

# Rationale and Objectives of the ECREA Temporary Working Group on “CRISIS COMMUNICATION”

## **Rationale**

In the recent past, the world society was confronted with utterly devastating crises whose social, economic and political consequences are still noticeable nowadays. In particular the 9/11 terrorist attacks, the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, the Indian Ocean tsunami, the spread of the H1N1 virus, the devastating earthquake in Japan but also the international credit crisis, which triggered a series of organizational crises, called multiple audiences' attention worldwide and became dominating issues on both media and personal agendas. The appropriate communicative response to such crises turned out to be an extensive challenge for professional communicators, such as journalists, public relations practitioners, corporate communication managers, political spokespersons, or civil society actors.

Thus, from a scientific point of view, communication plays a pivotal role in the analysis of crisis situations since crises can be conceived as social and observer-dependent constructions (Hearit and Courtright, 2004, Löffelholz, 2004). Consequently, crises can be caused, influenced, and mitigated by communication as a constitutive element of all crises.

Crisis communication as an interdisciplinary field of research provides very much potential for the scholarly understanding of communication processes as well as perceptions and the behavior of stakeholders in turbulent and threatening situations. Although a number of studies from different theoretical perspectives are available, “there are many different disciplinary voices, talking in different languages to different issues and audiences” (Shrivastava, 1993). All in all, the current state of research regarding crisis communication can be described as respectable but highly fragmented (Coombs, 2007, Löffelholz, 2004, Pearson and Clair, 1998), because the different approaches and empirical findings have barely been seen in relation to each other. In addition, crisis communication has increasingly become global. Crises as well as public communication about crises are regularly crossing national and or cultural boundaries and affect audiences in different countries and different cultural contexts. This international dimension of crisis communication urgently needs more research and academic discourse.

While organizational crises have increasingly been taken into account by crisis communication scholars, the study of armed conflicts, wars, natural disasters, pandemics, and terrorism was not a primary focus. Therefore, we call for a broader understanding of crisis communication, which includes work in different sub-disciplines of communication such as journalism, public relations,

corporate communications, organizational communication, audience research, media psychology, political communication, health communication, computer-mediated communication, and international/intercultural communication. The Temporary Working Group on Crisis Communication is a platform to look for common patterns of how crises are socially constructed by involved actors, how the media bring up and frame crises, but also the way different audiences perceive and make sense of crises.

### **Goals of the Temporary Working Group on Crisis Communication**

Because of the increasing relevance of crisis communication as object of study and the lack of interdisciplinary collaboration in the field, the Temporary Working Group on Crisis Communication strives for the following goals:

- To broaden the perspectives on crisis communication
  - by discussing the theoretical, methodological, and practical implications of crises in domestic as well as international contexts,
  - by including research on manifold crisis types on organizational and societal levels,
  - and by looking at crisis communication actors in different areas such as politics, business, and civil society.
- To build a platform for European and international communication scholars to critically discuss and compare different theoretical approaches and empirical findings of coexisting research fields related to crisis communication, which usually have lacked reference to each other.
- To intensify academic discourse and stimulate interdisciplinary collaborative research on crisis communication, also by organizing regular conferences, workshops and seminars between ECREA conferences to advance the international exchange of ideas and knowledge.
- To discuss and assess the possibilities of the creation of a "journal of crisis communication" that enable scholars in different areas of crisis communication to publish their findings, case studies, etc.
- To discuss instructional and educational matters in the field.
- To cooperate with other relevant ECREA Sections (e.g., Journalism Studies, Organisational and Strategic Communication, Political Communication), other ECREA TWGs and Networks, and other communication associations (e.g., ICA, IAMCR).
- To encourage and support doctoral students or junior scholars in pursuing their research on crisis communication.
- To provide a platform to share information about faculty positions in the area of crisis communications

- To develop relationships with global firms that can provide internships and full-time positions for students in the area of Crisis Communications

## References

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