace treaty, it can be reckoned that – on both sides – there will always be violent fanatics who want to boycott the peace process. The fact that there were still Palestinian terrorist attacks after the conclusion of the Oslo Accords (though in reduced numbers) led first to disillusionment and was then exploited by Israeli media that reinterpreted the victims of these violent acts against peace as "victims of peace". Thereby they gave the initial impulse for a development that led to the assassination of Israeli Minister President Yitzhak Rabin (1922 – 1995) by an Israeli right-wing extremist student and subsequently to the stalling and finally collapse of the peace process. Today, 25 years later, broad segments of Israeli society do not regard Rabin as a martyr, but rather see his murderer as a hero, and the fathers of the Oslo Accords (Rabin, Peres and Arafat), who were awarded the Nobel Peace Prize, are shamelessly defamed as "Oslo-Criminals".

8. Rule violations

Conceived in reaction to two world wars, the cold war and the nuclear threat during the second half of the 20th century, the theory and practice of constructive conflict management was based on a democratic value canon, which among other things is marked by readiness for peaceful conflict resolution, honesty (cf. 1st step of reasonable commonality), truthfulness (cf. 3rd step of reasonable commonality), rejection of double standards (cf. 2nd step of reasonable commonality) and striving for justice (cf. principle of practical reason). Insofar, Hanitzsch's (2008) criticism that peace journalism already presupposes a peaceful society is not entirely to be dismissed – though not a peaceful society, but rather a system of values on whose foundation peace can flourish.

As well the above recommendations for constructive coverage of negotiations presuppose that negotiators will orient their actions to these basic values. What, however, if the rules of cooperative conflict management are violated? How can peace journalism suitably respond, if the conflict parties present each other with accomplished facts, declare their own positions to be red lines, de-legitimate opposing positions, declare untruths to be "alternative facts", make demands they themselves not comply with, or are not prepared to comply with and/or do not recognize universal norms, etc.?

If journalism wants to give peace a chance, it cannot simply accept such rule violations and/or report affirmatively. It cannot avoid reflecting on its role as the fourth estate and portraying rule violations as what they really are: misconduct detrimental to peaceful conflict resolution.

As difficult as it may be, the above-named demand remains valid: the need to present complete information on all conflict-relevant positions without bias and without claiming that any position deserves to be rejected or accepted from the outset. However, the fact that they should be included in negotiations does not mean that they have to be adopted. If they conflict with democratic values and/or rules of constructive conflict management, there is no way around opposing them. Keywords: acting firmly but fairly, i.e., without defaming their representatives and/or reviving competitive misperceptions, but rather by appealing to universal norms to explain that, and why, these positions cannot be maintained, and – instead of slamming the door shut – by exploring the underlying (justified) interests and offering alternative ways in which they can be satisfied.

How can constructive coverage, e.g., respond to right-wing populist parties' calls for restricting the civil rights of migrants from Muslim countries?

That their position cannot be adopted is obvious. To fend off disputes over it, to accuse their proponents of racism and at the same time court its supporters, by euphemistically calling them "concerned citizens", is detrimental to constructive conflict resolution. In particular, if they make common cause with the violent right-wing scene, one cannot silently look away and/or make unvarnished racist positions socially acceptable by declaring migration to be "the mother of all political problems" (Bundesinnenminister Horst Seehofer, the Federal Interior Minister). As long as one does not try to convince proponents that their position is untenable, they will not abandon it, and as long as (justified) concerns of citizens (if they exist) remain a meaningless assumption, they will rather feel confirmed in their position and at the same time discredited and restricted in their rights.

What can help against this is only a factual argument which clarifies the incompatibility of the position in question with Article 7 of the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights⁸. And indeed not because it is so written, but rather because equality before the law is a universal norm, and cannot be circumvented without resorting to double standards.

The refutation of this (untenable) position is not enough, however, and there is an urgent need to explore the justified interests that may underlie it, and to press for a reconciliation of these interests (e.g., security needs) with other, likewise justified interests (e.g., liberty rights).

If to the contrary even presenting an untenable position is sanctioned and excluded from negotiations, participants cannot explore the interests behind it, and if the underlying interest conflict is not dealt with, negotiations will turn into a mere power struggle for the imposition of own goals. Regardless of who finally wins the upper hand for his position, all those who see their interests as injured will reject negotiated agreements and even more strongly embrace the defeated position.

That outright racists will not be persuaded by the equality norms established in Article 7 can be expected. But accusations of racism born of indignation are no substitute for objective argumentation. If one does not even try to enlighten them, one gives racists further access. The electoral successes of the AfD in Germany are a clear illustration of this.

To resist being swept away by indignation is often more easily said than done. That it can still succeed is shown by the objectivity with which the Austrian daily newspaper *Der Standard* reported on the continuation of the ÖVP-FPÖ asylum policy in the turquoise-green government program, e.g., on the proposed law for deterrent preventive arrest for so-called endangerers, which Green Party Chairman Werner Kogler had until then condemned as an "unconstitutional and human-rights violating undertaking".⁹

Accusing the Green Party of selling out democratic values and/or putting it on the same level with the right-wing populist FPÖ would not do justice to the outcome of the coalition negotiations (see below). At the same time, it would distract from the burdening of the negotiations with the red line drawn by the ÖVP, which if crossed, would have threatened a revival of the conservative-right-national ÖVP-FPÖ coalition.

As well the (self-)reassurance that the law would at any rate be defeated by the Constitutional Court does not do justice to the goal of reasonable commonality between politics and society. Instead there is an urgent need to point out the explosive conflict formation that has arisen as a result of the coalition agreement.

⁸ Text: "All are equal before the law and are entitled without any discrimination to equal protection of the law. All are entitled to equal protection against any discrimination in violation of this Declaration and against any incitement to such discrimination."

Cf. <https://www.un.org/en/universal-declaration-human-rights/> and

https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Allgemeine_Erkl%C3%A4rung_der_Menschenrechte (last download 21.6.2020)

⁹ Cf. <https://www.sueddeutsche.de/politik/oesterreich-kurz-kogler-1.4742536> (last download 21.6.2020).

In fact, ÖVP and Greens agreed in their government program on a formulation compatible with Article 7 of the UN Declaration of Human Rights. Namely that “an additional constitutionally compliant reason for imprisonment (preventive detention to protect the general population) [is to be] introduced” “for persons, for whom facts justify the assumption that they endanger public security.”¹⁰

The express emphasis that a planned bill should be consistent with the constitution is probably unparalleled. At first glance, it seems to exclude that constitutionally guaranteed civil liberties are affected. On closer examination, however, it is marked by productive indeterminacy. It can either mean that the bill must be in conformity with the current constitution (that is the Green’s reading), or that one would otherwise change the constitution (that is Chancellor Kurz’s reading). Future conflicts are thereby pre-programmed that could lead to the Coalition’s collapse.

Since the FPÖ has already signaled agreement with a constitutional amendment, the required parliamentary majority could easily be achieved – but only with support from the Greens, who have so far opposed it¹¹, and are now part of a coalition with the ÖVP.

Already in his time as Minister of the Interior, the executive club chairman of the FPÖ, Herbert Kickl, took the position that the law had to follow politics, and politics should not follow the law.¹² Such legal arbitrariness cannot be accepted unchallenged and cries out for clear language. The mere indication that the EU limits constitutional change does not suffice for this, however. It’s not just about the letter of the law. Constructive coverage would have to make it clear that democratic values are at stake, and in this course also straighten out the arguments of the proponents of change, who try to play down the constitutional amendment as a mere adaptation to European law.¹³

That the Austrian constitutional law on personal liberty is more strict than EU law, and the European Human Rights Convention does not mean that with this “adaptation” the authority of a superordinate norm would be established. The Austrian constitution does not violate EU law, but rather EU law lags behind the constitution. The fact is no more and no less than that, on the one hand, the constitutional amendment would restrict guaranteed fundamental rights and, on the other, European law allows a certain margin for this. Whether and how far one wants to stretch this leeway is really a political decision, and yet it is not (just) a matter of feasibility, but rather of fundamental values.

By making all this clear, constructive coverage could counteract the distortion of decision-making long in advance of negotiations on a constitutional amendment. To balance personal liberty rights against public security is complicated enough even without misleading polemics.

9. Limits of constructive coverage

Constructive coverage can hardly escape the danger of being defamed as a “lying press” by fanatics trying with all their might to impose their positions. In order to avoid being drawn into conflict, to maintain the necessary distance and be able to report constructively, reporters and editors need a firm grounding in the logic of constructive conflict resolution (conflict sensitivity), an understanding of the escalation and de-escalation dynamic of conflicts and the associated misperceptions (cf. Bläsi 2005: general conflict competence), an intimate knowledge of the respective conflict (cf. Bläsi 2005: specific conflict competence) and healthy mistrust of the plausible (cf. ASPR 2003).

Journalists are themselves members of society and, as such, often share the same misperceptions as society at large or (if they dissent from it) their peer group. Even if they have no other aim than to report the truth, journalists cannot say anything other than what they believe to be true, and without the above skills, they can hardly free themselves from misperceptions. To question these and, if necessary, to revise one’s own convictions is the sine qua non of constructive conflict journalism.

But even then, constructive coverage of negotiations cannot do more than *give peace a chance*. The social construction of reality is a complex process in which a multiplicity of actors participate. And even if they report constructively, the media make only one contribution among many others.

By providing the information necessary for peaceful dispute settlement in an impartial manner and by urging fair negotiations, however, they provide an indispensable prerequisite for civil society to defend itself against actors who cling to a confrontational conflict strategy. And this does not apply just to conflicts that have already

10 Cited from <https://www.derstandard.at/story/2000114130120/sicherungshaft-wie-geht-verfassungskonformes-einsperren> (last download 21.6.2020).

11 State at end of July 2020.

12 Cited according to <https://www.tagesanzeiger.ch/ausland/europa/der-rechtsstaatgefaehrder/story/23291474> (last download 21.6.2020).

13 Cf. <https://www.addendum.org/news/bernhard-raschauer-sicherungshaft/> (last download 21.6.2020).

escalated to struggle or war. In the face of social media that trample on fundamental rights and democratic values, civil society needs this sort of constructive news channel already for the settlement of everyday interest conflicts, without which one cannot imagine a democratic society. There is no way around negotiations (consultations) with a conflict-resolving intent, and they must not be thwarted by merciless populists – neither in advance nor during negotiations and especially not when they have agreed on a sustainable result.

Where the will to settle conflicts is lacking and negotiations are held as a continuation of war by other means, the mediator role of constructive coverage reaches its limits, however. In particular, if wartime enemies were forced to the negotiating table by third parties, this would be more the rule than the exception. And even more so when third parties do not act as mediators, but pursue their own particular interests.

If coverage has to report not only on individual rule violations, but rather also on systematic blocking of constructive conflict resolution, it can turn into a balancing act between competitive and cooperative misperceptions. The accusation of blame intensifies the antagonism between conflict parties, and naivete, which overlooks distortions of the negotiating process, favors negotiation results that ultimately prove unsustainable. How this balancing act can be mastered is not answered by the present text.

The will to resolve conflict cannot be forced. To argue against your better judgment as if it were given does to be sure leave the door open to reaching an understanding. Arguments that emphasize the usefulness of cooperative negotiation, however, come to nothing if the parties involved do not want to resolve the conflict and still believe they can win. Admittedly, not on the battlefield, but rather at the negotiating table, by causing the opponent to lose face and increasing their power base through coalitions with third parties, etc.

No matter how coverage tries to survive its balancing act, three things are in any case indispensable: truthfulness, a focus on factual issues and support for civil opposition against continuing the status quo – if this exists. The social-structural changes occurring in the course of conflict escalation, and the development of societal beliefs which tie society to the previous conflict strategy, work against this. Namely in long lasting, highly escalated conflicts, peace forces are therefore often only a small, marginalized minority and find little positive resonance in the national media. On the other hand, one should not underestimate the influence of international media. National and international discourses are closely interwoven, and politicians refer to them when setting the guidelines for their foreign policy (Naveh 2002).

Support for peace forces does not mean, of course, that peace journalists themselves should turn into peace activists. What is meant is that the legitimacy of peace forces should be resolutely defended. If the international media had done its duty in this regard, efforts would have failed to demonize non-violent resistance against Israeli Occupartheid¹⁴ – which is supported by many Jews in Israel and the Diaspora –, and the annexation of parts of the Occupied West Bank¹⁵ would not be on the agenda of Israeli politics today. It is no coincidence that Netanyahu celebrated the German parliament's anti-BDS resolution as a great victory. Once peace forces have been de-legitimized, there is no longer any need to dissemble a desire for negotiation.¹⁶

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14 Defined as discrimination between populations on the basis of ethnic origin as a result of a lasting occupation that denies political and economic rights from the occupied population (Bar-Tal 2015).

15 End of July 2020.

16 The reasons for the failure of the international media are not only to be found in the fact that some journalists have adopted Israeli propaganda. Self-censorship and majority silence also contributed to it. And last but not least, some critics of Israel's Palestine policy also share the blame: Whoever uses generalizations and resentments in place of factual arguments not only makes himself vulnerable (cf. Betzler & Glittenberg 2015, Kempf 2016), but also weakens the struggle against de-legitimization of peace forces.

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