

ECREA

**Temporary Working Group on Crisis Communication**

**-- now transformed to "Crisis Communication Section" --**

## **Annual Report 2015**

*Foundation:* June 2011

*Transformation into full ECREA section:* summer 2015

*Chair:*

- Andreas Schwarz, Ilmenau University of Technology, Germany  
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*Vice Chairs:*

- Winni Johansen, Aarhus University, Business and Social Sciences, Denmark  
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- Alessandra Mazzei, IULM University, Milan, Italy  
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### **Mission**

The group aims at building a platform for European and international communication scholars to critically discuss different theoretical approaches and empirical findings on crisis communication and to collaborate across sub-disciplines.

The TWG advocates 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.

For further details about the goals of the TWG and its modus operandi see this website: <http://www.ecrea.eu/divisions/twg/id/24>

The new Crisis Communication Section websites are:

<http://www.ecrea.eu/divisions/section/id/34>

<https://ecreacrisis.wordpress.com/>

## **Membership**

February 2015: 140 members (growth rate since 2011: ~240%). They are scholars coming from more than 20 countries in Europe, Asia and the Americas.

## **6th European Communication Conference (ECC), Nov 9-12, Prague 2016**

In 2015, the Crisis Communication Section (previously TWG) started the preparations for the 6<sup>th</sup> ECC in Prague 2016. This included the announcement of the conference among the members the TWG/Section as well as the recruitment of reviewers. By March 2016, the Crisis Communication Section received approx. 60 submissions for review.

## **Fourth Business Meeting at the Crisis4 conference in Helsingborg 2015**

The fourth business meeting of the TWG on Crisis Communication took place on October 8, 2015 in Helsingborg, Sweden, during the fourth International Conference on Crisis Communication "Intersections" organized by Lund University, the TWG/Section and its partners.

The Agenda was the following:

- Welcome note, the TWG CC at Crisis4, 2015
- Past business: Conference Report Lisboa
- Future business:
  - Next conference: ECC 2016, Prague
  - Elections of the new Section management team
  - Next conference: 'Crisis5' 2017 – Call for Hosts
- TRANSFORMATION of the TWG into SECTION Crisis Communication & Findings of the Member Survey
- Reception & talk

### *1. Welcome note*

During the welcome note, the TWG chair Andreas Schwarz addressed the status quo of the Temporary Working Group (TWG). This included the following aspects:

- 140 members
- Objectives:
  - discuss theoretical approaches and empirical findings
  - collaborate across disciplines
  - work in different sub-disciplines of communication

- strengthen global network of scholars
- support doctoral students or junior scholars
- turn TWG into a full section (long-term objective) that was successfully achieved in summer/fall 2015
- How to join the TWG/Section:
  - Being an ECREA member is prerequisite
  - Register on website: [www.ecrea.eu/divisions/twg/id/24](http://www.ecrea.eu/divisions/twg/id/24)

## 2. Conference Report ECC 2014 in Lisboa.

The TWG chair reported on the ECC2014 conference in Lisboa (see the TWG's annual report 2014 for more details).

## 3. Future business

In this slot of the business meeting the TWG/Section chair informed about the ECC2016 in Prague including deadlines, submission process, and recruitment of reviewers.

### 3.1 Elections of the new management team

First, the current management team from 2014-2016 was presented:

Chair: Andreas Schwarz (Technische Universität Ilmenau, Institute of Media and Communication Research, Ilmenau, Germany)

Vice Chair: Winni Johansen (Aarhus University, Business and Social Sciences, Denmark, Aarhus V, Denmark)

Vice Chair: Alessandra Mazzei (IULM University Milan, Milan, Italy)

Second, the procedures and deadlines for the elections of the next management team of the SECTION (2016-2018) were presented. The deadline for submitting candidacy proposals and mission statements was set for September 1, 2016. Eligible to vote and to be elected are members of the Crisis Communication Section.

### 3.2 Call for Conference Hosts

The TWG/Section chair presented the call for conference hosts of the 5th International Conference on Crisis Communication (Crisis5). Call for Proposals should include...

- Topic: relevance, state of research, practice
- Host: related research activities/profile of the hosting institution
- Location: good accessibility for ECREA members
- Inclusion of YECREA network
- Short CV of the conference chair(s)
- Estimate of the conference fees
- 4 to 5 pages proposals, including rough program scheme, planned events, potential keynote(s)
- deadline: March 31, 2016

### 3.3 TRANSFORMATION of the TWG into SECTION Crisis Communication & Findings of the Member Survey

The TWG/Section chair informed members and conference participants about the successful application and transformation of the TWG Crisis Communication into a full ECREA section. In addition, the results of a member survey were presented which had been conducted previously to the application. The results of the survey produced evidence for a strong support of the TWG transformation into a Section by the TWG members and other international scholars in risk and crisis communication.

At the end of the business meeting, a reception was held to celebrate the successful TWG transformation.

#### **TRANSFORMATION of the TWG into SECTION Crisis Communication**

In early 2015, the management team of the TWG Crisis Communication applied for the transformation of the TWG into a full ECREA section based on a previous survey of members who strongly supported this endeavor.

At ECREA, the application was fully supported by 7 Sections and received general support by the 3 ECREA Networks. Specific concerns were voiced by only 2 Sections, a general concern was voiced by 1 Section (that all TWGs should be granted another 4-year term rather than being transformed into Sections).

The TWG management team responded to these concerns to ECREA and finally was granted a full section status in summer 2015.

→ see also section 3.3 of this report

#### **The Crisis4 conference in Helsingborg 2015**

The 4th International Conference on Crisis Communication (CRISIS4) was held in October 7–10 2015 at Lund University, Campus Helsingborg. The conference host (Lund University: Jesper Falkheimer, Timothy Coombs, Mats Heide) summarized the outcomes as follows:

“We think that the conference was a great success with many interesting and highly qualitative paper presentations and valuable discussions, an inspiring keynote talk by professor Arjen Boin and worth considering panel by Henrik Olinder, The Swedish Civil Contingencies Agency, Catrin Johansson, Mid Sweden University, Marina Ghersetti, Gothenburg University, and Charlotte Simonsson, Lund University. Dr. Andreas Schwarz, Chair of the TWG Crisis Communication, announced the successful transformation of the Working Group into a full ECREA section and we celebrated this important step with sparkling wine. And we also remember our excellent guided tour in Lund with the the Cathedral of Lund, the main building of Lund University and the old Bishop’s House, where we enjoyed a delicious dinner.”

The conference program consisted of 12 parallel panel sessions with approx. 2 to 5 paper presentations each. All in all, approx. 47 papers and two keynotes were presented at the conference.

#### *Conference topics:*

The theme of the conference was “Intersections” that encompasses themes as internal/external communication, social media and transboundary crises. The

Intersections theme seeks to capture idea that crises are critical points where various topics intersect and reflect the complex nature of crises. Crises are at the intersection of internal and external organizational communication, management and stakeholder relations, the utilization of social media and traditional media, and corporate and political interests. Crisis communication requires crisis managers to address both internal audiences (such as employees) and external audiences (such as consumers and citizens). Crises connect internal and external communication. Crisis communication balances the needs of management (what is good for the organization) and the needs of stakeholders, especially victims. Crisis communication must leverage all possible communication channels demanding an ability to integrate and to utilize both social media and traditional media. Crisis communication is required in both corporate and political crises. Crises can force the corporate and political realms to work together or creates conflict between the two. The general theme examines the various applications of crisis communication at the points of intersection. The sub-themes included four primary intersections: internal–external, management–stakeholders, social–traditional media, and corporate–political crises.