Crisis communication under terrorist threat: A case study of the counterterrorist operation in Chechnya

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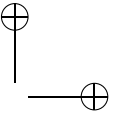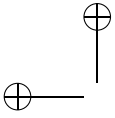*MGIMO-University, Russia*

Abstract: The dramatic societal changes such as globalization and information revolution transformed terrorism into a huge security challenge at the turn of the millennium. Modern terrorist groups have access to unprecedented mechanisms of data monitoring, finance collection and recruiting all over the world. Though 9/11 is usually perceived as the dividing line, Russia started experiencing a large-scale terrorism-provoked societal crisis several years before that notorious date.

Today's widespread global terrorism is a product of the information age because terror is a communication act, a means to transmit messages to the authorities through the mass media and the key audiences. That is why media relations are one of the most important actions in anti-terrorist policy. This paper presents a multidisciplinary analysis of terrorism as communication and a social crisis. Most crisis researchers classify terrorism as a crisis of malevolence and a conflict-type crisis. Crisis management expert Paul Shrivastava (2005) qualifies terrorism crisis as a particular crisis type that needs special research and response strategies. This study analyses crisis communication and media relations of the Information Policy Department of the President of Russia for years 2000-2004 during the counterterrorist operation in the Chechen Republic. The findings are based on internal governmental documents regulating terrorism-related communication policy.

By the year 2000 when the Information Policy Department was created, Chechnya was under the control of terrorist and criminal groups with their own successful propaganda though the Republic was still legally a part of Russia. The Chechen crisis was a large-scale creeping crisis which consisted of different micro-crises such as: terror acts, armed raids, incriminations, rumors and disinformation, social protests. By practicing the principles of speaking with one voice, openness and
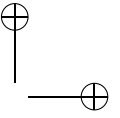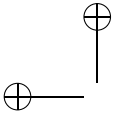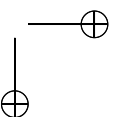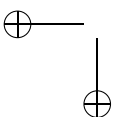
efficiency the Information Policy Department coped with the crisis and won the confrontation with the terrorists on the information field.

Keywords: media relations, crisis communication, strategic management, counterterrorism, sense-making.

1. Terrorism as communication: the role of traditional and new media

TERRORISM is not a new phenomenon. However, the characteristics of modern terrorism transformed it into a huge security challenge to national states as well as to the global community at the turn of the millennium. Terrorism can be defined as violence that consists in itself a threat of more violence designed to cause social disruption, panic and victimization within the community for the purpose of political change. One of the world's most renowned counter-terrorism experts Brian Jenkins (1974) calls terrorism "theater". In terror acts the show itself is the most destructive weapon, not the bombs. "The symbolic character of the terrorist act had fused with the amplifying potential of new information and communication technologies to create a new and highly visible form of political struggle" (Freedman & Thussu, 2012, p. 10). Terror acts do not reach their aims if they do not become notorious. As American philosopher and sociologist Douglas Kellner (2002) notes, "September 11 could also only be a mega-event in a global media world, a society of the spectacle where the whole world is watching and participates in global media spectacle" (p. 152). Terror is a "communicative act" (Hoskins & O'Loughlin, 2007, p. 9), a means to transmit messages to the authorities. British psychologist and sociologist B. Richards (2004) draws a parallel between terrorism and public relations. His research shows that terror groups mostly use spectacular form of "power-based PR" which "constructs an audience that is awestruck, whether in fear or admiration" (Richards, 2004, p. 175). Terror acts are usually widely broadcasted because they represent "the media event par excellence" (Richards, 2004, p. 170), the ideal media product which merges sensation, conflict, alarm and grief. According to William Biernatzki (2002), "sensationalism attracts audiences, so the media are especially vulnerable to manipulation by terrorists who are willing to use violence to publicize their causes" (p. 22). Apart from terror acts themselves as "propaganda of the
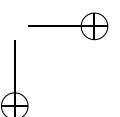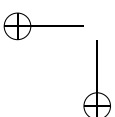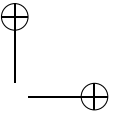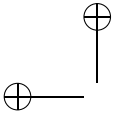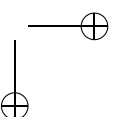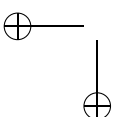
deed" (Picard, 1989, p. 21), terrorists widely use conventional media relations in different forms of "direct contacts with the media" (Picard, 1989, p. 12), including press releases, press conferences, provision of visual materials and interviews. As case studies show (Somerville & Purcell, 2011), both tactics were used by the Irish Republican Army (IRA) and their political wing Sinn Féin in support of their separatist activities. The Chechen militants also combined spectacular terror acts with traditional media relations performed by the so-called Ministry of information and press of the Chechen Republic Ichkeria.

The target audience of terrorists is the authorities whose decisions they want to manipulate. There are also several key groups (or groups of influence) in the audience of terror communications. One of the key groups is a sympathizing group that can be divided in two subgroups. The major subgroup does not support terrorists' methods but find their aims justified. By pointing at so-called objective reasons of terror acts (for example the right of national self-determination) they socially legitimize terror through general values. The other subgroup which totally identifies itself with terrorists and realizes their success as its own represents the recruiting base for terrorists. The largest key group of terror is the victimized group which sees the terror as a threat to their life and wellbeing. These people are the object of victimization which causes either destabilization of social behaviour leading to social disruption (like panic or violence) or joining the sympathizing group in their demand of concessions to terrorists. There is also a special key group of international governments and transnational organizations that can influence the authorities of a terrorized country in a way advantageous to terrorists.

Major factors that influenced the characteristics of terrorism at the turn of the millennium are connected to the drastic changes such as technical progress in general, information revolution and globalization.

Information revolution and the creation of the cyberspace provided terrorist organizations with unprecedented mechanisms of information monitoring (from open resources as well as from closed ones by hacking them), money collecting, recruiting all over the world and creating ramified networks of internal communications with the possibility of staying anonymous and external communications by broadcasting audio, video and text content to large audience (Thomas, 2003). In case of such notorious organizations as Al-Qaeda and similar groups the messages are usually duplicated by the traditional media. The Internet also gives terror groups the possibility to launch disinfor-
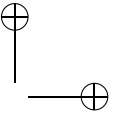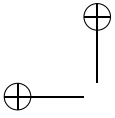
mation campaigns within the community in the guise of independent opinions using the tools of "mass self-communication" (Castells, 2009, pp. 63-71) such as blogs, forums and social networking websites.

Globalization produced the phenomenon of international terrorism characterized by multinational recruits, bases situated in different countries, terror acts prejudicing the world community. There is a process of consolidation and integration of terrorist organizations that are ideologically similar. Terror organizations are not hierarchical structures but global networks. As long as most of the connections are made through the web, including social media, American scientists proposed a simulation model called 'NetBreaker' that finds possible terrorist networks using a small amount of information before they commit a terror act. The model is based on both social theories (sociology, complexity theory, organizational theory) and computer science (North & Macal, 2005).

Today's terrorism is aimed at mass mayhem among the civilian population. Random choice of victims and widespread broadcasting of the crime make the victimization total: no country and no person can feel absolutely safe from a possible terror act.

Modern terrorism has a special tendency of increasing religious motivation as compared to political one, especially concerning the emerging terrorist ideology based on misinterpreted Islamic principles. However, there exist profound studies of the incompatibility of Islam and terrorism from the perspective of Islamic morals, law and history (Capan, 2004) that can be used in the antiterrorist communication among Muslims. The misconceptions are generally connected with two Islamic terms: "jihad" and "shahid". The term "jihad" is wrongly translated as the "holy war" though there is no such a conception in Islam (war cannot be holy, it can only be justifiable when defensive). "Jihad" means "righteous zeal on the way of God" that can be manifested in many ways. "Big jihad" means self-perfection, "small jihad" can mean defensive war that is regulated by norms prohibiting killing of civilians. "Shahid" means a martyr that was killed heroically for a righteous aim. Suicide is proclaimed a sin as well as killing innocent people (Capan, 2004). Thereby suicide bombers are literally not "shahids" on "jihad" and calling them that way in antiterrorist rhetoric glorifies them instead of condemning which means talking the same language as the terrorist propaganda. Mohamed Chafri (2005), legal scholar, political activist and former Minister
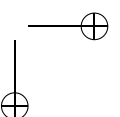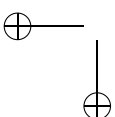
of Education of Tunisia in his major book argues that Islam is actually quite flexible concerning the political sphere and compatible with democracy. The narrow-mindedness of some Muslims who are vulnerable to terrorist propaganda comes mostly from the lack of proper humanitarian education.

As far as the psychology of a suicide bomber is concerned, there are two opposite positions that both merit attention and further investigation. From the one hand, acts of terror can be described as "a form of psychopathology, indeed as a form of psychosis" (Richards, 2004, p. 171). On the other hand, the research of The Chicago Project on Security and Terrorism (Pape, 2006; Pape & Feldman, 2010) shows that the motivation of suicide terrorists is mostly rational and represents an extreme form of armed resistance.

Sociologists study terrorism from different perspectives. One of them is the view of terrorism as an alternative way of social control "from below" through fear, conflict and victimization of the society (Black, 2004; Chriss, 2007). The goal of terrorism is usually destabilization or even demolishing of the existing mechanisms of social control (informal values and formal regulations) and of the social structure in general. There are four levels of social disruption and its prevention. The governments should use the means of communication on these levels to oppose a manipulation of any kind, including terrorism.

The first social level concerns an individual as a citizen. Any intervention on this level can cause either political extremism or, on the contrary, political apathy. Terror acts can form distrust to the authorities, a wish to change the state system or leave the country. Communications of the state on this level should be aimed at forming patriotism, civil consciousness and confidence in the government. Since political confidence is based on both affective and cognitive factors it is important to combine image making with efficient news making and response to disinformation. Communication channels are: the media, mass culture, educational institutions, social and cultural organizations, especially for young people.

The second level of social disruption is aimed at an individual as a personality. Manipulation on this level can cause serious harm. Terrorists can provoke panic, apathy, spontaneous aggression or uncontrolled mass fear which hampers adequate perception of reality. The level can be protected from any manipulation in general by forming strong ethical values, revival of cultural heritage and improving the people's educational level through mass-media,
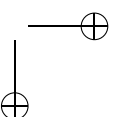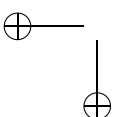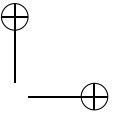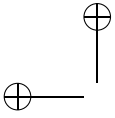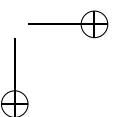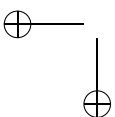
special events, offline and online libraries and other institutions. As far as the terrorism in particular is concerned people should be informed of all its psychological threats and manipulation mechanisms. Ways of personal and mass psychological rehabilitation after terrorist acts should be established.
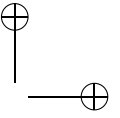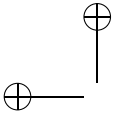
The third social level concerns groups (social, ethnic, religious and others) and group behavior. Terror activity can cause hostility between groups if some of them are victimized and others are associated in mass consciousness with terrorists. This can lead to conflicts, violence, genocide, separatism and other social convulsions that represent serious threats to national security. The government needs to argue away the terrorists' activity in favor of any social group except for themselves (the Russian anti-terrorist campaign used a motto that terrorism had no nation and no religion). As for the general measures, it is necessary to favor comprehensive dialogue between groups and create consolidating principles that should be pluralistic and based on fundamental values, open for any positive innovation but protected against manipulation.

The fourth social level is the society itself. The control on this level is gained when the complex of the three previous levels is under control. The loss of governmental control on this level can lead to total demolition of a social structure which is manifested most often in revolutions and civil wars. That is why it is necessary to take preventive measures especially against terrorists' manipulation.

2. Terrorism as a social crisis

Crisis is an unpredictable "perceived disruption" (Boin, 2005, p. 163) of a social unit which threatens its integrity, reputation or survival, "challenges the public's sense of safety, values or appropriateness" (Sapriel, 2011) and requires immediate action under the circumstances of uncertainty, urgency and increased attention. A crisis is an ambivalent event. It has objective and subjective sides that are interconnected the way that the crisis extends on both. That is why from the sociological point of view a crisis can be studied from different paradigms which represent its two different sides: objective disruptions (structural functionalism) and subjective perceptions (symbolic interactionism, phenomenology and sociology of knowledge). An integrative theory of cultural sociology that rejoins the subjective and the objective sides, recon-
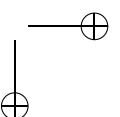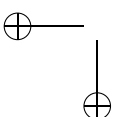
ciling functional analysis with the concept of social performance (Alexander, 2004) is also proposed to be applied to social crises, terrorism-related ones in particular.
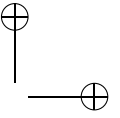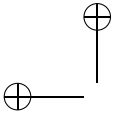
From the objective point of view crises are 'disruptions of normality' which happen "when the institutional structure of a social system experiences a relatively strong decline in legitimacy, as its central service functions are impaired or suffer from overload" (Boin, 2005, pp. 162-163). From the subjective perspective a crisis exists in a symbolic field of collective perceptions. "We can only speak of a crisis if the actors in question perceive the situation as a crisis" (Boin, 2005, p. 162) and "stakeholders will react to the organization as if it is in crisis" (Coombs, 2007, p. 3), no matter how serious or not the objective disruption is.

If we take a terror act as an example of this objective-subjective crisis concept we can see that it strikes only once in the objective field (with deaths, injuries and economic losses as its manifestations) but it can strike over and over again in the subjective field with every rumor, every new conspiracy version or new piece of information about governmental security failures. The creeping effects of terror crises can cause further socio-political disruptions such as conflicts or protests. That is why counterterrorist crisis communication is so important.

Most crisis researchers classify terrorism as a form of a crisis of malevolence which happens "when some outside actor or opponent employs extreme tactics" (Coombs, 2007, p. 65). Otto Lerbinger (2012) emphasizes that "terrorist acts committed against governments are the clearest expression of malevolence, with the September 11, 2001, attack on the twin World Trade Center towers as the prime example" (p. 185).

In a distinction between consensus and conflict types of crises American sociologist Enrico L. Quarantelli (2002) considers terrorism a classic conflict-type crisis. However, his colleagues Lori A. Peek and Jeannette M. Sutton (2003) argue that terrorist attack should be studied as a unique crisis type that includes characteristics of both types and also some unprecedented traits. The question is crucial because different types of crises need different response strategies especially concerning communication and media relations. In conflict-type situations mass media's interest is higher. Conflict makes a thrilling story that is why the press shows both sides of a conflict and depicts their positions. Conflict-type crises disconnect the society and provoke anti-

social behaviour while the consensus crises create rejoin the society in returning to normalcy as soon as possible (though there can be mutual accusations or different opinions, the goals are not contrary), volunteer help and mutual grief. The negative psychological impact of conflict crises is higher. Terrorism is not a typical conflict-type crisis because it can also follow the scenario of a consensus-type crisis. Symbolic interactionist David L. Altheide (2009) shows in his analysis how the mass media content frames crises and puts terrorism into a conflict paradigm through "war programming" (pp. 143-144).

The world's renowned crisis management expert Paul Shrivastava (2005) qualifies terrorism crisis as a particular crisis type that needs special research and response strategies. Terrorism "crises evolve and emerge as economic, social and political processes over time" (Shrivastava, 2005, p. 67). Deaths, injuries and other physical disruptions are the consequences of terror acts. But the consequences of terror crises are wider and include social disruption, political setbacks, economic/financial losses, war responses, environmental degradation and damage to reputation and image. That is why the design and development of special systems for terrorism crisis communications are needed.
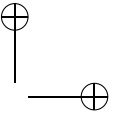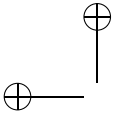
3. Crisis communication under terrorist threat

A crisis life cycle includes several stages that require special kinds of crisis communication and media relations strategies. In this paper we use the three-staged approach advocated by crisis communication expert W. Timothy Coombs (2007).

1. The pre-crisis stage means crisis prevention and preparation. Terrorist crisis prevention includes both psycho-social and physical crisis manifestations. Psycho-social crisis prevention means detection and extermination of terror manipulation threats on different social levels using the mass media educative tools. Physical crisis prevention necessitates evaluation of the risks of terrorist attacks and informing the community about them. Communication should be designed to cause alert, not panic.

The primary step of crisis preparation is creating a crisis management team and a crisis communication plan. Governmental crisis communication's characteristic feature, especially when terrorism is concerned, is that a crisis
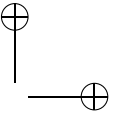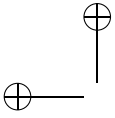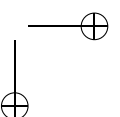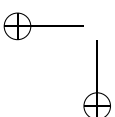
team should be inter-agency. It is necessary to facilitate internal information flows and communication over bureaucratic barriers. "As the ample disaster and emergency literature shows, coordination and cooperation requires (after the central authority lays out a meaningful mission and exercises oversight) frequent drills, exercises, simulations, and meetings where diverse agencies get a chance to see each other's point of view, establish personal contact, and build trust" (Perrow, 2011, p. 96). The authors of "The terrorism crisis communications manual for public authorities" (Shpiro et. al., 2001) recommend the following positions to be represented in the team: crisis manager who is responsible for the decision-making and holds the leadership function; crisis coordinator who is charged with coordination and the correct flow of information; authorized spokesperson who performs crisis communications and answers media questions; crisis team assistant who is responsible for organizational tasks (p. 24). One of the important functions within a crisis team is the role of a spokesperson that needs to be carefully selected and thoroughly trained to communicate with the media and the stakeholders. A spokesperson should be competent and trusted and have good communicative skills. During the pre-crisis period spokesperson needs to go through media rehearsals, especially practicing answering tough questions about a hypothetical terror act under time pressure and lack of data. Crisis plan should include basic organizational and communicational crisis measures, communication channels, draft communication strategies and comments, exact contact information.

It is important to foster alliances with other concerned organizations, the media and expert community and to develop consensus communicational strategies. There should be formed a special loyal terrorism-reporting press pool. Joint media/government trainings and simulations are useful: "exercises such as those conducted by George Washington University and the Technology Institute in Holon, Israel, which bring together government officials and media representatives to simulate government response and media coverage of mock terrorist incidents" (Perl, 1997). Paul Shrivastava (2005) argues that "the public itself needs to be trained in first-response strategies" (p. 68) as well.

The crisis-event stage after a crisis is triggered can be characterized by: threat, urgency, uncertainty, time compression, stress, loss of control, escalation of events, crisis perception, violation of expectations, focus of attention, external interferences. The are several important rules of crisis communication
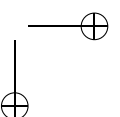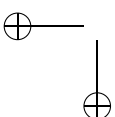
that can be shortened into a motto: "Be first, be right, be credible" (Reynolds, 2002, pp. 90-101).

The first crisis communication rule is to make a statement as quick as possible. A crisis creates an information vacuum that can be filled by any kind of information whether provided by the official sources or not. Public attention is focused on a crisis and the media has deadlines to report about it. "If the crisis team does not supply the initial crisis information to the media, some other groups will, and they may be ill informed, misinformed, or motivated to harm the organization. The information void can become filled with rumor and speculation, not facts" (Coombs, 2007, p. 129). Otto Lerbinger (2012) emphasizes that "the first hours or, in quick-moving crises, minutes after a crisis event, are of critical importance for an organization to gain control over the reporting of the event – not only in describing what happened but in framing the event" (p. 46). Silence and "no comment" statements make the media and the public think there is something to hide. There is no need to wait until all the facts are available (it can never happen). During the first news-cycle of a crisis it is enough to generally explain the crisis event and what the organization is doing to normalize the situation.

It is important to dominate the information field during a crisis. The government needs to stay the primary news source and use any occasion possible to show that it keeps the situation under control. It is necessary to explain threats, risks and give recommendations to the community in order to prevent panic and victimization.

The authorities should avoid giving unverified information, especially about the victims or guilty. A mistake can provoke reputational losses and amplify the crisis. This is what happened after the terror act of 11 March 2004 in Madrid of which the government initially accused ETA Basque organization but the information revealed to be false (Castells, 2009, pp. 349-364). Another example is the Beslan school hostage crisis. Getting unverified and wrongly understated number of hostages from the republican authorities was interpreted by some media as an intention to hide the truth by reducing the scale of the event.

There are several communicational tasks during a crisis:

1) Setting up the coordination center to elaborate the strategy and control the information flows between different agencies to help the authorities to speak with one voice.
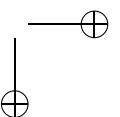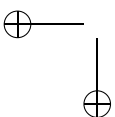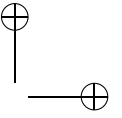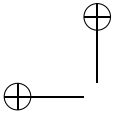
In Russia such an inter-agency crisis communication structure was designed to face different types of crises, mostly terrorism provoked. During the years 2000-2004 it was coordinated by the Information Policy Department (officially established in March 2001, before that – the staff of the Aide to the President) that developed crisis communication strategy for different governmental structures involved in crises and established cooperation with other concerned organizations, the media and experts.

Apart from the main center, the exceptional case of the counterterrorist operation in the Chechen Republic of Russia required the creation of two more regional coordination centers: civil headquarters based on the interim Republican Administration and military headquarters based on the joint forces in the North Caucasus. Thereby, the crisis communication organizational structure during the terrorism crisis in Russia was pyramid-shaped with the Information Policy Department on the top and two regional coordination centers in the base. This was done to make the structure steady.
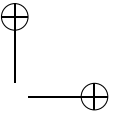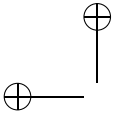
The government created a strategic multi-functioned communicative construction that consisted of a number of interconnected frames and followed different objectives: argumentation for the counterterrorist operation; condemnation of the terrorists; gaining support of different target groups; managing the reputation of the authorities and of the Russian military forces; responding to disinformation and manipulation.

2) Cooperating with the media. Crisis media center for ongoing press-conferences, briefings and interviews with the spokesperson and other newsmakers should be designated. The place should be equipped with all the necessary conveniences such as computers, Internet, local phones, cafes, free snacks where a journalist could get help and information. If there is a need to report the events from the ground, press tours should be organized. It is also important to be omnipresent in the news-field by regularly sending press-releases and other data to the journalists.

Media relations in a crisis should represent partnership and a two-way communication. By showing concern and helpfulness, the control of the media will be exercised in a soft, not noticeable way. One of the means of soft control is giving exclusive materials to loyal journalists. Refuse to disclose the information without giving reasons should be avoided.

Besides the pool of loyal journalists prepared to report a crisis event during the pre-crisis stage, it is important to create a relationship with all journalists
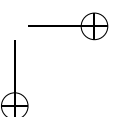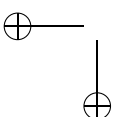
that the organization communicates with during a crisis and to get feedback from them. The media can be not only a transmitter of the organization's news but also a source of helpful information to the organization, in particular about the rumors and hostile newsmakers.

During a terrorism crisis the government and the media should cooperate to exercise joint control of interpretations (to avoid following the interpretation of the terrorists) and of verbal designations (for example, not calling terrorists rebels). During the terrorist crisis in Russia such a cooperation helped to refrain from the negative and unpopular war terminology (the terms "counter-terrorist operation" and "stabilization of the situation in the North Caucasus" were used instead) and to avoid calling terrorists "Islamists", "Wahhabis" or "Islamic extremists".

The distribution of the following information should be strongly restricted: live interviews with terrorists leaving no possibility to edit them; secret details about the counter-terror or hostage release operations (during the 2002 Nord-Ost siege the terrorists got the information about the operation from the TV); intimidating details that can provoke massive panic, fear and victimization (savoring the tragic facts, showing killed or injured in detail).

3) Establishing a hotline that provides direct communication to the public by phone, e-mail and specially created Internet site.
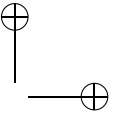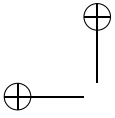
4) Communication with the other concerned organizations, elaborating joint communicational strategies.

5) Constant monitoring of the information flows, not only the traditional media but the Internet and the social media as well, giving immediate feedback and correcting disinformation.

3. The post-crisis stage should not be underestimated

Mistakes during this phase can make the crisis relapse and become chronicle. And on the contrary, skillful post-crisis communication favours the organization's reputation and promotes its activities and capabilities in crisis management. The post-crisis prompt analysis of the crisis communication and its results is priceless for future cases. Follow-up crisis communications should include the report about the crisis response measures and the results of the investigation of the terror act. The situation should be clear for the public
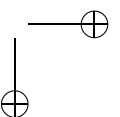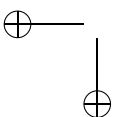
and the media to avoid further speculations or rumors. The activity of the government to handle the situation should be highlighted. Terrorism crises fade but do not vanish. As long as they cause many long-lasting psychosocial consequences, it is important to launch a public education campaign in the mass media to reduce creeping post-crisis effects and resist terrorist manipulation. The "discourse of renewal" (Ulmer & Sellnow, 2002) as a form of post-crisis communications is important on this stage and may be based on stakeholder commitment, commitment to correction and core values (Ulmer & Sellnow, 2002, pp. 363-364).

Governmental crisis communication should be thoroughly analyzed. "Evaluation data comes from the crisis records, stakeholder feedback, organizational performance measures, Internet comments, and media coverage" (Coombs, 2007, p. 152). The primary methods are: 1) content-analyses of external and internal documents, media coverage and Internet comments; 2) surveys, interviews and focus-groups with the stakeholders, including members of the crisis team, representatives of partner organizations, and families of the victims. The data collected is used to modify the crisis communication plan. The crisis communication circle returns to the pre-crisis stage.

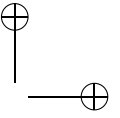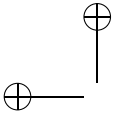## 4. A case study of counterterrorist operation in Chechnya

The first Chechen campaign from December 1994 to August 1996 was marked by the disastrous defeat of the Russian government on the information field. The self-proclaimed separatist Republic of Ichkeria created a powerful, well-organized and financially supported structure of propaganda which was called the Ministry of Information and press of the Chechen Republic Ichkeria with Movladi Udugov at its head. The Russian government, on the contrary, did not have coordinated media policy, often avoided any comments and its communications were targeted only at wide Russian audiences outside the Chechen Republic. Meanwhile the separatists' propaganda was aimed at target audiences in the Republic as well as outside the country where they used democratic rhetoric based on the myths about the genocide of the Chechens. They established contacts with the mass media in Russia that often showed unedited video tapes of war scenes provided by the separatists and used their
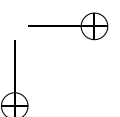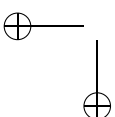
false statistics which had negative psychological impact on the audience and discredited the Russian army (Shvets, 2001).

The counterterrorist operation started by the Russian government in 1999 was represented by the separatists as a war against Islam and Muslims using new religious discourse. Depending on the target audience they used different communication strategies: 1) democratic rhetoric and the right of self-determination was aimed at Western audiences; 2) anti-Islamic aggression was a myth for the Muslim counties, the Chechens and other Islamic nationals in Russia; 3) fear and victimization was used to manipulate the general public in Russia.

The following research of the new communication strategy of the Russian government applied during the years 2000-2004 is based on official governmental documents: 1) "Rekomendacii po upotrebleniyu terminov pri podgotovke materialov po obstanovke na severnom Kavkaze dlya opublikovaniya v sredstvah massovoy informacii" ("Recommendations for using terms in the media publications about the situation in the North Caucasus"), n.d., Moscow; 2) "Rekomendacii dlya podgotovki materialov po informacionno-psihologicheskomu obespecheniyu deystviy Obyedinennoy gruppirovki voysk (sil)" ("Recommendations for preparing materials aimed and informational and psychological support of the activities of the Joint military (force) groups"), n.d., Moscow; 3) "Pravila akkreditacii predstaviteley sredstv massovoy informatcii pri Apparate pomoshnika Presidenta Rossiyskoy Federatcii S.V. Yastrzhembskogo" ("The rules for media accreditation by the Department of Aide to the President of the Russian Federation"), n.d., Moscow with the appendix "Poryadok organizatcii posesheniya I raboty zhurnalistami, akkreditovannymi pri Apparate pomoshnika Prezidenta Rossiyskoy Fedetatcii S.V Yastrzhembskogo Chechenskoy Respubliki" ("Regulations of the visits and work in the Chechen Republic applied to the journalists with the accreditation of the Department of Aide to the President of the Russian Federation"); 4) "Predlozheniya po koordinatcii deyatelnosti informatcionnyh struktur federalnyh vedomstv, deystvuyushih v Chechenskoy Respublike" ("Proposals for coordination of the activity of the informational structures of the Federal agencies operating in the Chechen Republic"), n.d., Moscow; 5) "Osnovnie zadachi vremennogo obyedinennogo press-centra OGV (s) na Severnom Kavkaze" ("The main tasks of the interim press-center of the joint military forces on the North Caucasus"), 18 November 1999, Moscow; 6) "Pravila raboty preds-

taviteley sredstv massovoy informatcii v zone otvetstvennosti Obyedinennoy gruppirovki voysk (sil)" ("Rules of the work of the media representatives in the area of responsibility of the Joint military (force) groups"), November 1999, Moscow.
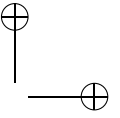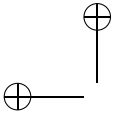
The new counterterrorist communication strategy of the Russian government during the years 2000-2004 was based on organizing an integrated communication system which combined the principles of hierarchy within the governmental structure and the principles of a social net cooperating with other institutions. Sergei Yastrzhembsky who was at head of the Information Policy Department of the President's Administration had a status of Aide to the President which gave him authority to make decisions at governmental level. The newly created Department was responsible for:

- rejoining the communication structures of all the agencies responsible for the counterterrorist operation;

- cooperation with non-core agencies and non-governmental organizations if necessary;

- framing the counterterrorist operation;

- strategic management of the crisis communication.

Field crisis communication centers were created on the territory of the Chechen Republic: civil headquarters were based on the interim Republican Administration and military headquarters were based on the joint forces in the North Caucasus. The regional centers were responsible for:

- coordination of all the official information flows in the counterterrorist operation's area;

- primary information monitoring, analyses and sending the data to the top coordination center;

- revealing the threats of disinformation and manipulation;

- primary crisis communication;

- field media relations.
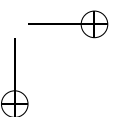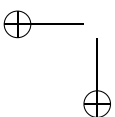
The headquarters were technically equipped (including modern transport and constant Internet access) that let them function effectively. Taking into account the subordination rules in military structures the chiefs of the communication units were promoted to the level of the deputy commanders-in-chief that gave them authority to exercise direction. Civil and military headquarters coordinated their activity.
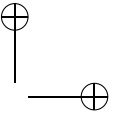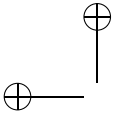
Effective communication functions were exercised by the interim press-center of the joint military forces based in two spots: the central spot was situated in Mozdok (the Republic of North Ossetia–Alania) and the supplementary one was situated at the Khankala military base which was then was turned into the primary one after eliminating most of the illegal armed groups in the region. The press center's main purpose was assisting the media which included:

- organization of press conferences and briefings;

- distribution of official press releases and messages of the military headquarters;

- informing about the current military operation activities;

- organization of press tours for the journalists around the territories freed from the militants.

The journalists had comfortable working environment. The press-center was equipped with modern communication facilities. As compared to the year 1999 when the working principles of the press center used to have serious flaws (the journalists felt pressure from the military forces, the access to the information was sometimes blocked with no explanation given), the media policy coordinated by the Information Policy Department changed. The press center turned to the tactics of open media relations in order to influence the journalists softly using the embedded press system that was previously successfully applied by the American military forces during the conflict in Panama and the Gulf War (Paul & Kim, 2004).

One of the main communication tasks of the Information Policy Department was framing the counterterrorist operation and the terrorist threat crisis. *Framing* means creating the *frames of reference*, i.e. "interpretative frames
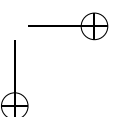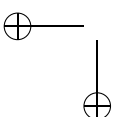
that provide the context for creating and understanding information" (Muhren & Van de Valle, p. 31) and includes the processes of *sense-making* which means determination of "how threatening the events are, to what or whom, what their operational and strategic parameters are, and how the situation will develop in the period to come" (Boin & 't Hart, 2006, p. 49) and *meaning-making* which implies getting "others to accept their definition of the situation" because "if other actors in the crisis succeed in dominating the meaning-making process, the ability of incumbent leaders to decide and maneuverer is severely constrained" (Boin & 't Hart, 2006, p. 51). Framing, sense-making and meaning-making should be distinguished from manipulation because they are based on facts and are aimed at mutual understanding of the situation equally shared by every side of the communication process, senders as well as receivers. They serve the goal of consensual interpretations for better coordination in the state of ambiguity or equivocality typical for crisis situations.

The frame of reference for the Chechen terrorist threat crisis had to solve several tasks:
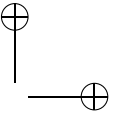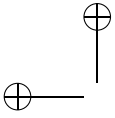
- substantiation of the counterterrorist operation;

- discredit of the enemy;

- support of the Russian government by different target audiences;

- improvement of the Russian army's image;

- response to any threats in the information field.

In order to solve these tasks several descriptive strategies were elaborated.

1) The first frame was the status of the Chechen Republic as a constituent entity of the Russian Federation, the integral part of the country. It means that the Russian authorities follow the basic principle of territorial integrity of a State. Russia's actions correspond to the Constitution, national and international laws.

2) The mission of the counterterrorist operation was formulated as: liquidation if the illegal armed groups; ensuring security of the Russian citizens; re-establishment of the constitutional order on the territory of the Chechen Republic. The stationing of the armed forces was explained as an exceptional
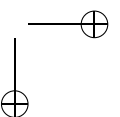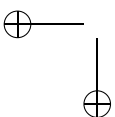
measure to stabilize the situation in the region that was not aimed at limitation of any rights and freedoms on the Chechen community.

The concept of "war on terrorism" was not used for many reasons. First of all, the media and the citizens were against any wars and the Chechen war 1994-1996 particularly but they supported, however, the counterterrorist operation as a measure to solve the terrorist threat crisis. Second, the term "war" that is generally applied by political theory and international relations theory provides terrorists de-facto with the status of an equal political actor. As German risk sociologist Ulrich Beck (2009) notes about the USA, "the involuntary complicity is reflected in the formula "War on Terror": this scattered the terrorist seed over real battlefields where terrorism could achieve its greatest victories" (p. 11). More than that, it is the possibility to be involved in war with the USA that serves as a latent advertising campaign and attracts radicals to Al Qaeda.

3) As opposed to the first military campaign when the condemnation of the Chechen militants was vague, during the second campaign they were framed as terrorists. Several communication concepts were formulated to support the frame.
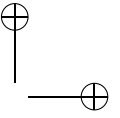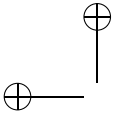
First of all, the threats on several levels were formulated and emphasized:

- the threat to the sovereignty and the integrity of the Russian Federation;

- the threat to the security of Russian and foreign citizens;

- the transnational threat of proliferation of terrorism, crime and drug traffic;

- the threat to basic values such as democracy and human rights.

Each of the statements indicated above were sustained by the facts such as documents, data, evidence, statements with special reference to the condemnation of the terrorists on the part of the Chechen Muslim leaders.

From the standpoint of the theory of communicative sense-making (phenomenology of communication), synthesized by Arnoldi (2010) on the basis of the research of Niklas Luhman and Edmund Husserl, sense-making and meaning-making involve classifications and identity attributions that form expectations about the phenomenon, particularly by means of the mass media.
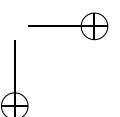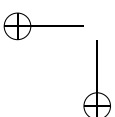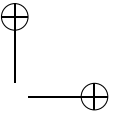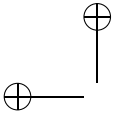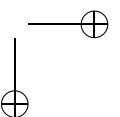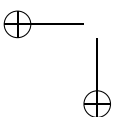
Semantics play a significant role this process. This theory explains the importance of suggested terms elaborated for the media to describe the separatists. It was recommended to omit of the media messages such notions as "the Chechen army" and "guerrilla war" by replacing them with "armed gangs" and "terrorist acts" ("Rekomendacii po ...", n.d.). It was also suggested to avoid calling the separatists "Islamists", "Wahhabis" or "Islamic extremists" but use the terms "extremists", "terrorists" or "members of the illegal (terrorist, extremist, criminal, radical) armed groups using slogans of Islam (Wahhabism) as cover" instead ("Rekomendacii po ...", n.d.). The campaign had a motto that terrorism has no nation and no religion. This important correction created the base for discrediting the separatists' incrimination of Russia making war against Islam and for minimizing conflicts between different confessions in Russia and between different Islamic schools in Chechnya. The key point is that the elimination of the religious factor deprived the terrorists of the ideological foundation of gaining support and recruiting. The media politics was aimed at disclosing the connection of the Chechen illegal armed groups with international terrorist organizations which lent them political, financial, technical and ideological support. The international terrorists were framed as criminals that were pursuing their own interests, not that of the Chechen people. Facts of the illegal armed groups' robberies, kidnapping, arms and drug trafficking, cruelty towards all confessions, including Muslims, were presented.

Russia positioned itself as an unbending fighter against terrorism on the international level. This status helped to gain the world community's support of the counterterrorist operation because Russian internal problem was thus connected to one of the global threats.

Another important communication task was to improve the image of the Russian army in the Chechen campaign. Russian soldiers were framed as heroes, liberators, protectors of law and order in the Republic.

As we can see, terrorism crises provoke not only physical but also social disruption and damage to political legitimacy. That is why the development of anti-terrorist crisis communication system is needed. The case study shows the example of the communication strategy that helped the Russian government to de-escalate the conflict and reunite the country. Despite the separatists' notorious Nord-Ost siege in October 2002, Russian government demonstrated trust in the Chechens as the citizens of Russia and turned to the

discourse of renewal instead of escalating the conflict. In 2003 two positive newsworthy occurrences were created: the establishing of the Ministry of the Interior of the Chechen Republic of Russia and the Referendum for the Constitution of the Chechen Republic of Russia. These events represented the way to normalization in Chechnya and factual reunion of Russia.
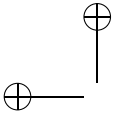
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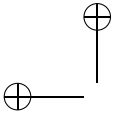Capan, E. (2004). *Terror and suicide attacks: an Islamic perspective*. Somerset, New Jersey: Light, Inc.
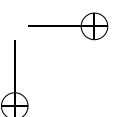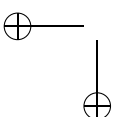
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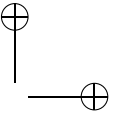
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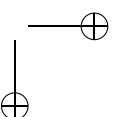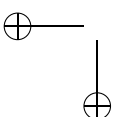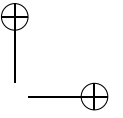
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