

Observing conflict escalation in world society

Richard Bösch

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Observing Conflict Escalation in World Society

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zur Erlangung des Doktorgrades

der

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Photography showing visitors of *The Art Institute of Chicago* while watching a photography that shows earlier visitors of the museum looking at the painting *Rue de Paris, temps de pluie* by Gustave Caillebotte (1877); *Of Observing the Observers of Observers* © Maurits de Wijs, 2010

Prologue

“The best way to begin is by approaching your dissertation in your imagination, preparing to write in and about this thesis at every stage and to become the researcher of your own work process.” (Bolker 1998: 3-4).

“But whom are you writing for?” the professor asked. “Well, I’ve been interested in the topic of conflict escalation for a long time now. First of all, I’m writing *for me*, to implement an inspiring idea that, to my knowledge, did not show up before and thus to get this dissertation done!” the PhD candidate answered impulsively right after the presentation of his project while he was yet thinking about a more ‘scientific’ answer he would give in a moment. “I mean, who are the readers you have in mind? Who are the people you wish to engage with the things that matter most to you?” the professor eagerly added. “Well, since I was socialised as a political scientist with a focus on International Relations and Peace and Conflict Studies in the first stages of my professional career”, the PhD candidate replied, “I cannot hide my ambition to make a modest contribution to conflict analysis within this field. On the other hand, however, during my research in the last years, I’ve been dealing with sociological theories extensively, particularly concerning Luhmann’s work. Therefore, I would be happy to promote systems theoretical thinking with regard to empirical research on violent conflict in general. I am convinced that this perspective will open up what I have increasingly experienced as narrow horizons.”

In a straight reaction to this statement, one of the other participants of the PhD students colloquium asked, “So, would you label your dissertation as an interdisciplinary project?” *Okay, I hope that this question won’t be the starting point of an epical debate on the pros and cons of inter- or transdisciplinary research designs*, the PhD candidate thought, then he frankly answered. “Let me put it this way: If you’re interested in the following question – How do conflicts escalate? – I don’t mind whether you see yourself as a sociologist, a political scientist, an IR-specialist, a peace researcher or, let’s say, ... a historian. You will definitely find a comprehensible part to the answer in my work which I would dub as a Peace and Conflict Studies dissertation!”

While diverse feedback on the presentation was collected in plenary, the PhD Candidate could only listen with half an ear. He was still pondering about his last statement. *Do I really offer a study that is comprehensible for such a diverse range of readers?* As he increasingly felt the urge to consolidate his argument, he once again raised his hand and referred to the fundamental work of Niklas Luhmann. “You can criticise Luhmann for many things”, he continued his prior remarks, “for example, for the hypercomplex character and elitist style of his language or the virtual indifference concerning empirical research. However, what I find deeply enlightening is Luhmann’s understanding of communication as the very essential building block of the social and, based on that, his concept of social systems. I am convinced that his complex thoughts can be fruitfully developed for empirical conflict research, particularly when it comes to Luhmann’s all-encompassing idea of observation. Therefore, any observation, which means every act of communicative distinction and indication, has its blind spot since it cannot observe itself. For me, it is both a provocative and comforting thought to realise that any observation, be it, for example, in the context of the media, politics, science and, perhaps most striking (!), in my

dissertation, is a product of the observing system. Having this in mind, the many rivalries over epistemological competences within and between the disciplines that bother us so often in this research colloquium and beyond can be viewed in a different light, right? In other words, contrary to the all-embracing ambition often ascribed to systems theory, its take on science is rather modest, saying: Don't let us attach too much importance and absoluteness to theories! In the end, they're based on contingent observations that could have been done differently. So, coming back to the initial question, I would say that I wish those people to engage with my work who are not too much stuck in disciplinary thinking and those who like to let themselves be positively irritated by research that cannot be immediately classified in conventional ways... Any questions left? ☺"

On the way home from university, the PhD candidate was reflecting on the many thought-provoking remarks the participants of the colloquium gave him to take along. While he was thinking about how to integrate them in his work, he remembered the key sentence from Joan Bolker's very common PhD-guide, which a good colleague had warmly recommended at the beginning of the project. *To write in and about this thesis at every stage and to become the researcher of your own work process.* "I think it's working..." the PhD candidate muttered under his breath while going home.

Acknowledgements

“If you want to travel fast, travel alone; if you want to travel far, travel with others.”
(anonymous proverb, most probably of African origin)

In 2006, during an internship with the *Friedrich Ebert Foundation* in Mali, I became aware of this proverb for the first time. Since then, it has time and again come to my mind in various situations of my life – especially in view of the present dissertation.

Yes, this dissertation has a clearly named sole author: me, Richard Bösch. Though, while working on the project for several years, I have somewhat realised that this work has many supporters, mentors and sponsors without whom writing this dissertation would not have been possible. From the bottom of my heart, I am deeply grateful for the help, the constructive and critical backing and the encouragement I experienced from many generous people in my environment.

I am especially grateful to my supervisor *Christoph Weller* who supported this project from its very beginning to completion; constructively challenged my thinking about theory and empirical conflict research; provided invaluable feedback that helped me find my perspective and consolidate my project; and supported me in funding my work within the framework of a PhD scholarship. I particularly appreciate that he showed immense confidence in my ability to develop and finalise my dissertation and had great patience while going this way with me. I also wish to thank my dear former colleagues at the University of Augsburg, *Julika Bake*, *Andreas Bock*, *Melanie Hartmann*, *Bernhard Ludwig*, *Lena von Naso*, *Pia Popal*, *Ulrich Roos*, *Charlotte Rungius* and *Michaela Zöhrer*, and the participants of the PhD and Master colloquium organised by the Chair of Peace and Conflict Studies. It was a great academic pleasure and a wonderful personal experience to learn and work in this inspiring environment.

I am also indebted to *Mathias Albert*, who got involved with my work as second supervisor with keen interest and also showed great patience with the development of my project. As we discussed my work during personal meetings and on the occasion of scientific conferences, he gave crucial feedback which helped me to continuously redefine the guidelines of my proceedings. Of course, his own research in the field encouraged me to follow up on a Luhmannian systems theory perspective on conflict analysis.

This project could not have been completed without the financial and ideational support of the *Cusanuswerk*. I particularly appreciate that the PhD scholarship not only gave me the opportunity to become an independent researcher backed up by a generous funding and a supportive organisation but also offered me the chance to meet and exchange with a huge number of fellows and get inspired by diverse and progressive minds.

I also wish to express my gratitude to the board of the international catholic peace movement *pax christi*, *Reinhold Gieringer*, *Wiltrud Rösch-Metzler*, *Wolfgang Gramer*, my assistant *Sabine Seebacher*, and the head of the department “Church and Society” in the Diocese of Rottenburg-Stuttgart, *Joachim Drumm*. As my employers and colleagues, they complaisantly encouraged

me to continue my academic career and provided me open space to finalise my dissertation within the framework of special leaves for research purposes.

Also, I am especially grateful to my good old university friends, *Benjamin Bräuer*, *Philipp Brugger* and *Jonas Gastbauer*. As members of the self-declared “Proletarian Institute”, they were and still are an important source of my academic curiosity, particularly concerning our special interest in metatheoretical issues in social sciences and schools of thought in International Relations. I will never forget our intense debates for nights on end on the streets of Tübingen! As far as my university years in Tübingen are concerned, I am also indebted to *Thomas Nielebock*. Throughout my studies, he was the right person at the right time, as specialist for IR theories, as a university teacher with great methodical diversity and as ‘a mentor of good will’.

Lastly, and most importantly, my deepest gratitude goes to my family. Throughout my studies and in the course of writing this dissertation, my parents, *Hildegard and Paul Bösch*, my sisters and brother, *Lydia, Christine and Günther*, have always been supportive and loyal and encouraged their fourth child and ‘little brother’ to pursue his plans. The most important contribution to the successful completion of this project comes from *Kerstin Bösch*. I am eternally grateful for my wife being a major moral support during the ups and downs while working on this dissertation. Without her love, encouragement, belief, motivation and relief, I would never have been able to bring my work to an end. Only together with Kerstin and our children, *Salomé and Leonard*, I could stand the adventure of writing this dissertation. Meine Lieblingsmenschlein, das ist für euch!

Summary

How do conflicts escalate? This is one of the major and overarching questions in conflict research. The present study makes a contribution in order to offer further answers to this question. Therefore, it has a tripartite agenda: First, it develops an empirical research strategy including a constructivist methodology for the study of conflict escalation. This strategy is embedded in a Luhmannian systems theoretical world society perspective; argues that conflicts can be understood as social systems in their own right; looks at the process of conflict escalation by analysing communication; follows a reconstructive approach informed by grounded theory and the documentary method. Second, to probe the plausibility of the approach, this study analyses two processes of conflict escalation prior to violent conflict within the framework of two systematic case studies (Maidan protests/Ukraine 2013-2014; Mali's crisis/2010-2012). Third, on the basis of the case study insights gained and the experiences made with the empirical research strategy developed here, the present work gives some impulses and ideas on how this kind of systems theoretical research can further on be beneficial for Peace and Conflict Studies and conflict analysis in general.

The present dissertation is written in English. It follows spelling, grammar and punctuation rules that are referred to as *British English*.

Nota bene: Since the use of quotation marks in British and American English is different but, at the same time, evolving, their usage within the framework of this dissertation is determined as follows: Double quotation marks (“ ”) are used with direct quotes, including block quotations. Single quotation marks (‘ ’) are used to highlight certain words or expressions. They are not used with direct quotes. In all direct quotes, *italics* are used to highlight the most important parts. Apart from quotations, italics are used to emphasise the importance of a central term in a larger context.

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Index of Abbreviations

AA	Association Agreement (between Ukraine and the EU)
ACLED	Armed Conflict and Event Data Program
AFISMA	African-led International Support Mission in Mali
AI	Amnesty International
AKUF	Arbeitsgemeinschaft Kriegsursachenforschung (German)/Working Group for Research on the Causes of War (University of Hamburg)
AQMI	Al-Qaïda au Maghreb Islamique (French)/al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb
ATNMC	Alliance Touareg Nord Mali pour le Changement (French)/North Mali Tuareg Alliance for Change
BCEAO	Banque Centrale des Etats de l'Afrique de l'Ouest (central bank for the common "CFA-Franc" currency)
BSEC	Black Sea Economic Cooperation
CONIAS	Conflict Information and Analysis System (University of Heidelberg)
COW	Correlates of War Project (University of Michigan/University of California, Davis)
CIS	Commonwealth of Independent States
CPLR	Centre of Policy and Legal Reforms
CU	Customs Union
DSF	Deutsche Stiftung Friedensforschung/German Foundation for Peace Research
DM	Documentary Method
EBRD	European Bank for Reconstruction and Development
ECOWAS	Economic Community of West African States
EU	European Union
FTA	Free Trade Area
GovMali	Government of Mali
GovUkr	Government of Ukraine
GT	Grounded Theory
IIHK	Heidelberg Institute for International Conflict Research
ICG	International Crisis Group
IBRD	International Bank for Reconstruction and Development
IMF	International Monetary Fund
IRF	International Renaissance Foundation (Ukraine)
IR	International Relations (as an academic discipline)
MFA	Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Ukraine)
MI-NUSMA	Multinational Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali
MMIC	Maidan Monitoring Information Center
MNA	Mouvement National de l'Azawad (French)/National Movement of Azawad
MNLA	Mouvement National de Libération de l'Azawad (French)/National Movement for the Liberation of Azawad

MUJAO	Mouvement pour l'Unité et le Jihad en Afrique de l'Ouest (French)/Movement for Unity and Jihad in West Africa
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
OSGS	Observatoire Sahélo-Saharien de Géopolitique et de Stratégie
PACE	Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe
PCS	Peace and Conflict Studies
Polisario	Frente Popular para la Liberación de Saguía el Hamra y Río de Oro (Spanish)/Popular Front for the Liberation of Saguia el-Hamra and Rio de Oro
PSPSDN	Programme Spécial pour la Paix, la Sécurité et le Développement dans le Nord du Mali (French)/Special Programme for Peace, Security and Development in Northern Mali
QDA	Qualitative Data Analysis
RF	Russian Federation
UAH	Ukrainian Hryvnia (national currency in Ukraine since 1996)
UCDP	Uppsala Conflict Data Program (Uppsala University, Sweden)
UEMOA	Union Economique et Monétaire Ouest Africaine (Economic and Monetary Union of French-Speaking West African States)
UHHRU	Ukrainian Helsinki Human Rights Union
Ukrainian GTS	Ukrainian Gas Transit System
UkrN	Ukraine Nachrichten/Ukraine News
UN	United Nations
UNOCHA	United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
USIP	United States Institute of Peace (Washington D.C.)
USD (\$)	United States Dollar
USSR	Union of Soviet Socialist Republics ("Soviet Union")

PART I: THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS

CHAPTER 1. Introduction: A Sneak Peek at the Subject Matter

“That each by observation
might satisfy his mind.”
(John Godfrey Saxe, 1872,
in *The Blind Men and the Elephant*)

“Behind every analysis of violent conflict
is a set of assumptions. Assumptions
about what moves human action and how
to study it, and about the interests, needs,
instincts, structures and choices that ex-
plain why and how people resort to vio-
lence.” (Demmers 2012: 1).

Ménaka, Gao region, northern Mali, mid-January 2012. An armed conflict between the Malian central government on the one hand and a newly founded alliance of different ethnic groups based in northern Mali including the Tuareg as a driving force on the other hand breaks out.¹ Although having a wide range of military equipment at its disposal, the Malian army, abruptly entangled in a guerrilla war, is later on forced to withdraw from strategic cities in the course of the attacks.

Bamako, the capital, southern Mali, March 2012. Low and mid-level soldiers, frustrated with the poor handling of the so-called ‘rebellion’ in the north, overthrow the democratically elected president and his government. Ironically, however, during the troubles of this coup d’état the Malian army is expelled from the northern regions and northern Mali is declared an independent state named ‘Azawad’. In the meantime, the anti-government forces led by the *Mouvement National de Libération de l’Azawad* (MNLA) have enlarged their alliance by several Islamist groups.² Though, this larger alliance proves to be a fragile and unequal one: local and foreign Islamist militants increasingly dominate the agenda and marginalise the more secular MNLA more or less by force.

A few months later, after intensive mediation efforts led by the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), the military junta returns power to a civilian administration. However, in the aftermath of a near-collapse of the army and Malian democratic institutions,

¹ The first paragraphs of the present introduction summarise a number of widely shared observations in media, science and politics concerning the situation in Mali in 2011/2012 (see e.g. Hainzl 2013; Heyl and Leininger 2012; Cline 2013; Heyl and Leininger 2013; Lacher 2013; Klute and Lecocq 2013; Pabst 2013; Ruf 2013; Schreiber 2013; Thurston and Lebovich 2013; Wiedemann 2014). To a great extent, these analyses rely on a broad range of media reports (for considerations on the role of mass media within the methodological approach presented here see Chapter 3/4; for the case study on “Mali’s crisis 2010-2012” see chapter 6).

² In particular *Ansar ad-Dine* (“Defenders of Faith”; Mali-based Tuareg Islamists), the *Mouvement pour l’Unité et le Jihad en Afrique de l’Ouest* (MUJAO; Movement for the Unity and Jihad in West Africa) and *Al-Qaïda au Maghreb Islamique* (AQMI; al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb).

the country experiences a de facto division and a massive and long-term international military intervention.³

By the end of 2010, a year before the armed conflict broke out, nobody expected such a dramatic chronology of events. At that time, the Republic of Mali was regularly cited, both by local and international observers, as an outstanding example of a peacefully developing democracy in West Africa.⁴ So, how could the Malian landscape change in such a drastic way? And how did the process of conflict intensification gather momentum? As a matter of course, there are various analytical accounts on Mali's crisis in 2010-2012 from different disciplines with elaborated explanatory approaches based on specific theoretical perspectives and rich empirical data. Lecocq et al. (2013) made it their scientific business to compile those topics and factors that have been referred to as the most relevant ones in miscellaneous conflict analyses:

- the formation of a new political movement in November 2010 ("Mouvement National de l'Azawad") claiming true political representation and economic opportunities for the population in the north;
- the return of ex-soldiers and alleged mercenaries, mostly Tuareg, with military experience and weapons from Libya beginning with the gradual collapse of the Gadhafi regime in March 2011;
- the gradual appropriation of the Sahel, particularly the northern parts of Mali, as a safe haven for global terrorist networks;
- the emergence of local Islamist state-building aspirations beginning in mid-2011 with the formation of MUJAO and Ansar ad-Dine;
- the creeping decline of the fragile Malian multi-party system and its president-centred institutions;
- a growing number of both criminal and terrorist attacks on uranium mines of international companies in the Sahel;
- a growing number of kidnappings of Western tourists in northern Mali and Niger;
- the far-reaching regional influence on conflict prevention and management exercised by the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and thus the increasing attention of the international community;

³ In January 2013, the anti-government-alliance was rapidly advancing to the south of Mali. In the light of this massive offensive, the Malian government asked France for military support. Right after the adoption of UN Security Council resolution 2085 Malian and French units, and later on ECOWAS troops, started an operation to fight the insurgents back and to recapture northern Mali. By and large, the mission was successful, notably concerning strategic towns. In July 2013, the *United Nations Multinational Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali* (MINUSMA) took over responsibility from the *African-led International Support Mission in Mali* (AFISMA) established before, under UN Security Council resolution 2100. At that time, Mali's transitional government, with support of MINUSMA, organised presidential elections that international and local poll observers described as peaceful, transparent, and credible. In 2015, the Algiers peace agreement was signed, bringing the conflict parties back into a political process. However, its implementation remains weak (see UCDP 2018c). In 2021, still, 18.343 UN-peacekeepers are in the field trying to fulfil their mandate of gradually stabilising the country (see UN 2021).

⁴ In 1992, after several years of armed conflict, the Malian government and the Tuareg signed a peace agreement, the 'Pacte National'. In this agreement, apart from the obligation to lay down arms, the Tuareg were guaranteed a fair share of natural resources, more autonomy rights in a federal system to be reformed, and the abolition of ethnic and political discrimination. Although the efforts of rapprochement between the different Tuareg factions and the Malian government continued, the Tuareg's political, economic, and social integration in the Malian state remained low (see Cline 2013: 618-621). From 2006 to 2009, again smaller insurgencies of the Tuareg emerged, partly as 'side effect' of the armed conflict between the Tuareg and the government in neighbouring Niger. However, the main players in multi-ethnic Mali succeeded in keeping the situation largely peaceful, although there were sporadic violent incidences (Wing 2013; UCDP 2018c).

- the growing importance of northern Mali for transnational crime, especially human and arms trafficking and illegal drug trade.

Obviously, explanations that solely consider, for example, the underrepresentation of the population in the north, especially of the Tuareg, in the Malian political system and therefore interpret the conflict as an issue of domestic insurgence would fall short (see e.g. Klute and Lecocq 2013). Likewise, interpreting the violent conflict against the background of geostrategic economic interests only, with regard to the France-backed company Areva for instance, which mainly holds the mining rights for uranium and other rare earths in northern Mali where the security situation was rapidly deteriorating in 2011 due to increasing cross-border activities in the Sahelian zone, would not be satisfactory either (see e.g. Kohl 2013). According to the authors of the above-cited meta-study, “no single scholar can claim full understanding of all these domains” (Lecocq et al. 2013: 344). Indeed, on the one hand, it can be disillusioning to learn that there are multiple and occasionally contradicting explanations of the Malian case according to the conditions set up at the beginning of the analysis. On the other hand, empirical examples like the Malian case urge scientific observers to be sensitive to and to analytically deal with the often-inconsistent multilayeredness of social conflict.

Conflicts do not speak – only we do!

As the sneak peek at the Malian crisis illustrates, conflicts do not speak *for themselves* – it is the journalists, policy-makers, activists, analysts and scientists who speak *about* conflicts when observing and taking advantage of all sorts of abstraction and, as a consequence thereof, reproducing their own maybe even competing conflict narratives.⁵ Following this, conflicts represent social phenomena that cannot be approached as self-explanatory and material facts. Once becoming aware of and dealing with a social conflict, all kinds of observers, whether they like (and know) it or not, necessarily rely on forms of symbolic representations:

“As a field of knowledge, Conflict Studies is situated in and shaped by highly political and messy practices of categorizing and coding. It is therefore not only important to engage in systematic research on individual cases of violent conflict, but also to study the ways conflicts are labelled and coded and to think through the consequences of these representations.” (Demmers 2012: 2)

Against this backdrop, the present study demonstrates a reflexive approach to conflict analysis that takes the multifaceted nature of social conflict into account and enables observers to focus on aspects from different conflict-related domains at once. For this purpose, it draws on a fundamental systems theoretical understanding of ‘the social’ according to which communication constitutes the basic unit of all social entities, including conflicts:

“Conflicts are highly integrated social systems, they tend to draw the host system into conflict to the extent that all attention and all resources are claimed for the conflict.” (Luhmann 1995: 390)

⁵ As pointedly reframed in the cross heading, this insight refers to an often-cited dictum from Rorty that serves as an epistemological motto for the present work: “The world does not speak. Only we do.” (Rorty 1989: 6)

Conflict research more or less centres on a common *gretchenfrage*: How do conflicts escalate? To further elaborate on this fundamental question, this contribution adopts a process perspective on conflict conceptualised as a

“capturing social system, i.e. an evolving discursive space where contradicting communication from various social subsystems gets structurally coupled and stabilised” (own working definition; see also Bösch 2017).

Conflict escalation can thus be thought of as a cascade of communicative events. Hence, to approach the process of conflict escalation, it is worth to have a systematic look at the evolution of communication. At various times, conflict communication, understood as a vague field of relational references, tells different stories about how ‘the conflict’ is actually perceived by diverse observers. Indeed, the composition of a conflict, which means its issues, parties, positions, actions, environment etc., or, in other words, the difference between the inside and outside of a conflict system might continuously change in the course of conflict escalation, but – and that is one of the principal arguments of this contribution – it can be empirically studied via its discursive representations over time.

An empirical approach: case studies on Ukraine and Mali

Within the framework of the research project presented here, analysing conflict escalation means dealing with discursive processes. When focussing on organised collective violence, i.e. armed conflict and war, these processes can be regarded as communicative prologues to violence whereby strategies of legitimating violence play a key role (see Messmer 2003: 266-272).⁶ To empirically illustrate the analytical framework and thus to probe its plausibility, the present work comprises two case studies: the first case study deals with the public protest on Maidan square in Kiev from November 2013 to February 2014 (chapter 5); the second case study addresses the antecedent of the armed conflict in Mali from November 2010 to January 2012 (chapter 6).⁷ Based on the idea of conflict as a social system stated above, the case studies’ agenda entails reconstructing discursive clusters that emerged around a common conflict reference, i.e. mapping conflict-related linguistic communication. Concerning the analysis of the Malian case, for example, this requires to have a close look at the ‘story’ that lies in between the following statements (*italics added*):

“Today, we are declaring the birth of the National Movement of Azawad (MNA) which is a political organisation of Azawad that defends and approves *a peaceful policy in order to achieve legitimate goals*.” (Founding Statement, MNA 1.11.2010)

“President Amadou Toumani Touré straightforwardly reveals his preference for a violent confrontation to the detriment of political dialogue. [...] solely the

⁶ Even though violence is not considered to be an essential element of conflict escalation per se, understanding the legitimisation of violence, or even more in-depth, asking for what is named as ‘violence’ in specific discourses is a pivotal research interest in conflict studies (see e.g. Jabri 1996).

⁷ In Part I, the theoretical and methodological framework of this study will be developed step-by-step with the help of cursory examples from both case studies throughout. A more detailed argumentation regarding case selection will be given in chapter 4.2. For now, it can be stated that both Ukraine and Mali represent rather tricky cases in the light of more traditional analytical settings in conflict studies. *Nota bene*: The case studies have been conducted separately, as plausibility probes; the present research design does therefore not involve to engage in any form of systematic comparative case studies.

president and the local militia under his control bear the heavy responsibility of triggering a violent upheaval in Azawad. [...] Now, the people of Azawad will claim the *right to self defence in reaction to this military invasion*.” (Press Release, MNLA 12.01.2012)

Now, how did those statements emerge from the discursive space that represents the Malian conflict system? How did MNA’s/MNLA’s perception of violence as a legitimate means of political action change over time? As these examples of case-specific research questions suggest, one of the main objectives of the systematic reconstruction that has been conducted within the framework of the case studies was to identify turning points or key discursive marks in the process of conflict development.

World Society in Peace and Conflict Studies

In an overall view, however, this study is not only designed to make a contribution to case study research on armed conflict and war but also to contribute to theoretical and methodological developments in the broader context of Peace and Conflict Studies (PCS). In this regard, one of the main challenges is to advance those theories in social sciences that are based on the nation state as a key conceptual element, especially when it comes to its still structuring impact on the perception of conflicts.⁸ In this contribution, the concept of social conflict goes towards transcending some of the disciplinary orthodoxies that often narrow conflict research to certain levels of analysis or specific ideas about structures and actors.⁹ More precisely, the idea of social conflict presented here is part of an impartial and broad systems-theoretical perspective that considers conflicts as being inherently embedded in a world societal communicative framework. With this, it draws on recent developments at the intersection of constructivist International Relations (IR) and Luhmannian systems theory and thus sees itself as further exploring the “IR-sociology-nexus”.¹⁰

Considering the above cited accounts on the Malian conflict, for example, a good argument can be made that the conflict emerged from a network of social, economic, political and other relations on different transnational levels at once. The perception of its conflict parties, issues and forms is thus constituted within multiple cross-border relationships. In this sense, the Malian conflict can be understood as *a conflict in world society*. Seen from this angle, the present study offers a perspective on conflicts understood as specific discursive arenas developing in world society. Hence, conflict escalation is linked to communication from functionally

⁸ For debates on the many implicit and explicit links between conflict theory and the ‘statist’ concepts of sovereignty, the monopoly on violence, security, democracy, or, in other words, for debates on the more or less hidden ‘methodological nationalism’ in social sciences see Jabri (1996), Albert (2003), Bonacker and Weller (2006), Chernilo (2011), and (although the key word is not used literally) Lakitsch (2014).

⁹ In this context, critiques of the debates about new wars and failed states have been enlightening. Thus, many conflict analyses not only absolutise “limited statehood” as a cause of conflict (see Bonacker and Weller 2006: 20-24) but also reproduce a colonial discourse of western knowledge production that opposes the self (i.e. functioning European nation states) to others (i.e. non-Western proto- or pseudo nation states) in need of help suffering from failing (see Chojnacki and Namberger 2014: 188-190; see also Gulowski and Weller 2017: 400-404).

¹⁰ As far as this study is concerned, a systems theory of world society is considered to be the focal point of the rapprochement between both disciplines. Further reflections on this are given in chapter 3. For a comprehensive overview on this field of research see particularly Albert et al. (2013), Stetter (2013), Albert (2016), and Albert and Mählert (2017).

differentiated social realms that overlap and, at the same time, produce inducements for contradiction. Or, to put it another way,

“the major rift zone at which conflicts crystallize lies at the fault lines of world society’s functional differentiation.” (Albert 2010: 57)

However, identifying, understanding, and comparing modes of conflict escalation that grow out of discursive arenas in world society necessarily remains an empirical endeavour.

A constructivist empirical approach

At first glance, the present work adopts a quite common social constructivist perspective on conflicts: As phenomena of the social world, they are produced in a processual framework of discursive constructions of reality (see Weller 2005a). Therefore, a conflict essentially consists of an incompatibility of subject positions (e.g. identities, interests, values) that is observed and articulated (see Diez et al. 2006: 565). So far, so good. In addition to that, this contribution strikes an advancing path since it argues in favour of an empirical research programme that is inspired by a systems theoretical understanding of communication and observation. In an effort to bring Luhmann to conflict studies, it intends to benefit from the rich theoretical debates on Luhmann’s oeuvre and develop an empirical approach in order to systematically analyse conflict systems on the basis of text data.

How did the situations in Mali (2011/2012) and Ukraine (2013/2014) escalate into serious conflicts? How exactly could contradictions in these cases turn into conflicts that brought about organised collective violence? To advance towards answers to these questions, this work draws on a Luhmannian reading of constructivism: *operative* constructivism.

“Constructivism describes an observation of observation that concentrates on how the observed observer observes. This constructivist turn makes possible a qualitative change, a radical transformation, in the style of recursive observation, since by this means one can also observe what and how an observed observer *is unable* to observe. In this case one is interested in his blind spot, that is, the means by which things become visible or invisible.” (Luhmann 2002: 140)

Given this epistemological grounding, the approach presented here differs from others in conflict analysis: In a nutshell, it does not primarily ask for *what* is observed but for *how* observers observe. In other words, this work is interested in scrutinising modes of observation behind observations.¹¹ Indeed, it poses a methodological challenge to carry out this undertaking since it implies the reconstruction of the inherent distinctions that underpin each and every observation. This can be exemplarily illustrated on the basis of the following text passage taken from the case study on the Maidan protests in Kiev in 2013/2014¹²:

¹¹ As it is explained in detail in Chapter 3 and 4, these kinds of analyses deal with processes of social (conflict) constructions and are thus conceptualised as observations of ways of observing or, in other words, as “second-order observations” (Luhmann 2002: 128-152; see also Weller 2005b: 316-321).

¹² This statement appeared as part of an article that was published online within the framework of a “volunteer community resource” set up by Ukrainian civil society activists declaring themselves as government opponents. It was then immediately republished by “Ukraine-Nachrichten” (UkrN), an Internet platform providing German translations of much-quoted news and agency reports as well as social media posts and blog commentaries dealing with Ukrainian politics (for more details on volunteer community resources and other text data sources concerning the case study on Ukraine see chapter 5).

“Euromaidan: Citizens of Ukraine stand up and try to make their voice heard in Europe which does not end at the eastern border of the EU. They fight for their European future in a united Europe.” (UkrN 24.11.2013)

In late November 2013, after the Ukrainian government announced that the plan to sign the Association Agreement (AA) with the European Union (EU) would be suspended, a broad protest movement, referred to early on as “Euromaidan”, immediately evolved from Ukrainian civil society (see e.g. KyivPost 29.11.2013). In this context, as the present study focuses on modes of observation within the scope of a conflict’s overall discursive representations, it goes beyond simply stating that the Ukrainian protesters declared to be pro-European and chose one of the central squares in Kiev, ‘Maidan’ square, as their special place of assembly. Rather, on the basis of the analysed text data, the present approach aims at unveiling the distinctions (i.e. concepts, categories, images etc.) behind the buzzwords (hereafter exemplarily in *italics*): As the above-cited statement suggests, Ukrainians, here referred to as *citizens* (as hypothetically opposed to ‘oppositionists’, ‘activists’, or ‘protesters’), articulated their contradiction towards a government decision and thus documented the idea of sovereign citizens determining the fate of their country (as opposed to the political elite’s understanding of, once elected, top-down politics). In this sense, Ukrainian citizens not only claimed political and civil rights but also declared to be able and willing to *fight* for their future in non-parliamentary and unconventional ways, e.g. by launching mass protests on *Maidan*, Kiev’s history-charged “Independence Square” (as opposed to institutional ways of policy-making in parliament and government). Furthermore, given the direct address towards *Europe* (i.e. its governments and populations), the matter in question was not only presented as an issue of international politics (as opposed to exclusive domestic matters) but also as a vital issue within the context of a common European identity. Therefore, Ukraine is constituted as a very own normative part of Europe that longs for fulfilling its ‘European mission’ while the political borders and alliances at that time still did not mirror, to complete the metaphor, its ‘true destiny’.¹³

As this cursory example prompts, the reconstruction of modes of observation represents a fine-grained work, which requires a close examination of communication.¹⁴ Nevertheless, the present approach was developed to enable readers to understand how modes of observation develop and interact in the process of a conflict system’s discursive constitution over time. As mentioned above, this also includes recognising what and how an observed observer is unable to observe (‘blind spots’). Concerning the Ukrainian case study, for example, it is striking that both the Ukrainian government and civil society actors cling to a dichotomising either-or thinking: As the analysed communication suggests, there is an implicit imperative to

¹³ Of course, these insights could not be gained only on the basis of the text snippet cited above; they were confirmed within the complex framework of a systematic sequential analysis of the whole text corpus. Nevertheless, on the basis of this short section one can get an impression of how the identification of distinctions behind the spoken/written word are tackled in the present study. For a detailed account on the case study procedure see chapter 4.

¹⁴ In anticipation of chapter 4, it can be announced here that this study draws on an elaborated concept of reconstruction. Following Franke and Roos (2013: 11-23), reconstruction, broadly speaking, refers to an interpretive scientific procedure that aims at identifying intersubjectively shared (linguistic, symbolic) meanings in communication. In this sense, researchers who pursue a reconstructive logic systematically read and ‘understand’ empirical data by continuously (re-) formulating hypotheses about the shared meaning of the phenomena in question and thus about the very nature of their research topics (see also Herborth 2011; Vogd 2011).

either opt for being part of the European/Western block or to favour an orientation to the east. This distinction turned out to be a crucial one that virtually shows up in the totality of communication. In a way, this recalls a kind of Cold War thinking, which was stuck in a binary coding of world politics and, by and large, did not imply the possibility of finding “third ways” (see e.g. Lebow and Gross Stein 1994).

Assembling the big picture

In summary, the present study has a tripartite agenda: First, inspired by the theoretical rapprochement and exchange in the context of the IR-sociology-nexus, it develops a systems theoretical framework to analyse processes of conflict escalation and to reconstruct conflicts as phenomena developing in a world societal framework. Second, to probe the plausibility of the approach, this contribution analyses two processes of conflict escalation prior to violent conflict within the framework of two systematic case studies (Ukraine 2013-2014; Mali 2010-2012). Third, on the basis of the case study insights, the present work gives impulses to further promote systems theoretical research in PCS and conflict analysis in general.

In several aspects, this approach contrasts with more traditional approaches in conflict studies: Ontologically, it adopts a different perspective on the relevance of actors and structures since it highlights communication as the basic building block of the social. Hence, readers of the present study are offered to become (scientific) observers who are enabled to consider more of a conflict than certain firmly established actors or settings. Since all social phenomena are understood as dynamic networks of communication with variable ends, the analysis of a conflict’s discursive performance is not limited, in principle, to specific text data sources but only concentrated on the processing of communication. Epistemologically, against the background of operative constructivism, it deals with social reality construction within communication processes that are shaped by modes of observation working in the background. In other words, it focuses on communications as the ultimate constitutive operations that produce a conflict. Method(olog)ically, in order to implement a systematic mapping of communication on the basis of text data, it provides a reconstructive approach that has been developed following decidedly empirical approaches in social sciences, particularly within the scopes of *grounded theory* and the *documentary method* (see details in chapter 4). Broadly speaking, the present approach allows to take elements into account that would not have come into a common analytical view otherwise.

Outline of the study

The study is divided into three parts. Part I focuses on the theoretical and methodological foundation of the approach presented. In this context, chapter 2 outlines social science perspectives on conflict escalation, which is understood as a concept and thus a research topic in its own right. Initially, it gives a concise overview of the topic’s scientific origins that are closely intertwined with the history of sociology, IR and PCS. Following this, the research topic of conflict escalation is opened up according to its metatheoretical dimensions (levels of analysis, structure and process). Finally, based on a brief presentation of selected focus areas in application-oriented approaches, it illustrates how conflict escalation can indeed be understood as a distinct concept but, at the same time, as a more or less explicit part of ‘neighbouring’ concepts (e.g. conflict resolution, conflict transformation). Taken together, chapter 2 unfolds the rootedness of conflict escalation in different social science discourses. Based on these preliminary insights,

chapter 3 elaborates on the theoretical foundations of the approach presented in this work. For this purpose, it turns to a number of essentials in systems theory, particularly regarding the key concepts of communication and social systems. Following these basic theoretical considerations, it develops a perspective for empirical systems theoretical research within a world societal framework which is located in the context of the interdisciplinary field of PCS. In chapter 4, this perspective gets broken down into an empirical research programme, including a specific systems theoretical method of conflict analysis based on text data. Therefore, chapter 4 exposes the project's case study design and its practical implementation, particularly concerning the processing of texts. Drawing on two method(ological) approaches in social sciences (grounded theory, documentary method), the method presented here aims at a reconstruction of escalating conflicts as social systems in their own right.

In Part II, the results of the two case studies are presented in the form of *analytical narratives*. The case studies therefore reveal that the use of force in terms of organised collective violence gradually and creepingly finds its way into the conflict discourse. As the case studies show, too, this process has a world societal dimension insofar as the analysed conflict systems supply themselves with communication that exhibits a world societal outreach and brings emerging offers of meaning and contradictions. Chapter 5 deals with the Maidan protests in Kiev/Ukraine from late November 2013 to February 2014 that developed from a peacefully expressed contestation of a foreign policy decision into a situation where the legitimate use of force is claimed by different sides and degrading the other has become a widespread phenomenon. Chapter 6 addresses the antecedent of the armed conflict in Mali from October 2010 to February 2012. This case study, too, traces the development of a situation that is, at the beginning of the investigation period, observed as a peaceful articulation of a political programme but then successively evolves into a conflict in which the use of force had become a generalised and legitimate means to achieve or defend democracy.

Finally, part III provides a brief synthesis of the present contribution. For this purpose, chapter 7 reviews the case studies by summarising their results and introducing the built-in 'zoom' which enables readers to find their way through the case studies. Readers are also invited to reflect the methodology of the empirical approach by following chapter 7's seven questions and answers. In chapter 8, the major research question of this project – How do conflicts escalate? – gets answered by presenting the insights and experiences of this work within a broader context. Therefore, some implications for the field of Peace and Conflict Studies are outlined. As a last point, readers are offered a critical impulse to take away.

CHAPTER 2. Conflict Escalation as a Perspective in Social Sciences

“Escalation in Afghanistan: Erdoğan suggests face-to-face meeting with Taliban leaders.” (*Der Spiegel*, 12.08.2021)

“Escalation in vaccine dispute: London summons EU diplomat.” (*Die Zeit*, 10.03.2021)

“Tree sittings by student climate activists in Ravensburg – Mayor: A new stage of one-sided escalation” (*Schwäbische Zeitung*, 17.05.2021)

“An escalating love quarrel: 38 year old man injured with a knife” (*Süddeutsche Zeitung*, 8.08.2021)

From a life partner who refuses to do the dishes to a labour union striking to demand higher wages to a government and an opposition disputing mutual claims – conflict is an ubiquitous element of everyday life.¹⁵ However, there is a large diversity of conflicts in all these spheres of social life. The bulk of conflicts show up as cursory bagatelles whereas only few conflicts end up in situations of organised collective violence, e.g. as an armed conflict. It is thus crucial to find out more about those procedural settings where everyday conflicts begin to become meaningful in a broader societal context. Broadly speaking, this evolution, referred to as *conflict escalation*, is understood as intensification with regard to the observed extent and the means used (see Pruitt et al. 2003: 87-91; Mitchell 2014: 71-75). In this context, conflict escalation is further characterised by

“processes of circular interaction that lead to the growth and restructuring of the parties, generating new reasons and pretexts for applying additional means, thus leading to an expansion and fundamentalization of the content of the conflict” (Eckert and Willems 2003: 1183).

As mentioned in the introductory chapter, to fully grasp the complex issue of conflict escalation, the present study prepares to transcend some of the more ‘traditional’ concepts. Given its dynamics and, to a certain degree, its autonomous nature, conflict escalation here is conceptualised as both an evolving process and a self-stabilising structure, or, in other words, as a social system in its own right.¹⁶

¹⁵ Major parts of chapter 2 are published in: Bösch, R. (2017) Conflict Escalation. In *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of International Studies*. Oxford University Press/International Studies Association.

¹⁶ As chapter 3 demonstrates in detail, conceiving of conflicts as social systems represents one of the theoretical centrepieces of this contribution. In chapter 2, too, while going through selected social science discourses, this idea appears several times. However, in none of these contexts, it has been elaborated as far-reaching as in the present study. Hence, this chapter intends to portray classical roots of concepts in conflict analysis with a special focus on those segments and forerunners in social science literature being more or less outspoken on the process of conflict escalation. Coming from this rather classical foundation and building on the experiences of this study’s empirical research, chapter 8 shows how connectable the findings are in view of more recent perspectives on conflict (escalation) analysis in PCS, particularly related to “civilian conflict management” (Gulowski and Weller 2017).

Research on conflict escalation is indeed a broad topic that covers agendas in different disciplines (see e.g. Byrne and Senchi 2009). Hence, in relation to respective empirical research interests, many concepts and theories of conflict escalation have been advanced and consolidated. The aim of this chapter is to explore existing accounts and thus to illustrate various perspectives on conflict escalation as a substantive research theme. In doing so, it not only shows the connections to other more prominent strands (e.g. conflict resolution, conflict transformation) but also sheds light on the significance of the present research question in an overall research context. *How do conflicts escalate?* Which answers have been given to the question in research so far? Instead of portraying a heavy list of (sub-) discipline-oriented approaches to answer this question, this chapter is intended to lay the grounding for a social science perspective on conflict escalation. For this purpose, it is dedicated to reveal the sometimes hidden or at least implicit origins of the concept of conflict escalation in different scientific discourses.

The first section (“Conflict Escalation: A Brief Intellectual History”) gives a concise overview of influential voices in the topic’s scientific history that is closely intertwined with the history of sociology, political science/IR and PCS. The second section (“Major Perspectives on Conflict Escalation”) opens up the field according to its (meta-) theoretical dimensions. Finally, the third section (“Staking Overlapping Claims: Conflict Resolution, Conflict Transformation, and Conflict Escalation”) further illustrates the role of “application-oriented research” in the field. Finally, a brief summary (“Conflict Escalation in Social Sciences Discourses: Summing up the Highlights”) condenses the chapter’s quintessence.

2.1 Conflict Escalation: A Brief Intellectual History

As cited in countless introductory chapters in PCS and beyond, etymologically, ‘conflict’ traces back to the Latin verb *confligere*, which means ‘fighting’, ‘battling’ or ‘struggling’. More precisely, the verb has a double meaning, depending on its transitive or intransitive use. On the one hand, it means intentionally clashing and beating each other, thus clearly emphasising the dimension of (violent) behaviour and physical action. On the other hand, ‘confligere’ also stands for the more abstract state of having an argument, a dispute or an opposition, thus indicating the structural dimension of a social phenomenon (see Bonacker and Imbusch 2010: 68-69). In comparison to these very common and elementary linguistic statements about conflict, ‘escalation’ is usually not an object of such explications. Hence, to begin with, escalation has its origins in the Latin noun *scalae*, which means ‘steps’, ‘stairs’ or ‘scaling’, metaphorically suggesting a process of becoming greater or higher. Even more notable, however, and analogical to the linguistic roots of conflict, there is also an explicit transitive and intransitive meaning of the verbs that have been deduced from the Latin origin (e.g. to scale, to escalate). In this context, escalating signifies both an action strategy and an abstract description of a state of affairs in a dynamic social relationship (Zartman and Faure 2005: 8-10). Both meanings have played a decisive role in major scientific debates about concepts of conflict escalation.

This section deals with those prominent forerunners in conflict theory¹⁷ – Georg Simmel, Lewis A. Coser and Ralf G. Dahrendorf – who not only developed a concept of conflict as a state *but also* integrated pioneering ideas about the societal process of conflict escalation,

¹⁷ For a comprehensive overview on the vast literature conceptually dealing with conflict in social sciences see e.g. Bonacker (2008).

even though the label itself was not used literally. For a long time, research on social conflict was predominantly concerned with ‘factor-oriented’ studies searching for general social conditions and specific constellations of interests or actors causing conflicts to arise (see von Trotha 1997: 16-20). At the time, conflict escalation, both in sociology and political science, was not a field of research in its own right (see Eckert and Willems 2003: 1182). However, those classical authors indeed wrote about conflict as a profound social transformation with both integrative and disintegrative functions for society. Therefore, they had at least an implicit idea of conflict as not only being structurally given but also as a processual phenomenon that manifests at different scales.

According to Simmel (1992[1923]), conflicts represent forms of socialisation. In his conflict theory, Simmel highlights both destructive and particularly constructive aspects of conflictive interaction, e.g. relating to the development and integration of social groups (or societies as a whole). Against this background, Simmel distinguishes between different configurations or “forms of conflict” (with increasing intensity: competition, dispute, and combat), thus indicating that socialisation processes can take more or less intensive (not to say violent) forms. Those forms, in turn, are characterised by the means used and by the degree to which the conflict identity is interwoven with the issue at stake (Simmel 1992[1923]: 247-336). Based on Simmel’s work, Coser (1956) further examines the conditions under which conflicts get functional or dysfunctional for society. In this regard, Coser analyses the controversial field of integrative and disintegrative aspects of social conflict both with reference to groups and society as a whole.¹⁸ For Coser, pluralistic societies are typically characterised by a large number and variety of conflicts. Since individuals have affiliations to various interest groups and thus to multiple identities, conflicts are generally reduced in intensity (Coser 1956: 67-86). Following Coser’s conflict theoretical thoughts, processes in dysfunctional conflicts are particularly shaped by the emergence of a strong and focused conflict-related identity that represses the multiple social affiliations that existed before and thus is supposed to have a boosting influence on conflict escalation. Referring to Simmel and Coser, Dahrendorf’s (1959) conflict theory represents a structural theory that also explains social change through social conflict. Partly drawing on Marx (though emancipating himself from Marx’s fixation on class as a crucial societal category), Dahrendorf considers conflict as an unavoidable and universal phenomenon since the societal organisation and exercise of power and authority (whatever the political constitution of the respective society may be) constantly produces diverging interests and, hence, “latent conflict” between individuals, groups, or classes (Dahrendorf 1959: 210-213). So, does this structural predisposition for power conflicts always lead to “manifest conflict”? According to Dahrendorf, yes. However – and this contains his implicit idea of conflict escalation – there is an empirical variability in the intensity of conflicts which is essentially influenced by the social mobility of individuals.¹⁹

¹⁸ As can be retained from Coser, the possible socialising effects of social conflict at the level of groups (e.g. strengthening solidarity, cohesion, and normative integration) do not necessarily correspond to constructive effects at the level of society. In this context, Coser introduces the distinction between conflicts as means of transformation (“realistic conflict”) and conflicts as self-purpose (“nonrealistic conflict”), the latter being dysfunctional for society since they do not improve the flexibility and resilience of institutions (Coser 1956: 33-66).

¹⁹ For Dahrendorf (1959: 234-236), the ultimate merit of a conflict theory depends on its ability to explain how, in comparable structural situations, a power conflict escalates into a violent revolution in one case and ends up in democratically controlled reform policies in the other.

Hence, Dahrendorf sketched a proto concept of conflict escalation (i.e. a continuum from latent to manifest conflict), which can still be considered a seminal piece for social science conflict research.

In political science, conflict escalation was by and large associated with the realm of international politics. As IR and Peace Research entered the academic stage in the 1930s, the question of war and the definition of peace were focal points of the discipline (see Stephenson 2010). Since that time period, conflict theories in IR have basically been dealing with two key problem areas: a non-existing international monopoly of violence and a lack of internationally binding norms. Realist thinking of international politics as being basically conflict-prone and conflict-driven emerged out of those fundamental ‘systemic’ features.²⁰ Given this history, conflict escalation was certainly an IR topic right from the start since escalation processes lie at the heart of most state interaction (Carlson 1995). Arms races, deterrence, armed conflict, or war... escalation processes are intimately associated with situations referred to as “international crises”.²¹ In crisis situations, actors have to decide whether or not they want to pursue an escalating strategy, i.e. exert coercive pressure and thus impose costs on opponents. In this sense, escalation has to be thought of as a fine-grained game of competitive risk taking which is embedded in an overall bargaining process. Following Zartman and Faure (2005: 9), parties can have various (ir)rational motives to promote escalation: winning, not losing, covering investments (actual and previous costs of escalations), gaining support (from third parties), seizing an advantage or target of opportunity, feeling powerful, rewarding oneself, or punishing the opponent. For those early and influential IR theorists dealing with conflict development systematically, escalation represents a more or less rational foreign policy strategy in the repertoire of states (see e.g. Kahn 1965; Deutsch 1968: 141-157).

In contrast to these rather transitive interpretations, ‘systems thinkers’, particularly in neorealism, have highlighted structural features in which conflict escalation is understood as a specific constellation of states, “polarity”, in the global system.²² In an effort to bring together these ideas about conflict escalation in international politics (be it in state perspective or from a systemic point of view) as well as classical theoretical thinking about conflict and social change, Pruitt et al. (2003[1986]: 101-120) developed the “structural change model”. This model tries to conceptualise conflict escalation independent of any predefined level of analysis and thus represents a model of conflict evolution that has been very influential for the development of conflict studies as an interdisciplinary endeavour. For Pruitt et al. (2003[1986]: 88-91), processes of conflict escalation are characterised by different simultaneous transformations, from

light to heavy (means used),
small to large (material/immaterial resources needed),
specific to general (issues addressed),

²⁰ At the same time, however, the sovereignty of nation states proved to be one of the very few reliable global norms. Following Hobbes and Kant, ultimately all modern schools of thought in IR, i.e. neo-/realism, institutionalism, liberalism or Marxism, have been built upon these fundamental opening questions (sovereignty, conflict-proneness) in conflict studies (Bonacker 2008: 21-26).

²¹ See for example Schelling (1960), Jervis (1976), Lebow (1984), or Brecher and Wilkenfeld (2000).

²² See exemplarily Waltz (1979), Walt (1987), and Copeland (1996). While differing in their ideas about the effect of those constellations, those authors put forth the argument that the likelihood of conflict escalation is closely linked to the polarity of the international system, i.e. the distribution of capabilities and power between states or, to be more precise, to the dynamic of change that alters these global conditions.

few to many (number of participants involved),
and from winning to hurting (orientations dominating).²³

Their approach is thus more interested in describing and understanding the evolution of conflictive relations than in party-oriented strategies for getting the most out of a given structural conflict (see Pearson d'Estrée 2008: 75-77). Whilst transcending the (neo-) realist idea of systemic change and reanimating classical conflict theoretical thought, the structural change model sees escalation as

“a particular type of intensification by steps across time, as a change in nature rather than a simple change in degree” (Zartman and Faure 2005: 6).

In conclusion, it can be stated that although the label ‘conflict escalation’ rarely appears in classical conflict research, parts of its conceptual substance are quasi omnipresent in these works. Due to the dominant realist paradigm at the outset of the field’s emergence, IR limited itself to a foreign policy view on conflict escalation or, in its systemic variants, to a structural determinism without getting into the details of specific state behaviour. However, based on an integrative approach with regard to theory *and* praxis, conflict resolution as a special subfield of PCS (see Stephenson 2010) started to examine the whole life cycle of a conflict, aiming at developing

“ideas, theories and methods that can improve our understanding of conflict and our collective practice of reduction in violence and enhancement of political processes for harmonizing interest” (Bercovitch et al. 2009: 1).

Therefore, conflict escalation, as a topic often referred to within the context of conflict resolution research, has always been located in between interrelated visions of academics and practitioners. So, in research on negotiation and mediation, for example, the spectrum ranges from rather theory-oriented research in IR that deals with rational or normative motivations in arguing and bargaining processes (e.g. Risse 2000; Müller 2007) to practice-oriented research with a focus on multi track diplomacy or peacebuilding (e.g. Reyhler and Paffenholz 2001; Kriesberg 2010). In sum, a truly ‘holistic’ thinking about conflict escalation, conciliating transitive and intransitive ideas, did not emerge until Pruitt et al. (2003[1986]) presented a comprehensive concept that was able to address escalation at different societal levels and thus integrates sociological and politological thinking in favour of a common social science perspective.

2.2 Major Perspectives on Conflict Escalation

Levels of Analysis

As hinted at earlier, conflict escalation embraces a transitive and an intransitive dimension. This points to a classic metatheoretical issue that has also been referred to, particularly in IR, as the level-of-analysis problem (see Singer 1961; see also Albert and Buzan 2013). According to Waltz

²³ For a reformulation of these transformations see Mitchell (2014: 71-75).

(1979), for example, there are three “images” that can be considered to approach international politics: the individual level (i.e. statesmen, leaders), the level of a state’s political regime (e.g. democracies, autocracies, hybrids etc.), and the level of the international system (which is composed by states, understood as like-units), whereas (at least in Waltz’ idea of neorealism) the latter is regarded as the most relevant one. With reference to this thinking, theoretical statements should not be either reductionist, i.e. drawing conclusions about international politics from the perspective of subsystemic entities only (first and second image), nor holistic, i.e. explaining foreign policy solely on the basis of systemic features (third image) (see Schimmelfennig 1995: 258-259). Surely, Waltz’ often-quoted idea of images has encouraged scholars in IR and beyond to clarify which phenomenon they want to explain in relation to specific levels of analysis. However, when focussing on conflict escalation as a social phenomenon that is per se intertwined with different societal levels at once, only a few seminal works in conflict studies have aimed for emancipating themselves from an overly paradigmatic level-of-analysis-thinking.

Galtung (1996) has probably contributed one of the most influential concepts of conflict to social sciences in the recent past (see Diez et al. 2011: 12-13). In his work about the “conflict triangle”, conflict is conceptualised as a triangle between contradiction, attitude and behaviour (Galtung 1996: 70-80). In this context, *contradiction* is understood as a perceived incompatibility between positions of actors (e.g. aims, interests, aspirations). *Attitudes*, as the second vertex of the triangle, encompass perceptions and misperceptions of the parties about themselves and their respective opponents (e.g. concerning the causes of the conflict or the allocation of blame). Finally, *behaviour* involves specific actions of the parties to the conflict, e.g. cooperation, yielding, problem solving, contending, coercion, threats, destructive attacks etc. In a full or “manifest” conflict, according to Galtung, all three elements have to be present. However, conflicts are embedded in dynamic processes in which contradictions, attitudes, and behaviour constantly change and influence one another (Ramsbotham et al. 2011: 10-12). Therefore, by contrast, in a “latent” state, a conflict can be constituted by contradictions only, i.e. without any negative attitudes or any contending behaviour. Much of Galtung’s work tackles the shift from latent to manifest conflicts. This is where the question of the “right” level of analysis comes into play. Taking the idea of *social* conflicts as point of departure, it is crucial for a contradiction to become a socially “visible” conflict that is pronounced or, more general, communicated in a broader frame of reference, be it, for example, community disputes over garbage disposal, labour-management struggles, class-based revolutions, civil rights struggles, border conflicts (Kriesberg 1998: 1-2), or transnational conflicts (Weller and Bösch 2015). In other words, the very empirical nature and spectrum of conflict escalation longs for a transcending of that what is conventionally referred to as levels of analysis.

Against the background of the ideal of parsimonious theory construction on the one hand (Waltz 1979: 60-78) and the conflict triangle on the other hand (Galtung 1996: 70-80), the greater part of works explicitly addressing conflict escalation have limited themselves to specific levels of analysis (such as individuals, groups, networks, social movements, organisations, states, state dyads, the (world) system) and have prevalently focussed on a single vertex of the triangle (e.g. on the dimension of behaviour only). Sociobiological approaches, for example, argue that in conflicts between small groups (e.g. youth cliques) raising the stakes in order to achieve a goal against an opponent, as a general rule, does not follow a rational logic. In contrast, violence, being a resource available at any time in conflict, is rather driven by biologically predetermined

emotions like fear, anger, or vengeance and is thus an impulsive action (Eckert and Willems 2003: 1185-1186). In socio-psychological works (see particularly Tajfel and Turner 1979), findings from research on interaction between individuals have been transferred to a dyadic inter-group level perspective suggesting that relative deprivation and discrimination are not only ordinary processes of social comparison between groups but furthermore important factors in collective identity formation (Tajfel and Turner 1979: 40-43; Cook-Huffman 2009). Based on the idea of social identity formation as being a conflictive process per se, socio-psychological studies have also evoked a strong response in research on “civil wars” and domestic conflict (see e.g. Horowitz 1985, Gurr 2000). In this regard, conflict escalation is conceptualised as a spiral, whereby cause and blame are reciprocally assigned. It thus represents a self-amplifying mechanism that simultaneously downgrades the out-group and upgrades the in-group. During this process, violence against the other ultimately gets incorporated in normative belief systems. Conflict spirals represent vicious circles of insecurity, fear, lack of information, stereotypes, deficient communication and an endless chain of mutual counteractions (Pruitt et al. 2003[1986]: 96-100). To sum up, however, the analytical focus in socio-psychological works remains on societal (sub-) groups.

Other theories on conflict escalation are based on the paradigm of rational choice and agency. As mentioned above, from a foreign policy analysis perspective, escalative strategies and violent action in conflict can be understood as the result of utilitarian calculations.²⁴ Thus, decision makers engage in conflict escalation purposefully as a mutually coercive or bargaining strategy (Zartman and Faure 2005: 8-10). Rational choice and game theory approaches have also been adopted in research about domestic conflict. In “ethnic conflicts”, for example, individual engagement in violent escalation strategies has often been interpreted as a regression to atavistic instincts and irrational hatred. By contrast, rational-choice-based approaches have convincingly substantiated the assertion that in a wide range of armed conflicts, particularly in “war economies”, the individual/collective acquisition and allocation of resources (natural resources, arms, people) is realised by the use of violence (Elwert et al. 1999). Thus, actors in “new wars”, e.g. warlords, guerrilla fighters, drug barons, terrorists or governments, are interested in perpetuating cycles of violence to generate stable rents (Reno 2000). However, according to the greed vs. grievance debate, actors pursuing escalative strategies in war economies can be driven both by economic and political motives. In this context, escalation in new wars has often been associated with the phenomenon of limited statehood (see Kaldor 1999; Kalyvas 2001).

For research on armed conflict and war in IR and PCS, one of the main challenges in examining conflict escalation is to overcome a more or less rigid (and sometimes unconscious) fixation on the nation state (see Daase 2003: 176-178). Indeed, there are elaborated and highly diagnostic concepts, such as ‘intrastate armed conflicts’, ‘one-sided violence’, ‘political violence’ or ‘militarised interstate disputes’ that have been developed on the basis of comprehensive empirical research and global databases.²⁵ However, given the insights from the new wars perspective mentioned above, the transnational dimension of conflict escalation has become hyper-

²⁴ For this, see particularly Schelling (1960), Kahn (1965) or Lebow (1984).

²⁵ See the *Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project* (ACLED 2017), the *Working Group for Research on the Causes of War* (AKUF 2018), the *Correlates of War Project* (COW 2015), the *Uppsala Conflict Data Program* (UCDP 2020a). For detailed information see the projects’ websites; see also Schwank et al. (2013) for a compact overview on the different databases.

obvious (see e.g. Chojnacki 2008; Francis 2009). Against the background of the profits from the global trade in ‘blood diamonds’ from conflict areas, worth billions of dollars, the cross-border recruitment of soldiers, and, ideologically, the actualisation of regional ethnic identities, those theoretical approaches that consider just a single level of analysis are necessarily stretched to their limits when explaining conflict as a complex societal phenomenon. In this context, a great deal of research on conflict adheres to a kind of implicit “methodological nationalism”, i.e. the methodological praxis of observing the nation state as a key conceptual reference or, at least, as vital analytical category (see Jabri 1996: 1-10; Chernilo 2011). Certainly, it is an ambitious undertaking to develop a methodological approach that would allow one to transcend the levels of analysis framework, particularly when it comes to the integration of processes and structures.

Structure and Process

According to Dahrendorf (1959) discussed above, conflict theories need to meet the challenge of integrating both the structural dimension and the processual dimension in order to understand conflict as drivers of social change. For a long time, theories of social conflict have particularly concentrated on questions of why conflicts emerge in different societal settings (e.g. in organisations, between groups, between collectives in national societies, or between states). They focussed on ‘generalisable’ social conditions and ‘objective’ factors for conflicts to arise. At the same time, little attention has been paid to processual questions of how conflicts develop and how escalation takes place to the point that organised collective violence occurs (see Eckert and Willems 2003; Elwert et al. 1999).

Since the 1990s, there are at least two directions of research on violent conflict in IR and PCS. One strand equates violent conflict with its structural causes, and the other strand foregrounds the coming-into-being of a conflict (see e.g. Schlichte 2011). With its positivist natural science orientation and its methods of correlational analysis, the former has long been dominant, for example by highlighting causal explanations that deal with absolute/relative power gains, economic motives (‘greed’), and the impact of ethnic or religious identities (see Daase 2003: 176-194). The latter, however, offers an alternative perspective by stressing the dynamic nature of conflicts, shifting from cause-oriented “why-questions” to “how-possible-questions” that ask for constitutive conditions in the production of social phenomena (Wendt 1999). Constructivist approaches have pointed out that conflicts are produced in the framework of discursive constructions of reality (see Weller 2005a). Thus, the ‘reality’ of conflict is not self-evident and intersubjectively verifiable but rather composed in the context of overlapping perspectives. A “process perspective” on conflict escalation thus asks for how conflict identities and conflict issues develop over time (see e.g. Collins 2012). Hence, social conflict is not reduced to static conditions that are understood as temporally preceding the conflict. In this sense, specific actors, for example, are not considered as entities of any corresponding ‘external’ reality of the conflict. Instead, they are seen as changing products of an intersubjective process of attributing meaning regarding the self and the social world (see Bonacker 2007: 4-5). The same applies to issues, positions, and environments of conflict.

Of course, the interplay between societal structures (e.g. institutions, identities, norms) and processes (i.e. actions/practices of individuals, groups, states) is in some way or other at the heart of any comprehensive theory about the social. To understand organised collective violence

as a part of conflict escalation, it is therefore critical to bring together these two dimensions. In Giddens's words, according to his theory of structuration, the focus should be on

“conditions governing the continuity or transformation of structures, which in turn are reproduced relations between actors or collectivities, organised as regular social practices.” (Giddens 1984: 66)

Against this background, in an effort to reconsider conflict analysis, Jabri states that conflict studies in IR and in PCS (as in social sciences in general)

“must incorporate the discursive and institutional continuities which render violent conflict a legitimate and widely accepted mode of human conduct” (Jabri 1996: 1).

Based on these epistemological remarks, research on violent conflict seeks to understand how conflict escalation is interwoven with both the structure and the process of identity formation, incorporating changing norms, role models, interests, institutions etc. In this regard, it is of utmost interest to what extent the legitimisation of organised collective violence gets encoded in conflictive identities. As hinted at earlier, based on the concept of conflict as a triangle as well as on the idea of latent and manifest conflict, Galtung (1996) lays important groundwork, illustrating that contradictions, attitudes and behaviour include structural features and processual elements of a conflict at the same time.

What happened so far: Reviewing influential models of conflict escalation

Building upon Galtung and other conflict theoretical landmarks in the rich history of social sciences, there is a wide range of conflict models. Though, rather few of them explicitly address conflict escalation and deal with the problem of levels of analysis or structure and process mentioned above. This section briefly presents three of the frequently referred to: Glasl's *nine-stage model* (1999), Lund's *curve of conflict* (1996), and Ramsbotham et al.'s *hourglass model* (2011). Each of these models constitutes a conceptual building block for the present study's proceeding.

Glasl's work (1999) represents one of the most illustrative models in the field of conflict escalation (Diez et al. 2011: 13). Even though Glasl dealt with international conflict and civil wars in the early days of his intellectual preoccupation with conflicts, the often-quoted model was originally designed for organisations, particularly for managers, coaches, facilitators, and professionals such as lecturers, teachers, mediators etc. Broadly defined, Glasl understands social conflicts as interactions between actors who perceive incompatibilities concerning their ideas, feelings or interests (see Glasl 1999: 18-19). His model has been referred to in different societal settings, for example in contexts of partnership and family as well as in situations of armed conflict and war. It is meant as a practical 'handout' and diagnostic tool for conflict facilitators, aiming at sensitising people for the dynamics of conflict escalation. In a more analytical and abstract perspective, it is also intended to outline how the dyadic logic of a conflict relationship develops over time. In marked contrast to other theories and models of escalation, Glasl understands the gradual intensification of the conflict as a “downward movement”. According to Glasl,

“escalation progressively activates deeper and more subconscious levels, both in people and in groups, until these people or groups completely lose their self-control.” (Glasl 1999: 84)

Glasl suggests conceptualising conflict as a cycle that consists of nine particular phases at three main levels of conflict escalation (see Glasl 1999: 83-106). At level one, “win-win” (stages 1-3), a difference over an issue gets identified. While different opinions and interests gradually come up, in- and out-groups that share common attitudes, interpretations and interests develop. Increasingly, standpoints begin to become clear-cut and polarised. Since exclusive group thinking dominates, parties see each other as competitors mutually blocking each other’s goals. Yet, while competitiveness and cooperation alternate continuously, it is in principle possible that the conflict parties have a fair argument and realise their respective goals, at least partly. At level two, “win-lose” (stages 4-6), the initial “material” basis of the conflict is increasingly ignored. Against the background of stereotypical images of the counterpart, every concrete issue gets associated with the existential question of victory or defeat. Since both parties perceive each other as aggressive and their own actions as defensive, the responsibility for escalation is externalised. Continuous blaming then goes hand in hand with mutually denying the other’s moral integrity. Ultimately, conflict parties make use of threats of damaging actions in order to force the counterpart to do what the party wants. Thereby, the parties get involved in a spiral of threats and counter-threats, while the turbulence of events increases. Finally, at the level three, “lose-lose” (stages 7-9), all parties lose track of their original goals and focus on harming the other. Thus, the basic sense of security has been lost and the counterpart is expected to be on the verge of executing destructive acts. The other is seen as a pure enemy, without human qualities. To suffer less damage than the other party becomes the main goal. In the end, even the price of self-destruction is accepted in order to destruct the enemy.

Contrary to Glasl’s rather detailed model, Lund provides a simplified model of a conflict’s ideal-type life history based on its intensity over time (Lund 1996: 37-39). Thus, “the curve of conflict” illustrates how conflicts (between states, groups, individuals) begin and end. The model purports to be a heuristic tool to relate different phases of conflict to one another and to various kinds of third-party intervention.²⁶ While conflicts may non-linearly oscillate between periods of greater and lesser intensity, Lund’s model depicts ideal stages of intensity characterised by different types of actions between parties to a dispute in the course of a conflict. At the stage of “durable peace”, a “high level of reciprocity and cooperation” is realised (Lund 1996: 39). When disagreements and disputes arise in this stage, they are treated in institutionalised and constructive ways of accommodating diverse interests. Though, on the basis of persisting value or goal differences, the relationship between actors can become wary and tense, leading to limited cooperation. This stage is still understood as “stable peace”, but competition and cooperation are present at the same time. Both in the phase of stable and durable peace, violence is no option. However, when tension and suspicion rise and the parties perceive each other as adversaries, the use of deterrent means is put into play. From this moment on, in Galtung’s words, peace gets “negative” or, according to Lund, “unstable”. The next stage (“crisis”) is therefore characterised by a

²⁶ For a recent reformulation of Lund’s model see particularly Levinger (2013: 29-34). The curve of conflict has particularly been referred to in the works of the United States Institute of Peace (USIP) “to visualize how conflicts typically evolve over time and how different phases of conflict relate to one another” (see USIP 2015).

“tense confrontation between armed forces that are mobilized and ready to fight and may engage in threats and occasional low-level skirmishes but have not exerted any significant amount of force” (Lund 1996: 39).

Finally, when organised collective violence becomes an encompassing societal phenomenon, the curve of conflict hits its climax. Then, the threshold of “armed conflict” or “war” is reached. To each of these stages, Lund associates a typical form of conflict management, especially including third-party activities: from “preventive diplomacy” to “crisis management” to “peace enforcement” (Lund 1996: 40-49; Lund 2009).

Like the curve of conflict, the “hourglass model” (Ramsbotham et al. 2011) constitutes a model of conflict escalation that is directly linked to measures of handling conflicts (be it the conflict parties themselves or external actors). Also based on Galtung’s ideas on conflict, the hourglass serves as a metaphor pointing out the

“narrowing/widening of political space that characterizes conflict escalation/de-escalation [...]. As [this] space narrows and widens, so different conflict resolution responses become more or less appropriate and possible” (Ramsbotham et al. 2011: 13).

In this sense, at different stages of conflict development, the model includes respective measures, not to avoid conflicts but to avert violence and to pursue conflicts constructively (Kriesberg 1998: 14-22). In a nutshell, it can be stated that the favoured conflict resolution strategies are attributed to each stage of conflict formation (Ramsbotham et al. 2011: 10-32):

Stage of Conflict Formation (increasing intensity)	Favoured Conflict Resolution Strategy
Difference	Conflict Transformation
Contradiction	
Polarisation	Conflict Settlement
Violence	
War	Conflict Containment

Figure: Stages of Conflict Formation and Favoured Conflict Resolution Strategies according to Ramsbotham et al. 2011; own graph

Certainly, there are a number of approaches and models mapping conflict escalation as an idealised ‘conflict life cycle’ in one form or the other. Notwithstanding, Glasl’s model ranks among those rather sophisticated models that provide far-reaching and detailed empirical insights, since it has been inductively developed. Given its systemic considerations about the level of the relationship in conflict (win-win/win-lose/lose-lose) and its openness as to different levels of analysis, it is also a model with considerable theoretical aspirations. Yet, the structural and reflexive dimension of Glasl’s approach lags behind the high (meta-theoretical) standards a comprehensive conflict theory is supposed to fulfil (e.g. concerning the role of identity formation). Moreover, Glasl’s conflict model appears to be inherently deterministic (concerning the secession of stages) whereas the true probabilistic nature of conflict dynamics is obscured (see Pearson d’Estree 2008: 78-81; Brucher 2011: 27). In contrast to Glasl’s model, at first glance, Lund’s curve of conflict impresses with its simplicity: it charts the intensity of a conflict (by measuring threatening/violent behaviour) on the vertical axis and the duration of a conflict on the horizontal

axis. Therefore, an ideal type conflict undergoes four intensity levels: peace, instability, violent conflict and war. Thus, the curve of conflict can indeed serve as an orientation for further heuristic enterprises in the (empirical) field of conflict analysis. However, its theoretical aspirations are rather reserved. In large part, Lund's conflict stages remain theoretical black boxes since there are no attempts to theoretically answer the questions of why/how the parties' escalating behaviour takes place. Also, although references to domestic conflict situations are given from time to time, the descriptive parts are overly fixated on the interstate context. In comparison to Lund, Ramsbotham et al.'s hourglass model is much more detailed with regard to its empirical account and the theoretical grounding behind, particularly concerning the stages of conflict formation (contradiction, polarisation etc.) (see Ramsbotham et al. 2011: 17-32).

Yet, the three models presented here reveal shortcomings concerning the equal status of the dimensions in Galtung's conflict triangle (attitude, behaviour, contradiction) that serves as a more or less explicit basis for their approaches. Most importantly, however, in the hourglass model as well as in the curve of conflict the idea of conflict escalation is very much interwoven with practical approaches to conflict resolution.²⁷ This is in part a result of the busy exchange and cooperation between theorists and practitioners that qualifies this broad field of research since its early days (Kriesberg 2009: 16-27). In contrast, building on the analytical essence of Galtung's conflict triangle, this contribution advocates for the idea of conceptually separating conflict analysis (i.e. understanding/reconstructing the dynamics of conflict escalation) and conflict resolution (understood as any approach of strategically intervening in conflict contexts). A good argument can be made that practical considerations about prompt intervention (not to say political projects) potentially block our analytical attention to conflict dynamics as such. Thus, linking analysis and praxis too closely involves the danger of favouring existing structures and, at the same time, of hindering innovative ideas, concepts and methods (that may suggest to reframe existing structures/policies) to come up (Debiel et al. 2011: 330-331). This is not to say that the concept of conflict resolution is not worth being considered when analytically focussing on conflict escalation. As Ramsbotham et al. put it,

“conflict resolution is a more comprehensive term which implies *that the deep-rooted sources of conflict* are addressed and transformed.” (Ramsbotham 2011: 31; italics added)

Hence, to develop adequate strategies of conflict resolution in a *second* step, any analysis of conflict escalation processes needs to be conducted in-depth in a *first* step. Seen from this angle, as it will be outlined in the next section, there are 'application-oriented' approaches in research on conflict escalation that take both steps into account.

2.3 Staking Overlapping Claims:

Conflict Resolution, Conflict Transformation, and Conflict Escalation

²⁷ Of course, it would go way beyond the scope of this chapter (and this contribution as a whole) to provide a full account of the tremendous literature on conflict resolution, conflict management, or even peacekeeping and peacebuilding etc. For this, see e.g. Sandole et al. (2009), McLaughlin-Mitchell and Regan (2010), Kriesberg (2010), or Coleman et al. (2014).

Drawing on observations of analysts, diplomats, correspondents and peace workers, the field of conflict analysis and resolution is generally characterised by a close relation between praxis and theory (Byrne and Senehi 2009; Diez et al. 2011). In light of the empirical pertinence of armed conflict, scholars and practitioners engaged in conflict research are particularly interested in understanding the perpetuation and the intractability of deadly conflicts (Levinger 2013; Mitchell 2014: 45-62). Thus, intensifying (i.e. escalating) and mitigating (i.e. de-escalating) dynamics of conflicts are two sides of the same coin. From a PCS point of view, structures and processes that engender large-scale violence are of utmost interest. Consequently, research in the field of conflict resolution aims at understanding

“how to bring actors back from the brink of war, how events shape their reading of history, how preferences held by one actor can be addressed within the confines of a competing set of preferences, and how information that is held closely by one can influence the expectations and behaviour of another” (McLaughlin Mitchell and Regan 2010: 1).

Based on that, conflict resolution develops “sets of ideas about avoiding, minimizing, and stopping violence that often is mutually destructive” and, naturally, lays great stress on the role of negotiation (e.g. track I-III diplomacy) and mediation (trust building measures, conciliatory gestures etc.) in order to transform destructive escalations into constructive ones (Cheldelin et al. 2008; Coleman et al. 2014).

In debates within the field of PCS, the contrasting juxtaposition of “conflict resolution” and “conflict transformation”, the latter assumed to be more holistic and oriented to the longer-term, occupies a prominent place (Lederach 2003; Baros and Jaeger 2004: 228-233). Instead of appreciating both strands as distinct, conflict transformation is often portrayed as a subfield of the all-encompassing domain of conflict resolution (Ramsbotham et al. 2011: 7-10). Nonetheless, both conflict resolution and conflict transformation include a more or less ambitious and outspoken concept of conflict escalation. In other words, even though the bulk of concepts concentrate on the intervention-oriented resolution/transformation part, *conflict escalation* is a crucial (and sometimes rather hidden) building block in any of these approaches.

Appreciating ‘conflict escalation’ as a substantive concept

In order to back up the quality of conflict escalation as a substantive concept, the idea of conflict transformation, as introduced above, has to be addressed in greater detail. As it is argued here, conflict transformation is not simply another umbrella term for a set of theoretically informed techniques in dealing with social conflict practically (Ryan 2009; Mitchell 2014). Rather, it is a lens that enables observers to see more than an immediate issue-related contradiction but to envisage the overall meaning of a conflict as a long-term feature of social relationships. This perspective is deeply embedded in a tradition of considering conflict as normal in human relationships and, therefore, as an important driver of social change (see above Simmel 1992[1923] and Coser 1956). According to one of the key thinkers in the subfield, conflict transformation means

“to envision and respond to the ebb and flow of social conflict as life-giving opportunities for creating constructive change processes that reduce violence, increase justice in direct interaction and social structures, and respond to real-life problems in human relationships” (Lederach 2003: 14).

Although rather reflecting the more practical and reactive aspects of the subject, Lederach's approach²⁸ extracts its ideas about the 'handling' of conflicts from an analytical and holistic view on conflict development in all its phases. Thus, starting from the very beginning of a given social contradiction, reconstructing drivers and, based on that, identifying transformers of conflict play a key role. Strictly speaking, any approach of conflict transformation is supposed to have a more or less explicit idea of conflict escalation (and corresponding analytics) that serves as a starting point. Following Lederach and other founding figures in the field, the *Berghof Foundation*²⁹ provides a key reformulations of the concept of "conflict transformation", which is defined as

"a complex process of constructively changing relationships, attitudes, behaviours, interests and discourses in violence-prone conflict settings. It also addresses underlying structures, cultures and institutions that encourage and condition political and social conflict." (Berghof Foundation 2012: 23).

Based on that, the Berghof approach adds a further attribute: Thus, *systemic* conflict transformation includes the idea of understanding conflicts as systems that cannot be reduced to the properties of its elements. Instead, in each and every conflict, these elements form a new composition that can be observed in relationships only (Ropers 2008: 21-22). Consequently, empirical approaches in systemic conflict transformation take up the cause of pursuing a multi-level and multi-actor relational perspective on social conflict. By introducing this kind of systemic thinking³⁰, the approach not only provides a starting point to grasp the complexity of conflict but also emphasises the non-linearity of conflict development that can be modelled only to a limited extent (Wils et al. 2006: 13-14). Based on a certain attitude of modesty, systemic conflict transformation can be described as a conceptually guided enterprise whose analytical focus lies on patterns of interaction and the dynamic of relationships.³¹ Therefore, before thinking about intervening in a conflict by whatever means, this approach pleads in favour of reconstructing a conflict's transformations over time by equally considering views of the system as a whole

²⁸ For another 'classical' approach laying the foundation of the concept of conflict transformation see for example Väyrynen (1991: 4) who provides a more analytical and theoretical version highlighting the social, economic and political dynamics in societies and therefore the fluid character of issues, actors and interests in the course of conflict.

²⁹ The Berghof Foundation is a non-governmental and non-profit scientific institution "supporting conflict stakeholders and actors in their efforts to achieve sustainable peace" based in Berlin and Tübingen (see website at <http://www.berghof-foundation.org>, accessed March 3, 2016). Since it offers one of the most elaborated and far-reaching approaches in conflict transformation, the Berghof concept was exemplarily referred to in this chapter.

³⁰ As it will be outlined in Chapter 3 and 4, the meaning of 'systemic' within the framework of "systemic conflict transformation" (e.g. by the Berghof Foundation 2012: 105-110) is not to be confused with its meaning in (Luhmannian) *systems* theory. While the former represents an attempt to reflect the complexity of social conflict and to develop multilayered practical measures to address this complexity, the latter implies no less than the ontological claim that the whole (social) world is constituted by communication and systems. Nevertheless, even though the conceptual and theoretical aspirations are much less marked in systemic conflict transformation, both approaches do have parallels that facilitate a common perspective on conflict escalation (see particularly Bernshausen and Bonacker 2011).

³¹ As far as the Berghof approach is concerned, case-related working hypotheses (e.g. on the dynamics of interpersonal/intergroup behaviours or the characteristics of asymmetrical/symmetrical conflict structures) are generated both by building on best practice in the field (by integrating field research, experiences of practitioners and narratives of conflict parties) and on conflict theoretical thought from various disciplines, e.g. political science, sociology and social psychology, history, anthropology, law, educational science (Berghof Foundation 2012: 66-67; 105-110).

(“bird’s eye view”) and detailed examinations of the subsystems (“frog’s eye view”) (Wils et al. 2006: 14). In other words, it acknowledges the empirical insight that contexts, actors, and issues are not given facts but changing components of a variable whole.³² Methodically, systemic conflict transformation research mainly draws on qualitative tools based on empirical social research, including the evaluation of project reports, participatory monitoring, individual or group interviews, surveys, and ethnographic methods (Berghof Foundation 2012: 67-69; 108-109). While retrospectively mapping ‘conflict escalation’ in this way (although the term is not used literally), the approach enables observers to assess different stages of conflict development and thus to think of starting points for possible de-escalation strategies (see Reimann 2004: 43-46). In summary, it can be stated that systemic conflict transformation represents a far-reaching approach in current conflict research, which is addicted to practical application and experience to a great extent, but, at the same time, has a substantive analytical and theoretical understanding of conflict escalation as a separate part in a conflict’s life cycle that deserves its own attention.

Conflict escalation and taxonomies: a (not so far) excursus

As it has been portrayed in the course of this chapter, conflict escalation, be it as an explicit focus or as a rather implicit topic between the lines, indeed represents a focal point in the vast field of conflict studies. Broadly speaking, based on a rich legacy in sociology, political science and IR, on the one hand, there are rather theory-oriented approaches including a certain aspiration not only to contribute to practical strategies but also to promote theory development while dealing with the empirical performance of escalating conflicts (see the conflict transformation approach sketched above). On the other hand, there are elaborated empirical approaches aiming at advancing classical quantitative research in conflict studies by including qualitative elements within the scope of gathering and processing of conflict data. Against this background, the following section briefly addresses the *Heidelberg Conflict Model* as a well-known exponent of a sophisticated taxonomic model of conflict escalation.³³

In comparative research on armed conflict and war in IR and PCS, global conflict databases play a crucial role (see e.g. UCDP mentioned above). Although those databases have considerably advanced in recent years, particularly concerning the scope of the empirical coverage and the accuracy of concepts and typologies, there are still substantial desiderata that keep research busy (Schwank et al. 2013: 33): First, non-violent periods of conflict or phases in which the level of violent incidences is very low are still not represented. In other words, in most databases, the perceived life cycle of a conflict and, hence, the registration of a conflict begins with the observation of organised collective violence and thus omits prior phases of conflict development. Second, based on the levels-of-analysis-problem mentioned earlier in this chapter, there is still a need for an integrative model that is able to represent what is traditionally (and

³² As Miall (2013: 76-80) outlines, in this context, typical “transformations” of a conflict relate e.g. to changing contingencies of the parties to a conflict or to the de- and relinking of issues perceived as relevant to the conflict.

³³ The Heidelberg Conflict Model originates from the work of two conflict research facilities located at the University of Heidelberg/Germany: the *Heidelberg Institute for International Conflict Research* (HIIRK) (since 1991) and the *Conflict Information and Analysis System* (CONIAS) Research Group (since 2005). Based on a common understanding of political conflict (see sections below), this model provides an elaborated scheme of classification for a wide range of conflict-related empirical phenomena according to their intensity or, in other words, it offers a taxonomy of conflict escalation that serves as a conceptual grounding for a comprehensive conflict database (see e.g. the *Conflict Barometer*, at <https://hiik.de>, accessed August 14, 2021).

artificially) referred to as different types of ‘domestic’ and ‘international’ conflict (e.g. concerning revolutions, coup d’états, terrorist attacks, civil wars, wars etc.) in the very same database. Following this, third, given the impetus to empirically ‘typologise’ conflict events, a conflict can indeed appear in various categories of a database since different phases of the very same conflict are ‘counted’ as different conflict types. Though, against the background of a conflict’s changing characteristics over time, conflict databases are rather supposed to enable users to adopt a process perspective on the whole life cycle of a single conflict. Finally, in order to get a valid representation of conflict intensities, it has become increasingly obvious that conflict databases need to gather a lot more than just conflict-related deaths per year or month.³⁴

In an effort to contribute to these desiderata and to overcome the fixation on quantitative concepts and methods in the field of conflict databases, the Heidelberg Conflict Model provides an approach that includes a “wide range of conflict manifestations, [...] not only wars, but also violent conflicts far beneath the threshold of wars as well as completely non-violent conflicts.” (CONIAS 2016a) In doing so, conflicts represent differences in positions (i.e. contradictions), which are understood as expressions of perceived incompatibilities of (world) views and interests.³⁵ Therefore, this understanding of conflict requires actors (individuals, social groups) who already act/ communicate with reference to a specific (conflict) issue. Based on that, data gathering and analyses within the framework of the this model concentrate on *political* conflicts, i.e. conflicts that are relevant for society as a whole since, as well as conflicts that give no reason to expect an institutionalised option of dealing with the dispute, and conflicts whose actors are perceived as important and assertive (see Schwank et al. 2013: 36-40).³⁶ Concerning its centrepiece, i.e. its account on different phases of conflict development, the Heidelberg approach provides a “dynamic intensity model” that distinguishes between five stages of conflict escalation whereas the respective intensity levels are determined by the quality of communication between actors. More precisely, conflict intensity (see levels 1 to 5 in graph below) is scaled according to the totality of the observed conflict-related measures in a geographical area within a given period of time (see CONIAS 2016b).

1	Dispute	a political conflict, i.e. positional difference (see criteria above), holding out the prospect to threaten core state functions or the order of international law but without any use of organised collective violence	Non-Violent Conflict

³⁴ On this, see e.g. UCDP’s account on the Maidan protests, which is thoroughly concentrated on the gapless illustration of the number of violent incidences and deaths (UCDP 2020b). Consequently, the police forces’ crackdown on Maidan protesters on November 30, 2013, represents its “first stated goal of incompatibility” (and hence the beginning of the conflict), although the contradiction between government and protesters gathered pace earlier (see case study details in chapter 5).

³⁵ Partly, this understanding builds upon Galtung’s idea of contradiction and Glasl’s perspective on conflicts (see Chapter 2.2; Galtung 1996: 70-80; Glasl 1999: 16-19).

³⁶ Against the backdrop of these criteria, the situation in Mali in the first months of the investigation period (November 2010 to August 2011) would not have been considered as a *political conflict* since the contradiction between the MNA (i.e. the political branch of the Touareg) and the Malian government in this period was considered as manageable within the existing institutions on all sides. At the same time, this period was de facto one of hardening of positions and growing rhetorical tensions (see case study details in Chapter 6).

2	Non-Violent Crisis	threat of organised collective violence (including e.g. an actor's refusal to disarm when demanded, the mutual pointing of weapons systems, or the implementation of sanctions)	
3	Violent Crisis	classification procedure (intensity levels 3-5) depends on 5 indicators, which combine quantitative and qualitative criteria: weapons used, personnel/people involved, number of casualties, number of refugees, scope of destruction	Violent Conflict
4	Limited War		
5	War		

Figure: Conflict Intensity Levels according to Heidelberg Conflict Model; own graph

Indeed, as the annual *Conflict Barometer* demonstrates, the Heidelberg approach has brought out a highly developed and much-noticed conceptual model of conflict intensities, which points to further possibilities of refining conflict studies as a whole, particularly in terms of integrating quantitative and qualitative concepts and establishing global conflict databases. Even though this approach allows adopting a comparative perspective on conflicts at different stages of development retrospectively³⁷, there are substantial shortcomings that pave the way for further intruding desiderata: First, its understanding of political conflict³⁸ insinuates that, in order to be counted as such, a positional difference, at this point, already has to be perceived as relevant in society as a whole, including clearly defined actors/parties to the conflict. In other words, a crucial part of the overall process of conflict escalation, namely the question of how a contradiction gets relevant in a broader societal setting and how parties/identities to that contradiction gradually evolve (or emerge at all), remains beyond the scope of the model. Second, on the one hand, the model is able to portray conflicts in fine-grained stadia. On the other hand, it makes rather sparse proposals on how conflicts develop from one stadium to the next. To put it another way, the approach remains taxonomic inasmuch as it concentrates on refining the features of categories, classes, subtypes etc. to the disadvantage of dealing with the black box that marks the shift between the different conflict stages.

Beyond the Heidelberg approach briefly sketched above, there are a number of theoretically rather unambitious manners of using the concept of conflict escalation in more generic or typological contexts. In the following, one of these contexts, research on the “regionalisation of armed conflict” will be exemplarily outlined. To begin with, according to Lake and Rothchild (1998), collective fear represents one of the key mechanisms that drive the spread, i.e. diffusion

³⁷ As compared to the world's leading global conflict databases (e.g. ACLED, AKUF, COW, UCDP), the Heidelberg approach indeed offers solutions for the pressing desiderata in the field, particularly concerning the integration of different conflict types in a single database and the idea of portraying the very same conflict in different stages of its life cycle based on a wide range of qualitative features (Schwank et al. 2013: 51-57).

³⁸ The Heidelberg approach conceptualises (political) conflicts as social systems based on communication. However, as the use of the concept suggests, conflicts are thought of in the framework of a sender-receiver-model of communication. Indeed, there is a focus on linguistic communication *and* physical action in a conflict context. At the same time, the constitution of actors and issues themselves is excluded from communication analyses. In sum, the Heidelberg approach does not apply a theoretically charged and comprehensive concept of communication and systems similar to Luhmannian thinking. This is the point where the present study's approach takes up the thread (see Chapter 3/4).

and escalation, of “ethnic conflict”. Therefore, “diffusion” stands for conflict phenomena in one area that alters the likelihood of conflict elsewhere (basically via information flows, e.g. changing beliefs about existing power contracts), while “escalation” occurs when a conflict in one country brings in new “foreign” belligerents (e.g. via alliances, spillovers, or irredentisms) (Lake and Rothchild 1998: 23-32).³⁹ Even though this approach sets a good example for a promising effort to empirically cope with the transnational dimension of (ethnic) conflict (and thus addresses the level-of-analysis-problem hinted at in Chapter 2.2), its interpretation of the process of spreading conflicts offers few starting points to push forward to critical discursive processes. That is to say, it does not seriously look behind the façade of the declared ‘causal’ conflict mechanisms of collective fear and the security dilemma in order to capture the phenomenon of conflict escalation in a broader societal context.

In the same vein, based on Lake and Rothchild’s work and also Pugh et al.’s (2004) seminal study on “regional conflict complexes”, recent research developed sophisticated empirical methods to analyse the geographical diffusion of an armed conflict to a new territory or the escalation of violence within the very same territory with the involvement of an increasing number of actors.⁴⁰ However, this research still adheres to a notion of escalation that does not significantly differ from an everyday ‘faster-higher-further’ understanding (i.e. more actors, more resources, and increasing violence). In addition, it concentrates on partial aspects of conflict development (here: the regionalisation of *already existing* internal wars) while the guiding threads of the larger story of how conflicts emerge remains widely unappreciated (see Ansorg 2014). In this sense, although the idea of “regional conflict systems”⁴¹ represents a useful framework to transcend the more conventional conflict databases, it does not provide an innovative impulse to better understand processes of emerging conflict identities and, closely intertwined with this, the legitimisation of organised collective violence as a feature of social relationships.

2.4 Conflict Escalation in Social Science Discourses: Retaining the Key Points

Taken all together, Chapter 2 provides a concise panorama on conflict escalation in different but overlapping discourses in social sciences. The focus lays on the illustration of those concepts, theories and empirical models that classify conflict escalation as a field of research in its own right. In this context, it becomes obvious that conflict escalation indeed occurs as a nominal topic in various approaches in conflict studies. At the same time, however, appropriate accounts with true theoretical aspirations, particularly dealing with the black box of how conflict escalation proceeds from one stage to the next are rather rare. Hence, so far, the answers to the

³⁹ In this context, Lake and Rothchild (1998: 24) point to the differentiation between horizontal escalation (concerning an increasing number of actors involved) and vertical escalation (concerning rising intensity levels of violence in conflict).

⁴⁰ See e.g. the method of “multivalue qualitative comparative analysis” that was used within the framework of a comparative area study on 12 cases of “conflict systems” in sub-Saharan Africa from 1989 to 2010 (Ansorg 2014: 301-304).

⁴¹ As the definition exposes, the concept of regional conflict systems does not include (or hint at) any systems theoretical backing: “These systems are defined as geographically bound spaces of insecurity, ones that are characterized by interdependent armed conflicts in which a plurality of actors [...] participate.” (Ansorg 2014: 296). Moreover, the concept seems to be simply used as an auxiliary term to label a geographical intermediate unit that has not existed respectively been addressed in research before (see Ansorg 2014: 297).

overall research question of the present study – How do conflicts escalate? – that have been given in the above-cited strands of literature are, for now, not satisfying.

Nevertheless, in an effort to document the conceptual backstory of the approach to conflict escalation developed in the present work, a number of aspects can be retained from this chapter: In a nutshell, first, according to some of the most prominent intellectual forefathers in social sciences (Simmel, Coser, Dahrendorf), conflict escalation, here, too, is understood as a process of socialisation inasmuch as the emergence of conflict-related identities constitutes a crucial building block of a social conflict as such. Based on the idea of conflicts as ubiquitous and unavoidable phenomena, conflict escalation, rather than being a clearly measurable research issue, thus represents a genuine perspective in conflict studies that asks for how the many latent conflicts, or, in other words, the countless existing social contradictions, develop into manifest, i.e. socially visible and articulated conflicts.

Second, based on the rich theoretical and empirical history in political science and sociology, Pruitt and Rubin have called attention to “structural change” that conflicts bring about. In this sense, for example, the use of increasingly heavy means (e.g. from nonviolent protests to property damages) or the growing domination of devaluating attitudes towards the other (e.g. from political rivals to life-threatening enemies) are not just to be seen as conflict-related temporary occurrences but, at the same time, as both starting points and consequences of profound social change during conflict.

Third, Galtung’s “conflict triangle”, which defines conflicts as contradiction, attitude, and behaviour, provides a conceptual tool to relativise the level of analysis problem (particularly debated in IR) and thus to enable thinking of conflict escalation as a social phenomenon that can be intertwined with different societal levels at once (individuals, groups, or states). This, in turn, opens up a useful perspective to meet both the empirical challenge of dealing with the obvious transnational dimension of many conflicts and the theoretical challenge of overcoming the fixation on the nation state as an absolute analytical reference.

Forth, as the focus on conflict escalation entails a certain orientation towards process perspectives, constructivist approaches in social sciences suggest an appropriate epistemological framework to ask ‘how-possible-questions’ about the interplay between structures, actors and processes. Thereby, asking for how identities emerge and evolve, for example with reference to changing norms (about the legitimate use of violence) or perceptions (concerning power, security, etc.) lies at the very centre of conflict escalation.

Finally, as it can be learned from the above-cited conflict models (Glasl, Lund, Ramsbotham et al.) and comprehensive concepts (conflict resolution, conflict transformation), capturing social conflicts in their ‘life cycles’ represents a highly ambitioned enterprise. On the one hand, those indeed sophisticated approaches are very much informed by inductive research and thus provide far-reaching and detailed empirical insights (see particularly Glasl’s nine-stage model). On the other hand, their theoretical depth seems to lag behind the high standard a comprehensive conflict theory is supposed to fulfil, especially when it comes to conceptually separate analytical methods (e.g. to figure out the changing tableau of conflict parties) from practical considerations about prompt intervention (e.g. concerning mediation efforts). However, although often not even literally mentioned, ‘conflict escalation’ represents a basic building block in conflict studies (see Berghof approach) and therefore, at least in this contribution, will be (re-) cultivated as a primarily analytical perspective on conflicts that should not be

conceptually mixed up with intervention-oriented thinking in the first place. Admittedly, the highly elaborated taxonomies and typologies that came up with the large conflict databases can be an empirical orientation guide to make (comparative) sense of the manifold phenomena observed as conflict-related (see Heidelberg approach). Though, this does not suspend the necessity to develop a comprehensive approach that picks up the evident desiderata, notably the underrepresentation of pre-violent conflict escalation phases, meets the (meta-) theoretical requirements and definitely tackles the black boxes of conflict escalation left behind by research so far – a challenge that this study accepts by focussing on communication as the central building block of the social.

CHAPTER 3. Conflict Escalation:

Developing a Systems Theoretical Framework

“So that I may perceive whatever holds
The world together in its inmost folds.”
(J. W. Goethe, *Faust – The First Part of the Tragedy*, 1808)

“The following considerations assume that there are systems.” The first chapter of Niklas Luhmann’s magnum opus *Social Systems* begins with these lapidary and, at the same time, grandiloquent words (Luhmann 1995: 12). Indeed, system metaphors and ideas have become part of the standard vocabulary, not only in social sciences. Even beyond sociology and political science, ‘systems theory’ has become an umbrella term for different perspectives and levels of analysis, as for example widespread references to ‘political systems’, ‘ecosystems’ or ‘computer systems’ suggest. Their common denominator: a system is composed of particular units that interact with each other; it constitutes more than the sum of its parts and thus has qualities of its own. As everyday examples show, even without putting Luhmann’s huge theoretical superstructure into play, the systems analogy seems to be greatly useful to order and to make sense of complex phenomena in the world.

So, why does the present work draw on Luhmannian systems theory? And, on top of this, why should Luhmann be brought to PCS at all? Although Luhmann has often been portrayed as one of the most important sociologists of the 20th century, in international social sciences literature, Luhmannian systems theory, due to its sparse translation into English, still lives in the shadow. According to Albert (2007), it faces persistent prejudices (anti-empiricism, ivory tower research, excessive complexity, etc.) and a widespread reluctance to work across disciplines. Furthermore, as Moeller (2012: 10-15) pointedly adds, the brilliance of Luhmann’s theory is diametrically opposed to the fact that he wrote such “soporific” and “bad books”. Of course, he was part of a special intellectual heritage and a corresponding (German) academic discourse at that time. In this context, his highly academic and seemingly elitist writing style was even strengthened by a narrative and scattering way of pursuing thoughts and by the not so humble aspiration to provide a ‘supertheory’, i.e. a theoretical framework that, in principle, covers all aspects of social life.

“Reading Luhmann compares to listening to techno music: It makes no difference if the reader mentally zones out for a few chapters. Everything repeats itself constantly: [Luhmann] juggles with a small set of accurately defined basic concepts – meaning, communication, system, environment.” (Lindemann 2008; own translation)

Moreover, Luhmann’s systems theory was (and still is) perceived as ‘conservative’ and thus as opposing the dominant *zeitgeist* since it estimates the possibilities to purposefully influence social processes by individual/collective action as very limited. However, as the following considerations argue, Luhmannian systems theory entails an enormous potential to widen horizons of contemporary conflict studies.

As a coup d'oeil into the tables of contents of state-of-the-art sources reveals, PCS has become exceedingly differentiated since its beginnings as a field of research.⁴² Today, PCS' self-perception is characterised by a high level of pluralism (Bonacker 2011: 67-71). In fact, besides a more or less outspoken commitment to do research for/on peace as a separate topic⁴³, there are sparse uniting elements in the broad field of PCS. Quite the contrary, as for example there seem to be fewer and fewer common analytical concepts conflict phenomena could be attributed to and, as the question of how far application-oriented research should go further fuels debates, one could get the impression that the field has obviously drifted apart or that some trends in the field have even manoeuvred themselves into dead ends.⁴⁴ Against the background of the present study, bringing Luhmann to PCS represents an attempt to uncover a common conceptual thread in the field: communication.

Concerning the encompassing scope of its aspirations, Luhmann's systems theoretical thinking can indeed be viewed as "radical" (Moeller 2012: 3-9; Martinsen 2014: 22-26). Society, in its broadest sense, is constituted by different social systems. Social systems, in turn, consist of nothing but communication. To put it straight, society is supposed to be an effect of social reality construction through communication only.⁴⁵ In this sense, all social phenomena ultimately trace back to communicative processes. Therefore, as this chapter elaborates step by step, Luhmannian systems theory not only provides a productive theoretical basis to look at conflicts in a different light, namely as specific types of social systems that are embedded in other social systems; it also enables observers to comprehend the legitimisation of collective violence as part of a spiral of communicative attributions in a particular discursive setting.

In order to lay the foundation for the approach developed in the present study, the first section of chapter 3 ("Luhmann Revisited") outlines the theoretical underpinnings of a systems theory approach to do empirical research on conflicts. In doing so, it reviews the key concepts of communication and social systems. The second section ("Opening Horizons: A World Societal Framework") elaborates on the crucial idea that social conflicts, in an impartial and broad systems theoretical perspective, are understood as being inherently embedded in a world societal communicative framework. Therefore, it is argued that conflict escalation represents a process of social change growing out of discursive arenas in world society. Finally, the last section

⁴² See e.g. Webel and Galtung (2007), Sandole et al. (2009), Schlotter and Wisotzki (2011) or Bonacker (2011).

⁴³ As e.g. Schlotter and Wisotzki emphasise (from a German PCS community perspective), "Peace studies have not been brought into being in order to behave neutrally towards its subject-matter [...]. Peace studies can not get along without a normative orientation that is aligned to changing those social and political conditions inhibiting chances of peace." (Schlotter and Wisotzki 2011: 36-37; own translation)

⁴⁴ Relating to the debate on the need for and the limits of application-oriented research in PCS, dealing e.g. with the status of expertise in the political discourse or the controversy about "government-commissioned research" see Ruf (2009) or Bonacker (2011). For an example of a recent progressive discussion on the concept of "civilian conflict management" in PCS, see Gulowski and Weller (2017; see also chapter 8). Concerning the dead ends of some approaches in PCS, see e.g. the (not so hidden) circular argument behind the "failed states" debate: On the one hand, it is argued that failed states represent a central cause of violent conflict (escalation). On the other hand, limited statehood itself is understood as a product of already existing conflicts (see Bonacker and Weller 2006: 21-22; Chojnacki and Namberger 2014: 178-181).

⁴⁵ As Moeller (2012: 5-6) states, Luhmann's "radicalism" particularly consists in "deanthropologizing the description of society and of the world in general" inasmuch as human agency or actorness is not seen as absolute but contingent. Hence, following Luhmann (see e.g. 1995: 157-163), the focus is not on individuals or human beings as such but on communication as a process of selection whereby in certain (conflict) contexts some communicative addresses (e.g. "collective identities" individuals are attributed to) become more obvious than others.

provides a brief summary (“A Systems Theoretical World Society Perspective: What’s In It for Conflict Studies?”) in order to lead over to Chapter 4, which further pursues the development of an appropriate method(odology) within an empirical research programme.

3.1 Luhmann Revisited

“The world does not speak. Only we do.” (Rorty 1989: 6)

In Luhmann’s view, the answer to Faust’s existential concern (see introductory quote to chapter 3 above) is clear-cut: It is communication that holds the world together (see Luhmann 1995: 137-176). Taking this fundamental proposition as a starting point, the following remarks deal with the three central building blocks of Luhmannian systems theoretical thinking: a theory of communication, a theory of social systems, and a constructivist epistemology, i.e. “operational constructivism” (Bonacker 2008: 267-271). Against this background, a systems theoretical understanding of conflict will then be expounded.

The world, or, in Immanuel Kant’s words, the “things in themselves”, cannot be logically accessed and objectively experienced by means of whatsoever right criteria in empirical research.⁴⁶ And, as a matter of course, things are not self-evident and they cannot speak themselves. As can be learned from the *linguistic turn* and constructivist thinking in social sciences, the world is moderated by language, symbols and discourses.⁴⁷ To put it in a systems theoretical and at the same time everyday language: If we talk about the world, we communicate our observations of the world. These observations can be conceived of as distinctions and indications; this conceptual pair goes back to Brown (1972) and has been taken up again by Luhmann (1995: 66). From a systems theory perspective, the ultimate merit of an observation is a double one: Observers *distinguish* between different phenomena by choosing specific phenomena (from an amount of potentially perceivable phenomena) that form a specific entity, which is separated from the rest of the world (environment). At the same time observers *indicate* this entity by attributing terms and features (see Simon 2012: 14-17). However, since the observer cannot be part of the phenomenon observed or since observers cannot observe themselves (i.e. their own mode of distinction/indication), there will always be a ‘blind spot’ of observation. Reality can thus only be perceived and described by distinctions and indications that are brought into the world by observers (see Luhmann 2002: 139-142).

⁴⁶ For this see the respective passage from Kant’s *Prolegomena*: “Everything that is to be given to us as object must be given to us in intuition. But all our intuition happens only by means of the senses; [...] the senses never and in no single instance enable to cognize things in themselves but only their appearances and as these are mere representations of sensibility, consequently all bodies together with the space in which they are found must be taken for nothing but mere representations in us, and exist nowhere else than merely in our thoughts.” (Kant 2004[1783]: 40)

⁴⁷ See particularly Fearon and Wendt (2002), Ulbert (2005) and Martinsen (2014). Nota bene: Evidently, the linguistic turn represents a paradigmatic change that affected (and still affects) way more than the social sciences. It would go beyond the scope of this section to portray its profound impact in all (sub-) disciplines. However, broadly speaking, the linguistic turn particularly refers to the insight that the meaning of words and actions are communicatively defined (see e.g. Cienki and Yanow 2013; Angermüller 2014: 20-21). Following this, truth is a matter of convention and consensus and science represents just one ‘language game’ among others. As far as the impact of the linguistic turn in IR/PCS is concerned see Albert et al. (2008: 52-56) and Bonacker (2011: 67-71).

To be articulated, observations, as outlined above, need to take recourse to language and symbols. They are thus necessarily linked to preceding observations and their inherent meaning which is thereby confirmed, refused, or, more generally, reproduced. In this context, communication shows a contingent character: it constitutes its own frame of reference, its own horizon. Hence, by selecting communication generates information which is then, at the same time, imparted or articulated (in one way or other) as well as understood, whereas ‘understanding’ also includes all forms of misunderstanding.⁴⁸ Consequently, communication represents a unity of three components: information, utterance and understanding (see Luhmann 1995: 139-150). Taking as point of departure that what is increasingly referred to as *communicative turn* in the social sciences (see Albert et al. 2008), it is argued that communication constitutes the basis of all social structures and processes. This is obviously different from analytically getting hold of the world by considering certain given sets of actors and their interactions. In other words, ‘the social’, i.e. collective structures such as (in)formal institutions, norms, identities or specific subject-positions like ‘friend’, ‘opponent’, ‘rebel’ or ‘secessionist’ are understood as being exclusively produced within communication. Hence, all social phenomena (e.g. violent conflicts), first and foremost, represent discursive events that ‘materialise’ via processes of interlinking (linguistic, symbolic) communication.

According to systems theory, society can be defined as the totality of communications that are interlinked which means able to actually or potentially reach each other. Society is thus constituted of and reproduced by communication (see Luhmann 1995: 15). If communication is permanently processed beyond the level of simple interaction, stable structures of mutual expectations, or, to put it in Luhmann’s words, “social systems” will develop. Social systems reduce complexity by providing reservoirs of meaning, i.e. stocks of distinctions and indications ‘on call’. Moreover, social systems have the ability to reproduce their own constitutive elements and thereby to demarcate themselves from the environment (see concept of “autopoiesis”; Luhmann 1995: 205-209; 359-360). Based on the systems theoretical assumption of functional differentiation⁴⁹, modern society predominantly consists of different subsystems (e.g. politics, economy, law, science, religion, or mass media⁵⁰) having exclusive functions and specific generalised media of communication that enable “connectivity” (Kneer and Nassehi 2000: 131-141): As to the political subsystem, in one way or other, any communication relates to having binding

⁴⁸ According to Vogd (2005: 116), in social situations, “misunderstanding” is the rule rather than the exception. Here it becomes evident that ‘understanding’ is not meant in the common everyday sense of the word. In Luhmannian systems theory, understanding relates to *any* communicative connection that recursively refers to a prior communication, be it affirming or denying (see Kalthoff 2008: 132).

⁴⁹ According to systems theory, there are three main forms of differentiation: Segmentary, stratificatory and functional differentiation. “Segmentary differentiation is where every social subsystem is the equal of, and functionally similar to, every other social system (e.g. families, clans, or states as ‘like units’). Stratificatory differentiation is where some persons or groups raise themselves above others, creating a hierarchical order (e.g. feudal orders or hegemonic power structures). Functional differentiation is where the subsystems are defined by the coherence of particular types of activity and their differentiation from other types of activity, i.e. a certain kind of ‘division of labour’. It points to an increasing division into legal, political, military, economic, scientific, religious and suchlike distinct and specialized subsystems” (Buzan and Albert 2010: 318). On the one hand, the historical evolution up to contemporary (world) society can be understood as a succession of these three forms of differentiation. On the other hand, world society can be nowadays characterised by the co-presence of all forms of differentiation (see e.g. Kneer and Nassehi 2000: 122-141; Luhmann 2013[1997]: Chapter 4).

⁵⁰ Based on Luhmann’s work and taking into account what has been published following Luhmann, Roth (2014) compiled a list of 10 social subsystems composing modern society.

decision-making power or not; in economy, all actions turn on being able to pay for various scarce resources or not; the subsystem of law literally judges the world on the basis of the code legal/illegal; in sciences, the question is whether a scientific statement is correct or not, if not to say true or untrue⁵¹; religious communication is about how to get salvation and a decent standard of life; and finally, at the end of this non-exhaustive short list, the subsystem of mass media⁵² processes on the basis of the code information (i.e. news) or non-information.⁵³ Now, the pivotal question is how these subsystems can be scientifically observed in action.

Along these lines, operative constructivism forms the epistemological basis of Luhmann's systems theoretical thinking. In this context, the concept of observation is crucial. Political or social realities thus represent outcomes of specific observations, i.e. collective processes of attributing meaning. In principle, this also applies for scientific world views, dominant research paradigms and, therefore, for each and every research project as well:

“You have to organize your research in an autological way, i.e. you have to pay regard to possible inferences on your own action. [...] Results of research can retransform into research conditions.” (Luhmann 1990: 9; own translation)

To meet this claim, empirical research is supposed to consider different ‘modes of observation’ that affect the way reality is perceived. In other words, researchers (in conflict studies) are observers (among many others) who can indeed observe (i.e. describe, categorise, analyse etc.) other observers with due regard to the distinctions and indications the observed observer uses. Conducted in this way, research provides ‘second-order observations’.⁵⁴ This can be illustrated with an example from the Malian case study: After the MNA published its founding statement in November 2010, declaring that the MNA intends to be a peaceful political player within the Malian society,

“The MNA declares that it adopts the way of political and legal action to require all rights. The MNA rejects violence and condemns terrorism in all its forms, both committed by the state and individuals. The MNA determinedly

⁵¹ On this, see Luhmann's *The Science of Society* (1990: 274; translation R.B., italics added): “Only science deals with coded truth. [...] only science is about the claim that *true claims* implicate a precedent validation and rejection of their *eventual untruth*. Since this validation can never be completed, only in science, the *symbol of truth* always has a hypothetical meaning.”

⁵² According to Luhmann (1996: 10), “the term ‘mass media’ includes all those institutions of society which make use of copying technologies to disseminate communication. This means principally books, magazines and newspapers manufactured by the printing press but also all kinds of photographic or electronic copying procedures, provided that they generate large quantities of products whose target groups are as yet undetermined. Also included in the term is the dissemination of communication via broadcasting, provided that it is generally accessible.”

⁵³ Once an information gets articulated in form of a communicative event, it becomes a non-information. Therefore, a message that gets published a second time indeed keeps its meaning but loses its information value (see Luhmann 1996: 32-48). The function of mass media is thus to reproduce artefacts, i.e. information worth of being recorded (see Roth 2014: 16-18).

⁵⁴ See particularly Luhmann (1990: 14-16; 2005[1990]: 7-8), Weller (2005b), Stichweh (2010), and Simon (2012). Nota bene: Of course, as mentioned earlier, any observation has its blind spot that cannot be seen through at the very same level, but from a ‘higher’ standpoint. Therefore, observation, in principle, implies an infinite regress, i.e. an endless asking for observers of observers of observers... Or, in Luhmann's words, “They said ‘God is dead’ – and meant: the last observer cannot be identified” (Luhmann 1996: 210; see also Luhmann 1990: 668-670; Fuchs 2010: 82).

emphasises the necessity to differentiate between terrorism and legitimate resistance of the peaceful people of Azawad.” (Founding Statement, MNA 1.11.2010),

the Malian newspaper *22 Septembre* refers to the same declaration as if it supports the one and only conclusion that a rebellion would be imminent at any moment and that the MNA agenda would be an existential threat to Malian state as such,

“Birth of the MNA in Timbuktu: A new rebellion or sabre rattling? Thanks to the oil in the grand desert of Timbuktu – Goodbye to the unity and indivisibility of the territory near and dear to all Malians.” (Le 22 Septembre/Maliweb 4.11.2010a),

whereas the government, in anticipation of the proximate foundation of the MNA, launches a new multi-billion development programme (“Special Programme for Peace, Security and Development in Northern Mali”),

“Growing insecurity in this zone hinders the effective functioning of the administration, discourages our development partners and their missions and promotes banditry and black markets in all forms. We have to ensure security in this zone in order to foster development.” (GovMali 29.10.2010)

As this short sequence of communication suggests, there are obviously different descriptions, perceptions, and interpretations of the situation (first-order-observations) which, in turn, point to diverging modes of observation at work. Therefore, from a second-order-observation perspective, given the text material, it is crucial to ask empirically inspired questions aiming at identifying generic principles, i.e. distinctions and indications behind the superficial discursive layers, for example:

- What are the implicit/explicit distinctions that underpin particular speech acts?
- What has been said in reference to what could have been said?
- How was the initial information processed and reproduced?
- What are the different meanings attributed to “the people of Azawad” and a “national movement”?
- What about its relation to political commitment and “unity”/“indivisibility”?
- Is there a thematic ordering principle behind the notions “terrorism”, “resistance”, and “banditry”?
- What is declared being a political, legal, or economic problem?
- What is ‘the conflict’ seen through the lenses of the different speakers?

Against the background of this selection of general and case-specific questions⁵⁵, even a cursory attempt to think about answers shows that, for example, the distinctions used to qualify the Malian nation state and, as a consequence thereof, the ideas of what constitutes “the Malian people” are obviously diverging. More precisely, the text passages mark a contradiction between an all-encompassing idea of a “united” and “indivisible” Malian nation and the idea of a separate “people of Azawad” living among other ethnic groups in Mali. Also, as the MNA appears on

⁵⁵ The set of questions used in the case studies is outlined in chapter 4.4 on the work plan.

the political scene, its self-description portrays a new player being intent on peacefully fighting for the Tuareg's interests as an ethnic group; at the same time, this presentation is contradicted inasmuch as its behaviour is characterised as possibly illegitimate separatist activism or as a result of underdevelopment and delinquency. Having said that, thinking of the MNA as an organisation that has a serious and legitimate commitment to advocate for minority rights *within* (and not against) the Malian state seems to be no interpretative option, at least with reference to the above-cited text passages. As these cursory considerations illustrate, analysing communication in a larger discursive context brings contradictions to light. In the course of the next sections, it will become evident how the processing of contradictions embodies the development of a conflict.

A systems theoretical understanding of conflict

As stated earlier in the introduction, conflicts do not speak. In other words, an incompatibility of subject positions, be it in the form of contradicting interests, values or identities, only then becomes meaningful when observed and articulated as such. In this sense, the systems theoretical stance of this study suggests understanding conflict as exclusively produced within and thus by communication.

“We will therefore speak of conflict when a communication is contradicted, or when a contradiction is communicated. A conflict is the operative autonomization of a contradiction through communication. Thus a conflict exists when expectations are communicated and the nonacceptance of the communication is communicated in return.” (Luhmann 1995: 388).

As can be learned from the ‘classics’ in conflict theory – Simmel, Coser, Dahrendorf – that have been taken as a point of departure in chapter 2, conflicts here are not understood as dysfunctional and pathological phenomena. Instead, they are recognised as ubiquitous elements of everyday life and important drivers of social change both on the large and small scale (see Weller 2020a see also chapter 8). Hence, the present study is interested in analysing conflict escalation which means in exploring how some of these contradictions become meaningful conflicts in a broader societal context and even end up in situations of organised collective violence. Here the concept of social systems comes into play: If and only if contradictions give reason to subsequent communication of nonacceptance, a social process begins to stabilise in the form of a ‘structure of negative expectations’. Contradictions are thus understood as mutually refusing offers of attributing meaning which means competing ways of distinguishing and indicating a phenomenon of interest. In Luhmann’s words, “contradictions create moments of ambiguity and indefiniteness” (Luhmann 1995: 360). However, if the articulation of a specific thematic contradiction becomes a rule, or, in other words, a generalised expectation, it can be called a conflict system. As any other social subsystem, conflict systems, too, process the basic distinction between ego and alter; they attribute stable expectations of a ‘no’ to persons (individuals), roles (role models), programmes (interests, strategies), and norms (ideas, values, moral concepts).⁵⁶

⁵⁶ According to Luhmann (1984: 426-436), the basic identities of a social system (ego and alter) can be identified with reference to these four layers (with increasing abstraction): persons, roles, programmes and norms (for further details on the implementation of Luhmann’s concept of identity in this study’s empirical part see section 4.1).

Against this background, conflicts here are conceptualised as social systems in their own right. Conflict systems are characterised by the fact that the communication of contradictions not only implicates an immanent tendency to continuation in order to dissolve the ambiguity of meaning but also a drive to expansion. In this sense, they operate like maelstroms that force their discursive environment to react in one way or another. As they grow and stabilise expectations of mutual nonacceptance and contradiction without any preference as to inducements and topics, Luhmann also uses the metaphor of “parasitical social systems” (Luhmann 1995: 390). To further comprehend their development, the Luhmannian concept of meaning, particularly the idea of meaning dimensions (Luhmann 1995: 74-82), will now be linked to the concept of conflict escalation.

Conflict systems: now in 3D!

According to the basic considerations in systems theory mentioned above, conflict systems develop within other and between social systems.⁵⁷ In doing so, they increasingly claim and re-frame communicative resources and attention of the ‘hosting’ systems for the sake of their self-preservation. This process can be comprehended according to three dimensions of meaning (see Figure “3D-Conflict-Model” below, own graphic according to Luhmann 1984: 112-122). Concerning its *factual dimension*, conflict escalation is characterised by an increasing number of issues and topics that are perceived and referred to as relevant to the conflict or, to put it another way, considered as ‘conflict issues’. To give a brief example from the case study on the Maidan protests in Ukraine (see chapter 5): Initially, the emerging contradiction concentrated on the Ukrainian government’s suspension to sign the Association Agreement with the EU and thus was limited to a specific foreign policy decision; towards the end of the investigation period, it included not only the topic of replacing the actual political leadership but also of calling the whole political elite and the political system as such into question.

In a *temporal dimension*, conflict systems, like any other social system, do not tend to end for no reason but to create new starting-points for connecting communication again and again. In the course of this, the chronological distinction between before and after tends to change. More precisely, the experiencing of the here and now of a conflict gets selectively prolonged into the past and the future which means that communication actualises references, for example specific events or achievements, from the past or an expected future in the present (‘actualisation’). Again looking at the Ukrainian case study, there is a number of statements linking the Maidan protests, both in positive and negative ways, to the Orange Revolution of 2004. In the

⁵⁷ Nota bene: Luhmann refers to three different kinds of systems: interaction systems, organisations, and function systems. Whereas interaction systems consists of communication among persons in presence, organisations as systems are characterised by communication on membership and decision-making. A myriad of interaction systems contribute to the continuation of function systems (e.g. customers paying in shops/economic subsystem, pleadings in court sessions/legal subsystem). Organisations (e.g. women’s rights associations or car companies), use different forms of functional communication (e.g. making decisions to run a political campaign or dismissing employees, i.e. members, due to economic considerations). Function systems, in turn, produce all elements within themselves and comprise many but not necessarily all communication from interaction systems and organisations (see Albert 2019). In principle, conflict systems, too, could be analysed by taking interactions and organisations explicitly into account (see Sienknecht 2018: 77-78). However, in the present study, communication in the realm of function systems has priority. This is because of a twofold decision concerning this study’s direction: First, the major part of the analysed communication comes from contexts of non-presence (except parts of communication referring to the use of violence during phases of conflict escalation). Second, the aspiration of being able to unbiasedly think of evolving conflict identities (resp. parties) should not be analytically confounded by a ‘lens of organisation’.

same way, with reference to the experiences in the Soviet Union, the ongoing dispute about possible future scenarios (new east vs. old west orientation) gets talked up as a danger of Ukraine's breakup.

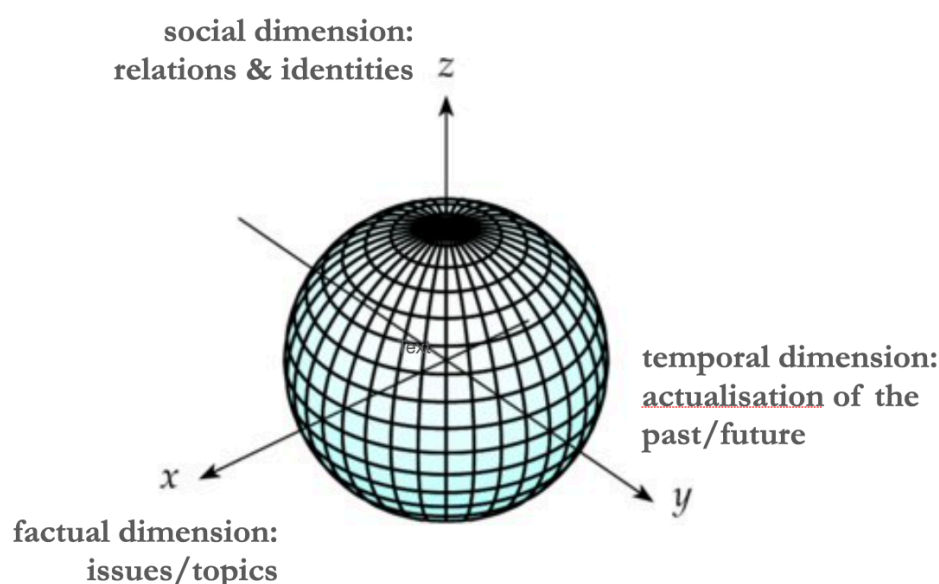


Figure: 3D Conflict Model; own graphic

Finally, in its *social dimension*, conflict escalation represents an evolution that finds its expression in a changing way of marking the difference between ego and alter (see remarks on structures of expectation and identity in previous section). In short, triggered off by an initial contradiction, the relation between self and other(s) is characterised by a mutual attribution of identity features that become increasingly adversarial and antagonistic. In this sense, as the Ukrainian government refused to sign the Association Agreement with the EU, an unprecedented form of civil society engagement assumed shape and increasingly articulated itself, particularly by means of mass demonstrations, as a new political force confronting the government. However, relations between those observing themselves as political players quarrelling for the right way to go changed into a situation in which different sides see themselves as clearly defined parties to a conflict and label one another as “terrorists”, “extremists”, “subversives” and as “autocrats”, “kleptocrats” or “idiots” (see case study chapters 5.5 and 6.5 for a differentiated view on identity layers, i.e. programmes, roles, persons and norms).

Turning to the “3D Conflict Model” above, the variable sphere in the coordinate system represents an idealised depiction of a conflict system. Therefore, in the course of conflict escalation, the sphere is supposed to grow, i.e. to observe its environment (communication from any other social system) as either relevant to the conflict or not and thus to incorporate more and more communication in its factual, temporal or social dimension. In each observation, the attribution of meaning is realised according to these three dimensions (see Luhmann 1995: 86).

To sum up, from the present work's systems theoretical point of view, conflict escalation constitutes a process that has an inherent tendency to absorb more and more communicative resources of the host systems, i.e. a tendency “to bring all action into the context of an opposition within the perspective of an opposition” (Luhmann 1995: 390). Therefore, and this may indeed be the challenging part for some approaches in conflict studies, ‘conflict parties’ and

‘conflict issues’ do not precede a conflict; they do not exist per se. Instead, they are an ‘instant’ product of self-referential and hyper-integrative social systems. In this sense, conflicts have no corresponding reality ‘outside’ the conflict in terms of conditions and causes (see Weller 2005a; Bonacker 2007). Though, that is not to say that research on ‘objective’ factors and ‘causes’ of conflict always would not be analytically interesting and relevant. Of course, as is has been demonstrated in various empirical studies on armed conflict and war, absolute and relative power gains, economic motives, ethnic identities, individual interests etc. can be identified as highly significant features of conflict (see Daase 2003: 176-184). However, these features do not exist as such, they come into being via observation and communication and thus gain their specific meaning in a complex social process (see Weller 2014; 2020a). As could be derived from the systems theoretical understanding of communication introduced earlier, communication in itself has no built-in factual, temporal or social limits. This is all the more relevant when it comes to transcend the rather ‘spatially-bound’ both analytical and everyday understandings of conflict. At this point, the concept of world society literally opens new horizons.

3.2 Opening Horizons: A World Societal Framework

In the last three decades the intersection between IR as a traditional political science sub-discipline and sociology has gained more and more attention.⁵⁸ ‘Sociology of IR’ thus represents a progressive interdisciplinary field of research where both sides are interested in leaving behind disciplinary limitations. On the one hand, IR is in search of an adequate understanding of world politics that takes the ‘socialisation’ of international relations into account. On the other hand, sociology is struggling for concepts and theories that are able to grasp multifaceted debordering processes of still nationally imagined societies (and scientific disciplines) in a globalising world (see Stetter 2013). The meetings points between these approaches seem to be arranged around the topic of understanding order and change at a global scale as a very feature of the world level itself, instead of conceiving world politics from the perspective of the entities, i.e. container-like nation states. Against this background, the claim would be to be able to approach classical issues of IR and (with certain reservations) sociology, for example power structures, cooperation, regional integration, and armed conflict/war as emerging qualities of a global societal context. Indeed, as examples in empirical conflict research show, armed conflict can be analytically captured by including manifold cross-border relations and networks in social, economic and political domains.⁵⁹ It is thus suggested to perceive conflict development, parties and issues as being deeply embedded in a context which is, in principle, actually but at least potentially global. However, the overall empirical picture of armed conflict and war, sophisticatedly represented in large databases (see examples in chapter 2), is still based on a more or less state-centered view of the world and thus does not seem to keep pace with portrayals of a dynamic globalisation.

⁵⁸ For a comprehensive overview on the spectrum of approaches including reflections about opportunities and limits in this field see Albert et al. (2013), Stetter (2013), Albert and Mahlert (2017). See also the *British International Studies Association’s* (BISA) working group “Historical Sociology and International Relations“ and the *German Association of Political Sciences’* (DVPW) working group “Sociology in IR”. And finally, the rapprochement between IR and sociology represents one of the key topics of *International Political Sociology*.

⁵⁹ For exemplarily overviews on this see Chojnacki (2008) and Francis (2009). With regard to the Malian case see e.g. the above-cited Lecocq et al. (2013).

Processes of social change in the course of globalisation are often characterised by an acceleration and intensification of cross-border activities and social relationships that are increasingly independent from the framework of the nation state and thus produce new political, economic and social demarcations perceived as being influential besides states (Held 2010). Especially since the end of the Cold War, based on an understanding of globalisation perceived as such, a number of IR-slogans have been produced that are in the meantime regarded as classic: globalisation comes with “debordering” (Brock and Albert 1995) or “denationalisation” (Zürn 1998) and the “global system” could best be described as a “post-Westphalian” one (Rosenau 1997) or as a “post-national constellation” (Habermas 2004). Recent research (see Holtgreve et al. 2021), in turn, argues to leave behind universalistic and potentially Eurocentric globalisation narratives on the one hand and to go beyond more or less statistically analysing transnational networks and connections with actual or potential global outreach in order to describe globalisation on the other hand. It is thus suggested to focus on how ‘the global’ is constructed and observed within concrete local practices: “[...] processes of globalization materialize in specific local acts, discourses and practices of observation” (Holtgreve et al. 2021: 17).⁶⁰ Since the time of the above-cited prominent IR-slogans, the need to develop concepts and theories beyond ‘methodological nationalism’ and to transcend disciplinary borders remained a recurring theme in IR.⁶¹ Having said that, IR scholars rarely referred to a systems theoretical perspective of world society when thinking about innovative ways of conceptualising violent conflict.⁶² However, it has been discussed since the 1990s, when a reluctant examination of Luhmannian systems theory (of world society) in IR began.⁶³

Returning to system theory’s essentials elaborated above, communication is assumed to be de facto global in its actual and potential scope. Now, if the totality of communications able to reach each other constitutes society, there is no communication and thus no society outside world society (Stichweh 2000).⁶⁴ In his central essay on world society, Luhmann (2005[1975]) clarifies that the nation-state can only be considered congruent with the concept of society for

⁶⁰ As it will be outlined in the following, this is a suggestion that the present study has taken as a guideline on its own terms since its early stages. In this sense, violent conflict represent materialisations (of globalisation processes) in “specific local acts, discourses and practices of observation”.

⁶¹ On the one hand, empirical research often creates the impression that there are robust findings: the absolute number of armed and wars has been decreasing since the 1990s; a large majority of these conflicts are “intrastate” or “domestic” conflicts; these conflicts are, as a rule, persisting longer than interstate conflicts; finally, the majority of these protracted domestic conflicts are found “beyond the OECD-world” (Schlichte 2011). On the other hand, studies on “areas of limited statehood” and “transnational war economies” suggest that the traditional analytical stencils of IR (and PCS) have become less and less suitable to capture the changing picture of armed conflict and war in the world (see Schlichte 2011; Daase 2012).

⁶² See particularly Stetter (2007), Albert (2007; 2008: 69), and Carlsneas et al. (2013).

⁶³ See e.g. Brock & Albert (1995), Jung (1998), Bonacker & Weller (2006), Albert et al. (2010), Buzan & Albert (2010) or Stetter (2013). Exemplarily, see Albert and Stetter (2006: 60) who understand the theory of world society as an “IR-theory in the post-Westphalian era”.

⁶⁴ The systems theoretical understanding presented here is not to be confused with other schools of thought (in sociology and IR) that refer to the concept of world society. Therefore, thinking of world society in terms of a “global community” or an increasing convergence of global norms (see e.g. “Stanford School”; Meyer 2005) is not part of the present systems theoretical perspective. For comprehensive overviews on other approaches to world society see Bonacker and Weller (2006b) or Greve and Heintz (2005).

a certain period in modern history. Accordingly, while insinuating the thesis of globalisation, society has obviously uncoupled from the framework of the nation state:

“Let’s begin with the question whether global interactions have consolidated. As a factual possibility, it is a historically new phenomenon. An Argentinian may marry an Abyssinian, if he loves her. A Dane may take out a loan in New Zealand, if it’s economically advantageous. A Russian may trust in a technical construction that has been tested in Japan. A French author may seek for a homosexual relationship in Egypt. A Berliner may get tanned on the Bahamas, if this conveys a feeling of recreation.” (Luhmann 2005[1975]: 66).

In reference to Luhmann’s second substantial finding, in modernity, world society is in principle characterised by the primacy of functional differentiation, even though other forms of differentiation (segmentation, stratification) can also be found in contemporary world society (Albert 2016: 62-63). Therefore, ‘world economy’, ‘world law’ or ‘world politics’ represent communicative subsystems of world society that operate and reproduce themselves more or less autonomously. For instance, there is a world political system of nation states (segmentary mode) and, at the same time, a developing economic system that observes itself as a globalised world market (functional mode) (see Stichweh 2000: 7-30; Albert 2010: 57).⁶⁵ In other words, as world society dynamically develops, it can be stated that it shows different forms of *internal* differentiation simultaneously. The political subsystem of world society thereby exhibits some particularities, not to say some hybrid features. On the one hand, the contemporary formation of territorially defined nation states represents a form of segmentary differentiation.⁶⁶ On the other hand, in the fairway of globalisation, one can hardly deny that there are more and more forms of power and authority developing beyond (and increasingly independent from) the long-known structures of nation states, as for example the debate on “regionalisation” or “global governance” suggests (see van Langenhove and Scaramagli 2011; Dingwerth and Pattberg 2006).⁶⁷ Yet, as Albert and Mahler (2017) pointed out, the still potent idea of a ‘world of states’ (and international relations among them) rather than being structurally underpinned at all times up to modern times “has its maybe most important manifestation on the level of semantics” (Albert and Mahler 2017: 33; translation R.B.). It can be stated here that there are different modes of differentiation processing at the same time. According to Luhmann (2000: 220-227), this is to be understood as an essential feature of contemporary world society. As, for example, the

⁶⁵ In this context, Waltz’ *Theory of International Politics* (1979) provides some worthwhile counterpoints. Even though IR has rarely referred to the concept of differentiation, it indeed represents a central cornerstone in Waltz’ neorealism. According to Waltz’ conceptualisation of the “anarchical international system”, there is no primacy of functional differentiation on the global level. Rather, the “international system” consists of similar political entities (states as “like-units”) and thus follows the logic of segmentary differentiation. For Waltz, functional differentiation (i.e. the evolution of ‘specialised’ social subsystems like politics, economy or law) plays an important role in domestic affairs but not in international politics. In the latter, the distribution of power (capabilities) conditions whether a state belongs to the centre (‘great powers’) or to the periphery (i.e. less powerful states). Waltz thus describes elements of stratificatory differentiation on the global level.

⁶⁶ The self-observation of the political system as a system of nation states found (and still finds) its pointed expression e.g. in the prominent “doctrine of the three elements”, according to which a state is constituted by the unity of people, territory and authority (i.e. exercise of sovereign power) (see particularly Jellinek 1914: 394-434).

⁶⁷ The insight that ‘the political’ exceeds the institutions of the nation state and its attributed roles (e.g. government, opposition etc.) can not only be found in systems theoretical considerations about world society. For example, within the framework of research on “global governance”, there are comprehensive thoughts on a global civil society and its role in international politics (see e.g. Wapner 2008; Scholte 2016).

volatile attribution of decision-making power to the EU relative to its member states shows, these modes of differentiation can compete with each other and thus be the starting point of contradiction.

World society, as introduced earlier, and other concepts in Luhmannian systems theory are often interpreted as contrary to the mindset of traditional IR, particularly because the role of territoriality and agency is marginalised (see Buzan and Albert 2010: 329). Also, even in sociology, systems theory à la Luhmann is often accused of being anti-empirical and having no suitable concept of actorness (see Vogd 2007). Nevertheless, drawing on Luhmann, the systems theoretical variant of world society theory provides a useful framework to empirically approach conflicts ‘on the ground’. In this sense, differentiation represents one of the key processes that form the general characteristics of a conflict. To restate: In an internally differentiated world society specific subsystems (e.g. politics, economy, law and others) operate autonomously, on the basis of generalised media of communication (e.g. power, money, laws and jurisdiction).⁶⁸ As hinted at earlier, modes of differentiation within or between subsystems can be in a certain competition that gets actualised within communication. Coming from the deductive side of research, settings in which these “fault lines” between differentiation modes (Albert 2010: 57) come into play represent discursive arenas where contradictions are expected to arise.⁶⁹

Evidently, this insight has substantial conflict theoretical repercussions (see e.g. Albert 2008: 63-69) that this study follows up on. Coming from the inductive side of research, in anticipation of the case studies, the context of the Maidan protests (chapter 5) serves as an illustration at this point: an ultimate form of ‘powerful’ political communication, for example the deployment of security forces in order to contain mass demonstrations based on a sovereign state’s monopoly on violence can stand in contrast to legal communication, for example concerning references to the obligations under national and international law relating to the principle of proportionality, freedom of expression as well as other civil and political rights.⁷⁰ Also, considerations within the realm of law, e.g. concerning the protection of natural and cultural environments can be contrary to economic communication that, for example, evaluates the extraction of natural resources according to demand and supply on a global market (see ‘rare

⁶⁸ According to traditional understandings of politics, the political system is commonly attributed an exposed role (relative to other subsystems) since communication is processed by means of power, i.e. the ability to communicate in an eduring and binding manner and with a broad impact on the “big picture” (Albert and Steinmetz 2007: 20-21). Thereby, politics is represented as a *primus inter pares* that has an overall steering function relating to all subsystems. For Luhmann, this kind of thinking is an expression of an “excessive steering mania” while, in fact, self-referential social systems cannot be steered but operate autonomously and can at best be irritated by other systems (see Simsa 2002: 166-168; Albert 2019).

⁶⁹ Against this background, research addressed that what is expected to be an empirical product of fault lines of differentiation in terms of *inclusion and exclusion* (of persons) from different social subsystems. In this context, Sienknecht (2018: 75, 85-93) develops an approach that places “exclusions from central social sectors [...] as conflict causes” centre stage. Even though there are some parallels in approaching conflict as social systems in a systems theoretical way (see Sienknecht 2018: 75-84, Bösch 2014, 2015), the present study attaches great importance to rather strengthen an inductive approach in revealing differentiation processes ‘on the ground’ (without a priori and exclusively stating the ‘exclusion hypothesis’).

⁷⁰ As opposed to this case study example, one can hypothetically imagine an absolute estates-based society, in which all communication is strictly ordered along stratificatory differentiation (see e.g. medieval European societies). Indeed, even in such a society a certain system of law would exist. However, it would not operate as autonomously as e.g. the contemporary global legal system (inter alia expressed by a global human rights regime). Therefore, it would not pose an increased potential for contradictions since it would not offer alternative views competing with power-based communication.

earths' and the Malian conflict; chapter 6). As can be retained from these brief illustrations, world society's subsystems are characterised by a striking incongruence inasmuch as their communicative outreach shows widely different frames of reference. This is where the very basic potential for contradiction and thus for conflict escalation lies.

To further illustrate these general characteristics of a conflict in world society, this section continues by elaborating on a selection of exemplary observations taken from the Malian case study (see chapter 6). At first glance, according to various reports, the 'conflict in Northern Mali' or the 'Malian civil war' has been commonly labelled as an 'intrastate conflict'. In this vein, it was either interpreted as ethnically (black Africans vs. white Tuaregs/Arabs), religiously (liberal Islamic/secular society vs. conservative Muslim orientation), economically (access to/control of natural resources and Sahelian shadow economy in the north) or strategically/politically driven (decades-long struggle for Tuareg self determination vs. survival of the multi-ethnic Malian nation state). However, assessing the Malian situation in 2011/2012 as a looming "domestic" conflict (Cline 2013; Hainzl 2013) would fall short against the background of a myriad of cross-border relations, which evidently played a role as well. Referring to Lecocq et al. (2013: 344-348), a comprehensive conflict analysis that truly takes multiperspectivity into account would also have to consider the transnational dimension, including aspects like:

- the transnational distribution of ethnic communities (such as the Tuareg in Mali, Niger, Algeria, Burkina Faso, Mauretania) maintaining their own ideas of tribal identity, nomadism and nationality;
- the exodus of thousands of Malian origins who left Libya for Mali after the fall of Gaddafi regime in summer 2011;
- the different performances of the northern regions compared to the south concerning the overall development, particularly against the background of an unbalanced/unsuccessful spending of (international) public and private funds;
- transnational economic interests defining 'security' in terms of rising and falling transaction costs for certain scarce commodities (nota bene: French and multinational companies were granted extensive concessions to exploit natural resources in the north, especially uranium and other rare earths);
- the Azawadians' continuous appeals to international law and the international community concerning the right to self-determination as a people;
- transnational terrorist networks trying to extend their sphere of influence in the Sahel (both by promoting an Islamist statebuilding project and by controlling narcotraffic and the 'kidnapping-business' in the Sahel).

Of course, this brief listing does not in itself point to a comprehensive systems theoretical 'explanation' of conflict escalation in the Malian case. Rather, it serves as an exemplification of how competing modes of differentiation in world society can take form and, thereby, provide discursive reservoirs for contradiction and thus conflict communication. However, without claiming to be exhaustive, the above listed considerations and hypotheses are basically deduced from other conflict analytical work. To adopt a more comprehensive perspective on conflict (escalation), it is hence indispensable to find out what shows up as being relevant in the eyes of involved observers and thus to pursue an inductive approach. As Chapter 4 expounds in detail, this study provides an approach to view conflicts in a different light. By tapping documented

communication as empirical sources, it elaborates a way to comprehend conflicts as discursive arenas in world society.⁷¹

3.3 A Systems Theoretical World Society Perspective: What's in it for Conflict Studies?

As notified earlier, the present study is dedicated to developing an approach to the analysis of conflict escalation that enables researchers to consider, in principle, a conflict's overall discursive performance. For this purpose, it argues in favour of a decidedly inductive approach that is based on the systematic analysis of conflict communication on the basis of 'documents' (for methodical details see chapter 4). Having said this in advance, such an empirically oriented approach can certainly not be devised and implemented out of a theoretical vacuum. As far as the present work is concerned, it is embedded in a very elementary systems theoretical worldview that undergrids its proceeding.

According to the key systems theoretical concepts (observation, communication, social system) elaborated above and bearing the ontological and epistemological considerations related to the linguistic/communicative turn in mind, conflicts here are conceptualised as social systems in their own right:

“Conflict systems are thus understood as ‘capturing’ social systems, i.e. evolving discursive spaces where contradiction from different social subsystems gets structurally interlinked and stabilised over time.” (Bösch 2017)

Taking the systems theoretical world society perspective into consideration, the present study basically rests upon two assumptions: Firstly, it is argued that communication constitutes the basic unit of all social structures, including conflicts. Secondly, conflicts are understood as being closely linked to the overall process of differentiation in world society: conflicts with a high potential of escalation particularly occur when varying patterns of differentiation accumulate.

Against this background, this study's idea of analysing conflict escalation represents an impartial and far-reaching approach that concretely opens up the empirical horizon of conflict studies. Instead of including and assessing conflict related phenomena exclusively based on alleged 'actorness' behind, this approach focuses on a conflict's discursive 'making-of' within linguistic communication which permits to draw on all kinds of (text) sources. Therefore, it enables its users to reconstruct the very process of a conflict's intensification which is often put aside as a 'black box' and thus represents a latent desideratum in conflict studies so far (see chapter 2.4). In this context, within the framework of this approach, tracing the process of emerging and increasingly opposing conflict identities plays a crucial role. As it will be demonstrated by the help of the case studies in this contribution, processes of differentiation (as a key feature of a dynamic evolution of world society) are constructed via and can be observed in conflict practices. Freely adapted from Holtgreve et al. (2021; see above), one might also say that competing modes of differentiation materialise in “specific local acts, discourses and practices of observation” that altogether form a conflict system. Now, chapter 4 turns to the question of

⁷¹ As it will be explicated in chapter 4, a 'document' is broadly understood as any form of 'recorded' (linguistic, symbolic) communication (e.g. texts, pictures, art works, songs etc.). In a narrower sense, the term will be used for written texts, i.e. fixed linguistic communication.

how this systems theoretical and world societal perspective can be 'translated' into a concrete empirical research programme.

CHAPTER 4. Conflict Escalation: Of Methods and Methodologies

“Methods can enable scientific research to surprise itself. This requires interruption of the direct continuum of reality and knowledge initially assumed by society.”
(Luhmann 2012[1997]: 37)

As the preceding chapters propounded, the meta-plot of this research project is to contribute to closing the gap between the complex assumptions of Luhmannian systems theory in its world societal variant and empirical conflict research in IR/PCS. This undertaking is aimed at gaining new analytical insights into the process of conflict escalation that may help to develop innovative practical approaches in dealing with (violent) conflict.

Conflict and peace are essential paradigms (i.e. reference frames) in IR and, of course, in PCS. In contrast, empirically dealing with forms of armed conflict and war or, more general, with organised collective violence is not a genuine field of activity for sociological systems theory (see Schlichte 2007; Stetter et al. 2012). However, as portrayed in chapter 2, sociology has brought forth seminal works in conflict theory that sustainably echoed way beyond its disciplinary borders in the broader field of social sciences. Since PCS represents an interdisciplinary field of research by birth, here it is argued that, in the wake of the recent rapprochement between systems theory and IR (see chapter 3), PCS offers an adequate baseline to develop a systems theoretical approach to conflict escalation.⁷²

As discussed earlier, conflicts do not obviously speak for themselves but are given various attributes by most diverse observers, such as journalists, policy-makers, activists or analysts. Upon this, conflicts earn specific labels and get qualified as, for example, political, economic, ethnic or religious; also, they are characterised as being conflicts over power, natural resources, norms, or identity; even more abstract, conflicts are commonly delineated as contrastive pairs: symmetric/asymmetric, antagonistic/non-antagonistic, legitimate/illegitimate, informal/institutionalized, consensual/dissensual, constructive/destructive, divisible/indivisible... Indeed, scientific communication about conflict, be it within the context of PCS or beyond, draws on an elaborated vocabulary to deferentiate and categorise social conflicts. Though, as much-cited and prominent works in the field reveal (see e.g. Crocker et al. 2015), although researchers have developed sophisticated concepts dealing with conflict, there seems to be no root concept in sight that convincingly gathers (violent) conflict as a central and, at the same time, everyday aspect of social life in a globalising world.⁷³

⁷² As the German Foundation for Peace Research (DSF) puts it, PCS “shall generate research-based knowledge about the conditions contributing to the escalation of social conflicts into violence and about the possibilities and means to prevent such dynamics with peaceful measures” (DSF 2013). In this context, PCS has always been an interdisciplinary field of research characterised by the participation of two or more distinct academic fields using a more or less common language to describe common problems (see Bonacker 2011: 65-67; Zick 2012).

⁷³ Exemplarily, the state-of-the-art publication of the United States Institute of Peace (USIP), *Managing Conflict in a World Adrift*, indeed provides a “sobering panorama of contemporary conflict” around the world, ranging from global power shifts to climate change to demographic structures (Crocker et al. 2015). However, efforts to identify common features out of the empirical diversity of conflicts and thus to bring together diverse empirical conflict research with a view to broader theoretical considerations, e.g. regarding a conflict theory of world society, remain

Given these shortcomings at the intersection of theoretical and empirical conflict research, chapter 4 offers an option to bridge the gap between the systems theoretical world society perspective outlined above and empirical conflict research by translating the abstract theoretical framework into an empirical research programme. To this end, it goes beyond the idea of scientific *methods* understood as more or less neutral and technical tools of the trade that can be used to select and analyse empirical data in most diverse research processes (Risse 2003: 103-104). Rather, it frames a *methodology* that specifies the relation between this study's epistemological interest and the practical approach to empirical phenomena and data in the research process.⁷⁴ As this chapter shows in detail, the present research project's methodology is based on a logic of reconstruction that focuses on documenting the making-of and change of intersubjectively shared meanings in (linguistic) communication (see also Franke and Roos 2013: 11-23; Cienki and Yanow 2013).

Chapter 4's first section ("The Point of Departure: Constructivist Conflict Research") outlines the epistemological basics of constructivist empirical research, particularly concerning interpretative and reflexive approaches. Based on that, the second section ("Doing Case Studies within a Systems Theoretical Framework") presents the idea of case study that underlies this contribution. In this context, selecting and approaching cases does not follow a strict methodical framework by using procedures of systematic comparison. Rather, section two unfolds this study's dealing with specific cases not in terms of predetermined procedural requirements but as the result of this researcher's individual approach. The third section ("A Reconstructive Approach: Putting the Cart before the Horse") expounds the concept of reconstruction, which can be located in the larger context of constructivist methodologies. Finally, chapter 4's last section details the work plan of this study. Therefore, it explains how empirical material was treated in those stages of research that preceded the present contribution, particularly concerning the genesis of the analytical narratives presented in the case study chapters 5 and 6 (for the concept of 'analytical narrative' see particularly chapter 4.3).

4.1 The Point of Departure: Constructivist Empirical Conflict Research

"We must be careful not to confound
map with territory." (Luhmann
2013[1997]: 178)

Rationalist approaches to conflict research in IR and PCS are generally characterised by conceptualising conflict as a 'completed' result of latent social structures that existed before. These structures, in turn, go back to given actors that interact according to cost-benefit analyses. Based

limited. Nevertheless, in contrast, Webel and Galtung (2007) or Bonacker and Weller (2006) provide inspiring work concerning the development of an integrative theoretical perspective vis-à-vis the rich empirical picture of conflicts.

⁷⁴ These remarks on the concepts of method and methodology refer to an ongoing debate in the theory of science: Broadly speaking, one position holds that methods of research can be seen as completely independent from research topics, whereas the opposite position points out that methods are not neutral control devices for research processes but variable and unavoidably subjective ways of approaching the phenomena in question (see particularly Herborth 2011: 137-145; Przyborski and Wohlrab-Sahr 2008: 15-24; Mayer 2003: 47-51). As chapter 4 shows, this project's approach to empirical data adheres to the second position.

on this kind of consequentialist thinking, a bulk of empirical research seeks for ‘causes’ and ‘conditions’ that are, in a strict sense, seen as being external to the phenomenon of conflict itself. Thus, conflicts are understood as ‘products’ of specific sets of factors that can be analysed. Empirical conflict research, in this rather mechanical view, is concentrated on collecting, scaling and correlating specific indicators and data that are believed to mirror an objectively existing social structure within which already existing actors act according to their obvious interests. Therefore, conflicts are considered as objectifiable and virtually clinical topics of research; they can be fully captured by systematic methods; they consist of more or less self-evident components (issues, parties, environment); and, based on robust data, they can be classified, for example as *ethnic* conflicts or conflicts *over resources*.⁷⁵

In contrast, having regard to constructivist research, conflicts are understood as phenomena that are deeply embedded in the social world and thus come up within the framework of discursive constructions of reality. With this, constructivist approaches point out that any observation is performed on the basis of different understandings of the social world. In other words,

“Constructivism is the view that the manner in which the material world shapes and is shaped by human action and interaction depends on dynamic normative and epistemic interpretations of the material world. [...] Identities, interests and behavior are constructed by collective meanings, interpretations and assumptions about the world.” (Adler 1997: 322, 324)

Going beyond this rather general constructivist position, the present study refers to the perspective of *reflexive* constructivism. In this context, as Weller (2005a: 97-100) puts it, perceptions of ‘reality’ do indeed depend on *how* the world is observed *by whom*. Modes of observation are thus understood as constitutive parts of any analysis of social phenomena. In this sense, scientific ways of observing the world are no exception (see e.g. Renn 2012: 19-21). They represent just one way of observation amongst others. In short, different modes of observation give rise to different constructions of reality. Based on that, reflexive constructivism asks for why observations, and thus constructions of reality, turned out in a certain way and not differently.

With reference to the empirical study of social conflicts, taking up a reflexive constructivist’s perspective means accepting that each communication referring to the context of conflict (from single statements to reports to larger narratives) represents an expression of a certain worldview. The present study’s ‘objects of investigation’ are thus constructions of conflict. Their examination is based on the following guiding question: *How* do participants observe *their* world of conflict? Or, more general, how does it happen that social groups perceive their interaction as a conflict? How do patterns of observation look like referring to perpetrators or victims of violence? How do third parties, e.g. bystanders, negotiators, mediators or reporters come to the conclusion that they (have to) observe a ‘conflict’? Even though all these constructions of conflict maybe articulated as stand-alone facts or, to refer to the introductory quote, as different ‘maps of conflict’, they are not independent from each other but interconnected in a common

⁷⁵ Against the background of this rationalist understanding of conflict see examples from quantitative empirical research on conflict, e.g. Collier et al. (2005), Wallensteen (2007), Vasquez (2012) or Schneider (2015). This paragraph pointedly depicted the features of a rationalist approach to conflict studies. For a rather prosaic comparison of rationalist and constructivist essentials see Fearon and Wendt (2002) or Adler (2013).

“field of relational references” (Nonhoff 2011: 101; own translation). In this sense, for example, voices from the rapidly mobilising civil society opposition in Kyiv (from October/November 2013 on) observed ‘the conflict’ as being about Ukraine’s orientation (west vs. east) and about the right to freedom of expression whereas the government observed ‘the conflict’ as being about seizing power and implementing regime change.⁷⁶ On that note, different constructions of conflict develop with reference (or in distinction) to one another and, at the same time, constitute (and are constituted by) a common reference frame within a discursive field or, according to this contribution’s theoretical background, within a *social system*.

Hence, constructions of conflict necessarily involve (or consist in) processes of socialisation and identity formation. As mentioned above in Chapter 2, this crucial insight already played an important role in the earlier stages of conflict theoretical thought.⁷⁷ Likewise, as it has been elaborated in Chapter 3, a systems theory understanding of conflict essentially relies on the process of identity formation: In their social dimension, conflict systems provide meaning by processing the central differentiation of identity, i.e. the one between alter and ego. According to Luhmann (1984: 426-436), identities in social systems can be regarded as “stable structures of expectation”. Following this, conflict systems represent structures of negative reciprocal expectations, or, to put it bluntly, “systems of mutually repeated noes”. During the evolution of a conflict system, expectations towards alter and ego increasingly stabilise by getting attributed to different “identity layers”, such as persons (i.e. individuals), their roles (e.g. as societal groups), programmes (e.g. interests, strategies), and norms (i.e. ideas, values, moral concepts).⁷⁸ Again coming back to the Maidan protests, under the header of “government”, the case study reveals an emerging conflict identity. As an increasingly stable structure of expectation, “government” thus not only served as a reference for those formally belonging to the state but also for social groups attributing themselves (or getting attributed) to the authorities’ side, supporting certain interests and strategies (esp. maintenance of power for the ruling elite, orientation to the east), and sharing a certain set of norms behind (esp. strong political leadership, nationalism, economic protectionism).

As both case studies show (Chapter 5/6), this study’s way of conducting constructivist empirical conflict research attaches major attention to the social dimension of conflict development and thus to the process of identity formation (see Jackson 2009: 176-182). Following the guidelines of operative constructivism, i.e. asking for how observed observers observe (Luhmann 2002: 140), does not only bring forward findings about certain modes of distinguishing/designating social phenomena but also includes a lot about the dynamic of emerging identities. Often, conflicts are understood as pathological deformations of social relationships or even as complete breakdowns of communication between actors (see Albert et al. 2008: 49). Yet, recalling the systems theoretical impulse of this work, phenomena in the social world do not consist in actions or actors in the first place but in communication. Based on that, Chapter 3

⁷⁶ See MMIC (2.12.2013a) and GovUkr (4.12.2013a). For the detailed presentation of the text data corpus and its sources see chapter 5 and Appendix A.1.1.

⁷⁷ See e.g. Simmel (1992[1923]), Coser (1956), Tajfel and Turner (1979), or Cook-Huffman (2009).

⁷⁸ In a more conventional constructivist perspective, these four layers from Luhmann’s definition of identity could be subsumed under the header of subject positions (e.g. Diez et al. 2006: 565). In this view, a conflict consists of an incompatibility of subject positions that is observed and articulated.

conceptualises conflicts as self-referential social systems having an inherent tendency to claim more and more communicative resources from their environment. To trace this dynamic, constructivist conflict research, as presented here, draws on empirical material that mirrors the collective construction of a conflict over time. Accordingly, within the framework of the case studies below, a range of documented observations (mainly in the form of accessible text data) have been selected in order to systematically track the interplay between different discursive constructions of conflict.

4.2 Doing Case Studies within a Systems Theoretical Framework

“The case-oriented approach places cases, not variables, center stage. But what is a case? Comparative social science has a ready-made conventionalized answer to this question: Boundaries around places and time periods define cases.”
(Ragin 1992: 5)

What is a case?

According to George and Bennett (2005: 17), in the context of case study research in social sciences, a case represents “an instance of a class of events”. Referring to this definition, Rohlfing (2012: 24) similarly conceptualises a case as “a bounded empirical phenomenon that is an instance of a population of similar empirical phenomena”. Following this, a case is characterised by two bounds: a “substantive” bound, i.e. a theoretical or analytical perspective that defines the class the observed instance is attributed to; and a “temporal” bound, i.e. the observation of a case as a set of historical (temporal, geographical) issues that jointly represent an instance. These definitions are part of a rather rationalist approach to empirical research that essentially concentrates on testing or developing theories, which are understood as “general statements that describe and explain the causes and effects of classes of phenomena. [Theories] are composed of causal laws, hypotheses and explanations” (van Evera 1997: 8; see also George and Bennett 2005: 19-22; Thomas 2011: 512-513). Notwithstanding its constructivist and systems theoretical orientation elaborated earlier, this contribution’s understanding of case study research on conflict partly makes recourse to similar criteria (as to “substantive” and “temporal bounds” mentioned above), albeit from a more fundamental perspective.

As introduced in Chapter 3, here, conflicts are understood as social systems that increasingly claim attention and thus communicative resources from their environment. Besides journalists, policy-makers, activists and others, this process, sooner or later, may drag in scientific communication (i.e. attention of research) as well. Indeed, as the many databases, concepts and theories suggest, works in different disciplines address the phenomenon of conflict extensively. The bulk of these works deal with conflicts *ex post*, i.e. in the aftermath of a cluster of social phenomena that are observed as a ‘completed’ entity or as a conflict that is ‘over’. In this sense, even before the research project behind the present contribution started, the armed conflict in Mali (2011/2011) or the Maidan protests in Kiev/Ukraine (2013/2014), were already observed as ‘instances of a class of events’, or, in other words, as cases of escalation to organised collective

violence. To put it in even more systems theoretical terms: Obviously, there are many conflict systems that succeed in irritating the environment and thus in expanding (see 3D conflict model in section 3.1). More precisely, they are able to attract attention (i.e. communicative resources) not only, for example, from the media or politics but also from sciences. In this context, Mali and Ukraine have frequently been observed as ‘cases’ in IR and PCS research, though against different theoretical backgrounds.⁷⁹

Indeed, regarding that what is referred to as escalation to organised collective violence, there is a huge “population of similar social phenomena” (Rohlfing 2012: 24). Thus, at this point, an explanation of this study’s case selection or sampling, i.e. the decision to observe a certain cluster of social phenomena and none other, is needed.⁸⁰ Simply put, the case studies here have the function of empirically illustrating the appropriateness of the theoretical framework outlined above for test purposes, or, in Eckstein’s (1975) words, as “plausibility probes”.⁸¹ In this sense, they are intended to demonstrate that systems theoretical eyeglasses are particularly useful to look at the complex world of conflict. More precisely, the case studies are supposed to settle the theoretical claim that the proposed way of conflict research enables to discern *more* of a conflict’s development. However, this does not explain why Mali and Ukraine were chosen as case studies. To answer this question, the next section goes back to the early phases of the research project: Based on its systems theoretical impetus, it started with an effort to structure the empirical field of conflict. For this purpose, Messmer’s (2003; 2008) conceptional work on conflict was used as a heuristic tool of exploration.

Messmer’s conflict model

Based on Luhmann’s concept of meaning dimensions (see chapter 3.1), Messmer (2003) offers a substantiation of a systems theoretical understanding of conflict. More precisely, he developed a model of conflict stages by means of empirical case studies.⁸² Each stage thus represents an ideal type of conflict that is characterised by one dimension of communication being at the forefront (i.e. either factual, temporal or social/relational). In detail, Messmer’s model proposes four stages of conflict (see Messmer 2003: 91-95, 275-315): The first stage is defined as an

⁷⁹ As indicated earlier, for synoptic views (including different theoretical approaches) on existing case study literature see Lecocq et al. (2013) on Mali and Onuch (2015) on Ukraine.

⁸⁰ Nota bene: Even though there are some similarities (see engagement with the practical aspects of grounded theory below), case selection in this study is not to be confused with a common understanding of “theoretical sampling” in terms of approaching an empirical field within a process of iteratively gathering data and refining theories on a rotating basis (see Przyborski and Wohlrab-Sahr 2008: 173-182). In fact, the present research project started by assuming a systems theoretical worldview as its basic theoretical orientation. Within this framework, this study indeed refined its hypotheses on escalation by gradually exploring empirical material (and thus proceeded similar to grounded theory).

⁸¹ According to Eckstein (1975: 110), case studies conducted as plausibility probes play a crucial role in hypothesis-testing or theory-developing contributions, since they are seen as a kind of “pilot study” in order to refine the theoretical and methodical apparatus even before the proper research study is carried out. In contrast, this study adopts a rather pragmatic understanding. Here, the case studies are regarded as studies of applicability to probe the plausibility of a methodological approach in concrete empirical research settings (see also Roos 2010: 88-90; Bergmann and Niemann 2013).

⁸² In one of the central case studies, Messmer analyses “communicative events” prior to World War I. Methodically, his model is based on conversation analysis/ethnomethodological analysis of radio and TV interviews, publicly accessible communication from legal and political domains as well as private correspondence (see Messmer 2003: 252-266).

isolated and reciprocal articulation of a contradiction, i.e. “a no” that corresponds to a rejected offer of meaning. According to the model, this kind of factually and temporally “limited” contradiction is considered as a simple everyday bagatelle or as a *conflict episode*.

The second stage of conflict is characterised by a specific topic or issue that shows high connectivity, which means, in this case, that factual communication easily links up and perpetuates. In suchlike *issue conflicts*, participants repeatedly articulate contradicting offers of meaning and therefore, without feeling personally affected, experience the conflict as an exchange of valid arguments and as a matter of mutual competitive persuasion.

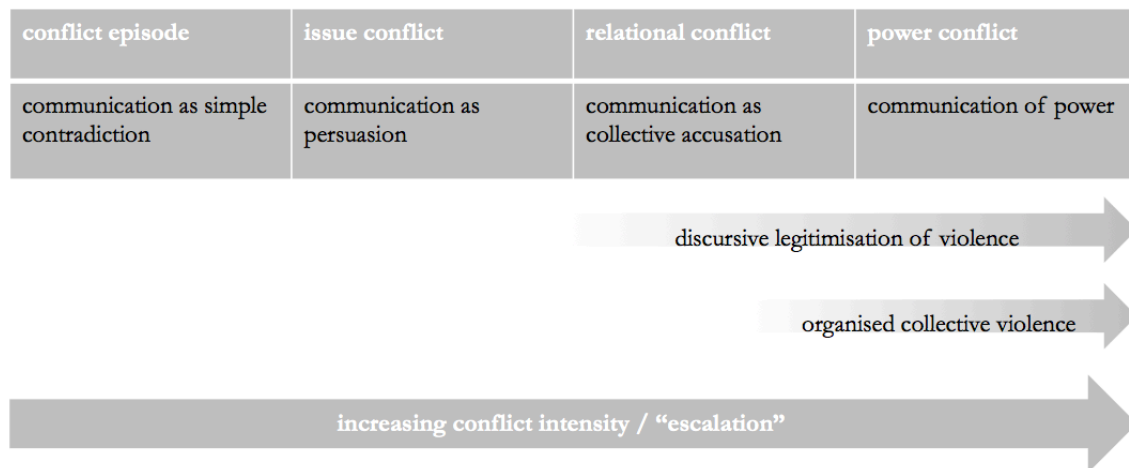


Figure: Messmer’s Stages of Conflict; own graph

Messmer’s third stage of conflict features the superposition of the (initial) factual matter by other topics. In this context, the conflict is no longer seen as an “issue conflict” but rather as a conflict diffused into other communicative spheres and thus being a substantial part of social relationships. In a *relational conflict*, contradictions that used to be observed as issue-related are projected on the relational level of alter vs. ego. In other words, the totality of communication gets attributed according to an either-or-principle: Either a respective communication is perceived as strengthening the collective identity, or it is seen as compromising or contradicting the same. Hence, at this stage, the responsibility for the conflict (and the social situation as whole) is completely attributed to the respective counterpart, which ultimately culminates in collective accusations. In this vein, the reciprocal demarcation gets consolidated and the self is increasingly observed as threatened by the other. Conflict identities are thus clearly apostrophised as antagonistic conflict parties.

Finally, according to Messmer, at the stage of *power conflict*, communication of power dominates all domains of social relations, which means that the potential and actual use of physical violence has become the favoured strategy of asserting (collective) positions.⁸³ Issue-related dissent then has completely made way to perceiving the counterpart as an opponent or even

⁸³ In Messmer’s rather narrow understanding, escalation refers to the transition from stage 3 to 4, i.e. from a conflict stage that is characterised by a non-violent dispute to a conflict marked by physical violence (Messmer 2003: 249-250). In contrast, this study, as introduced in chapter 2, operates with a broader concept of escalation that covers the whole process of conflict development from its beginning. In this sense, each step of conflict intensification can be regarded as a part of the overall escalation process (see Pruitt and Rubin 2003[1986]; see also ‘key points’ in chapter 2.4). As clarified below, Messmer’s elaborated model does not address these processual issues in detail.

life-threatening enemy who has to be encountered with force, coercion, repression and threats. To render any perceived potential of resistance harmless and to break the alleged will of the opposing side, the option of collective violence not only comes into the conflict parties' horizon of acting but also gets normalised.

At first glance, Messmer's types of conflict seem to be designed as clear-cut analytical units. However, the four stages neither follow a strict linear logic nor a chronological one; they are conceptualised as ideal types.⁸⁴ In other words, the model represents an

“effort to reduce the phenomenological diversity of conflict dynamics in the course of differentiating social conflict to its elementary forms.” (Messmer 2003: 92; translation R.B.)

Even though presented as a “process model” dealing with a conflict's communicative differentiation, it does not explicitly elaborate on how the “evolution” of conflict proceeds in detail. Indeed, Messmer's model describes structures of expectation in conflict (represented in communication) that create a kind of stable social order. However, it does not explain how these structures and orders change: Sequential processes of conflict intensification within and between each stage largely remain black boxes since, for example, the relation between phases of identity formation, the legitimisation of violence and the execution of violent strategies is not particularly addressed.

Nonetheless, Messmer's model enables a distinct mode of observing the empirical landscape of conflict in world society or, to put in more traditional IR/PCS terms, of armed conflict and war. In view of all the representations of conflict in scientific, medial or political communication, it serves as a conceptual heuristic that allows differentiating communication according to the kind of social order it (re-) produces. With this in mind, based on respective data and studies, it can be stated that scientific communication about Mali in 2010 shows much evidence indicating an issue conflict (about political representation in society as a whole), whereas in the beginning of 2012, based on different kinds of sources, the situation in Mali could be described as a power conflict. The same applies to the situation in Ukraine in summer 2013 and in spring 2014 respectively (see case study chapters 5/6 for details). To sum up: Although Messmer offers a beneficial model of conflict types based on systems theoretical considerations, it remains incomplete since it does not spell out its built-in potential to provide a strategy of empirically “tracking” communication, for example, in between the above-mentioned points in time concerning Mali and Ukraine. This represents a principal desideratum that brought the present study to the scene.

Researchers select cases – or do cases select researchers?

⁸⁴ For an empirical “application” of Messmer's four-stage-model see e.g. Diez et al. (2008): The authors utilise the model as an analytical substructure in order to do research on the process of European integration and its transformative influence on (different types of) conflicts in EU's neighbourhood.

„The primary criterion for case selection should be relevance to the research objective.” (George and Bennett 2005: 83)

Indeed, long before the first thoughts about this study were conceived, Mali and Ukraine have been observed as relevant cases in the context of a broad range of concerns and questions in IR/PCS research. So, how can the selection of these two cases among a myriad of other potential cases be explained?

The question of how researchers get to ‘their’ research topics and/or case studies can certainly not be answered in a brief and concluding way. Notwithstanding major efforts to make selection transparent and intersubjectively verifiable (e.g. Bennett and Elman 2008; Rohlfing 2012), ultimately, in each selection, there will always be a moment of contingency (see basic considerations on observation and communication in chapter 3.1). Against this background, the present study holds that selection is not only about researchers more or less deliberately and systematically choosing cases. The other way round, it is also about cases catching attention and thus ‘picking’ researchers. To put it in a systems theoretical wording: Obviously, conflict systems, from time to time, succeed in including researchers (as a further group of conflict observers) into the system’s communication. In the following, this issue will be clarified by reference to three interrelated factors that informed this project’s case selection: (1) cycles of research, (2) the pragmatic factor, and (3) the individual moment.

(1) “Whatever we know about society, or indeed about the world in which we live, we know through the mass media.” (Luhmann 1996: 9) Indeed, research has particularly considered the question of whether mass media influences the agenda of foreign policies or world politics in general.⁸⁵ In this regard, reciprocal relations between the media, public opinion and politics have been analysed in detail (see e.g. Weller 2002; 2004). For example, research on the “CNN-effect” has illustrated that decisions concerning military intervention are intimately linked to media coverage on “humanitarian crises” (see notably Robinson 2002; see also Weller and Bösch 2015: 7-9). With regards to sciences, it can be stated that researchers, too, are affected by changing cycles of medial attention for certain events, especially concerning armed conflicts and wars.⁸⁶ Obviously, this kind of ‘CNN-effect in sciences’ cannot be discussed in detail here. However, against this background, case selection within the present study can be viewed in a different light.

⁸⁵ According to systems theory, there is a permanent structural coupling between the systems of mass media and politics. To be able to observe and address an audience, political communication refers to public opinion, which is produced in mass media. In turn, mass media observe the political system as a renewable source of information (see Fuhse 2003: 136). In a narrower sense, within the framework of the present study’s case studies, mass media refer to those locally based mass media whose publications were selected for the text corpus. In a broader sense, of course, mass media point to “[...] all those institutions of society which make use of copying technologies to disseminate communication.” (Luhmann 1996: 10)

⁸⁶ However, having knowledge of changing cycles of medial attention may also lead to an “inverted CNN-effect”, i.e. the idea of reducing the imbalance of medial attention by dealing with those conflicts which are not that much recognised in the media (see references to “forgotten conflicts” in IR/PCS; e.g. “356 Days – Forgotten Conflicts”, a project of CONIAS Risk Intelligence, <http://www.vergessene-konflikte.de>). Also, as Beck and Werron (2013) show, it is the deliberate and increasing use of force in violent conflicts that is often meant to ensure the attention of international observers in the first place.

In 2012, when the project behind this study was in the very early stages of its development, the armed conflict in Mali broke out (see brief summary in chapter 1/Introduction). Since the representation of the Malian conflict in the (world) media and its reception in world politics began to increase, attention in sciences, particularly in IR and PCS, joined this trend sooner or later.⁸⁷ Towards the end of 2013, this research project reached a point where a definite determination regarding the case studies had to be done in order to get the empirical analysis started in the next step. Besides the ongoing conflict in Mali, at that time, the protests on Maidan Square in Kiev began (in October/November 2013). Therefore, given the theoretical purpose of this study on the one hand (understanding conflict escalation) and given the landmark of the project at the time on the other hand, the Maidan protests represented a welcome opportunity to deal with a very special and exceptionally convenient case of a conflict system, or, in other words, a spacially and temporally condensed microcosm of conflict development. This leads over to a pragmatic factor, which plays a role in procedures of case selection more or less explicitly.

(2) As presented earlier in chapter 3.1, from a systems theoretical understanding, communication of meaning can be defined as the processing of selection and, hence, as the unity of three selections: information, utterance and understanding (Luhmann 1995: 140, 147). Against the background of this broad definition, empirically, communication represents way more than linguistic communication, which is based on intersubjectively shared characters, rules and meanings of languages. Thus, a full capturing of communication would have to take other symbolic and non-verbal communication into account, such as music, visual arts and, ultimately, forms of “body language” (for a comprehensive review on this see Müller 2014).

Evidently, it is beyond the scope of this (and probably any) study to cover the totality of communication referring to conflict in a certain reference frame. Therefore, the case study design here represents a kind of approximation procedure, which is concentrated on a single layer of communication: text-based linguistic communication.⁸⁸ In this context, it was a pragmatic decision to concentrate on documented text-based communication since this kind of discursive representation of conflict was relatively easy to cover in terms of searching for and accessing sources. In the case of the Maidan protests, catching this author’s attention was facilitated by the fact that communication referring to the conflict was not only available in Ukrainian or Russian but also in English. In other words, the attribution of communication simultaneously ensued in three languages and thus enabled the inclusion of anglophone ‘international’ observers.⁸⁹ Likewise, in the case of Mali, French functioned as the conflict system’s

⁸⁷ Although there was no systematic analysis of publications in IR/ PCS within the framework of this study, random tests on the basis of journal archives confirm the assumed trend. See e.g. *Security and Peace’s* special issue on Mali (Brzoska et al. 2014) that was prepared in early 2013. See also increasing references to Mali in 2012/2013 in various journals (e.g. *International Journal*, *Security Dialogue*, *Cooperation and Conflict*, *Journal of Peace Research*; cf. Sage Journals).

⁸⁸ Against the background of a potentially endless field of discursive representations of ‘the conflict’, this case study design could, in principle, be extended to even more text data or to other layers of communication beyond text-based linguistic analysis, such as visual and tonal language in arts or music. For an account on routines and practices in news and documentary photography in conflict contexts see for example Koltermann (2017).

⁸⁹ Even though Ukrainian and Russian are the official languages in Ukraine, official government documents as well as documents issued by the political opposition, civil society movements or major journals were published in English (at least during the investigation period). In other words, the conflict discourse simultaneously operated in Ukrainian, Russian and English. Therefore, the analytical procedure was neither dependent on any previous

uncontested lingua franca – a language that made it possible to include the author of the present study as a further observer.⁹⁰ The pragmatic factor – i.e., here, the tendency to rather turn to those cases whose empirical representations are more approachable and accessible – is certainly linked to the last point, the individual moment of case selection.

(3) In (social) sciences, a good argument can be made that decisions made during research processes, e.g. on designs, methods, case studies etc., are not only influenced by intentional and rational considerations. They are also due to a more or less explicit scientific socialisation that speaks from theoretical beliefs and empirical experiences of a researcher. In fact, contrary to the rather positivist view that a researcher's individual experience represents a potential source of biases that has to be equilibrated methodically, it is argued that all kinds of prior knowledge should be handled openly and can be seen as an important source of inspiration or even as a necessary condition “to be able to decode the meaning of recorded traces of social actions” (Roos 2010: 85; own translation; see also Herborth 2011).

In addition to that, at least within the context of the present work, biographical incidences do indeed give a hint why key research choices were made just so and not differently: in secondary school, one of this researcher's main subjects was the French language; moreover, the author of this work not only spent an academic year in Paris but also, during the studies (in Political Science/IR), worked as an intern with an international civil society organisation in francophone Mali for several months.⁹¹ Finally, this author was part of a research project dealing with regional integration and conflict management in West Africa, whereby the Malian development played a crucial role as a case study.⁹² It can hardly be denied that these circumstances justify a certain individual moment of case selection. Similarly, in the first phase of this author's studies, due to the Orange Revolution in 2004⁹³, Ukraine became an important focus of Peace

translation work nor put at risk of translation biases on the part of this researcher. In total, the analysed corpus of texts involves 575 documents (for a detailed overview of all documents and sources see chapter 5.1 and Appendix A.1.1).

⁹⁰ In Mali, there are 13 indigenous languages having the status of ‘national languages’, including e.g. Bambara, Dogon, and Moorish. Half of these languages are not only spoken in Mali but also in a number of neighbouring countries in West Africa. However, since Mali's independence in 1960, when the language of the former colonial power was determined as the only official one, French has increasingly become the language that enables (linguistic) connectivity in the multilingual and multi-ethnic Malian context (see Konaté et al. 2014; see also Appendix A.3.2 for a map of ethnic groups in Mali). In the Malian case study, the analysed corpus of texts involves 689 documents (for a detailed overview of all documents and sources see chapter 6.1. and Appendix A.1.2)

⁹¹ At the time of the internship with the Friedrich Ebert Foundation (FES) in Bamako, Mali was regularly cited, both by local and international observers, as an outstanding example of a peacefully developing democracy in West Africa. Although there were smaller insurrections observed as being linked to economic problems and social cleavages nobody expected a destabilisation of the country as a whole (see e.g. Plate 2006). Hence, the drastic change of the Malian situation in 2010/2011 was all the more surprising and gave rise to a number of scientific issues.

⁹² In its pilot phase (September 2012-June 2013) the project “Si vis pacem, para integrationem? The Economic Community of West African States from a Peace and Conflict Studies Perspective” was funded by the University of Augsburg. By following a ‘reconstructive’ approach the project focused on ECOWAS’ decision-making processes concerning its reactions and strategies concerning violent conflicts in West Africa (2006-2012) in order to understand the role of ECOWAS in promoting norms of civil conflict management (see Bösch 2013).

⁹³ On November 22, 2004, the so-called ‘Orange Revolution’ began (proponents wore orange as a party symbol); as the case study confirms, it plays an important role in the collective memory of Ukrainians; it began with a national strike and developed into a series mass demonstrations that emerged after the presidential elections criticised for voter intimidation and electoral fraud on both sides; the bloodless Orange Revolution lasted for more than two months (for further details, particularly concerning the relation between the Orange Revolution and the Maidan protests see case study chapter 5; see also e.g. Kappeler 2014).

and Conflict Studies and thus entered respective university courses this researcher was personally interested in (e.g. on post-Soviet transition, on democratisation theories, on social movements etc.). Evidently, the epistemological interest in both cases studies cannot be fully understood without this personal background. The fact of having recourse to own (working, travelling, scientific etc.) experiences, contacts (e.g. resource persons) and familiar sources (e.g. data bases) made it more likely to choose Mali and Ukraine, which were already booming topics in the media at times when this project's case studies were to be determined.

Besides the above-mentioned path dependencies resulting from cycles of research, pragmatic factors and a certain individual moment, case selection here also follows an inner scientific logic: Given the above-presented systems theoretical framing to approach processes of conflict escalation prior to violent conflict, the present case studies represent plausibility probes that are considered appropriate to show that the proposed approach enables to understand conflict development from a more holistic point of view. Therefore, to increase the probes' connectivity regarding the broad empirical field of conflict research, this study addresses tricky cases: On the one hand, from a rather conventional perspective, the Maidan protests (i.e. a domestic and increasingly violent phenomenon concentrated on Ukraine's capital) and the Malian conflict (according to an old-fashioned reading: a conflict within the context of an independence movement that resulted in a 'civil war') create the impression that the case studies refer to completely different realms. On the other hand, however, both cases have a substantial common ground: they both show that neither different explanatory models for internal armed conflict nor approaches based on IR theories nor sociological approaches to conflict are alone sufficient to pin down the broad range of empirical phenomena that appear in various discourses on conflict. In other words, both cases intrinsically challenge approaches and theories that are associated to clearly defined empirical fields or, more precisely, to single levels of analysis (see e.g. Demmers 2012: 5-12).

In summary, the procedure of case selection within the framework of this study, as outlined above, once again spells out the systems theoretical principle of contingency: Against the background of the idea that, in each selection, the pressure to make a decision goes hand in hand with an endless amount of options, some observations become cases, others do not. In this research project, two cases were selected from among a larger number of cases that had already been referred to as 'tricky' in various contexts (especially in science, media, and politics). However, having said that, Mali and Ukraine were not only selected because they had been awarded a high potential of scientific irritation in research literature, they were also chosen because this author has a special relation to both situations and has thus developed a particular personal *and* scientific interest to get to the bottom of both conflicts and thus to reconstruct conflict escalation. The next section will now consider the concept and method of reconstruction, which plays a crucial role for this project's case study approach.

4.3 A Reconstructive Approach: Putting the Cart before the Horse

“Ex post: based on analysis of past performance; opposed to ex ante; Latin origin: from what lies behind, according to what lies behind” (see Dictionary.com)

Preliminaries I: some working principles

As the etymological components of the word indicate, ‘re-con-struction’ relates to an operation performed in the aftermath of something that has already been constructed. Or, in a social science phrasing, it refers to a particular *ex post* research perspective on social phenomena: broadly speaking, a researcher drawing on the method of reconstruction retells a story by systematically interpreting other stories that have already been told (and, at best, documented) within a common reference frame. In this regard, against a plentitude of meaning embedded in communication, reconstructive research intends to unfold processes of collective attribution of meaning and thus to reveal intersubjectively shared meanings (see Roos 2013: 11-23).

As expounded earlier, this study takes a systems theoretical model of conflict development as a basis. Taking up again the ‘3D conflict model’ introduced in chapter 3.1, a conflict system evolves along a factual, temporal and social dimension. Metaphorically, it corresponds to a communicative maelstrom that urges its discursive environment to take a stance. This process consists of circular articulations of contradiction, whereby the mutual refusal of offered meanings becomes a rule, or, in other words, a generalised expectation.

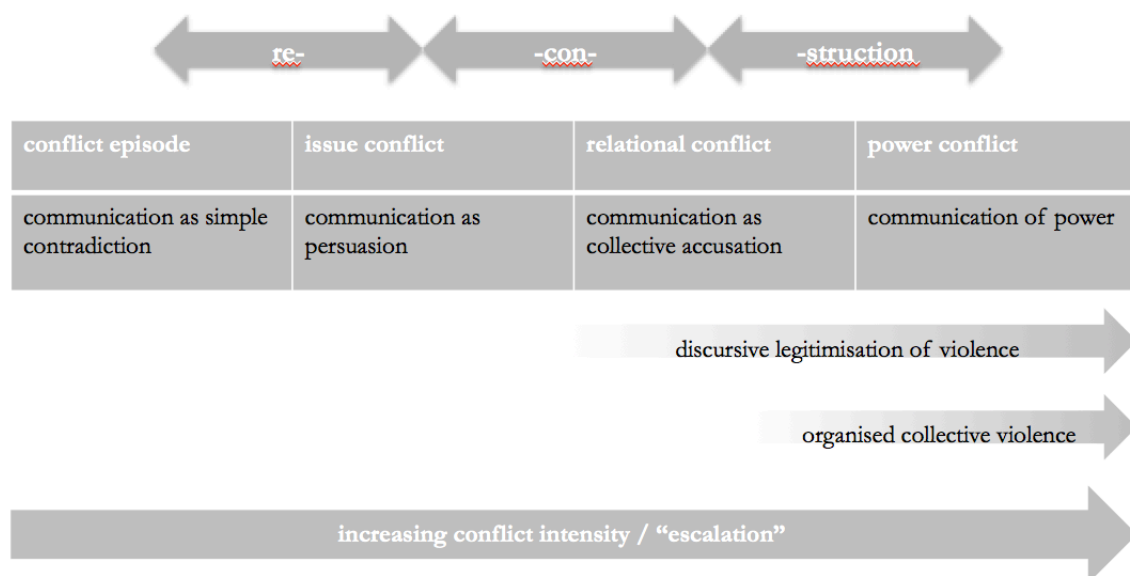


Figure: Conflict Stages according to Messmer & Reconstruction; own graph

As Messmer’s pioneering work has illustrated (see Messmer 2003; Chapter 4.2), a ‘conflict career’ can be empirically studied against a systems theoretical background and thus be portrayed as a process in stages. Though, Messmer’s conflict model leaves a few pending questions about the transition between the four ideal type stages behind: How do simple contradictions transform into an ongoing argument? How does factually oriented debates begin to include the

personal level? How do verbal accusations evolve into violent conflict? This is where the reconstructive approach comes in.

To specify reconstruction both as an abstract perspective and as a method in practice, the systems theoretical idea about a conflict system's increasing intensity is put into play as a quasi blueprint. In this context, to begin with, one of the main working principles of the reconstructive approach is to think of the analytical process as a process of a continual formation and refinement of hypotheses about the research topic's properties based on empirical material (see Przyborski and Wohlrab-Sahr 2008: 182-183). In this sense, the assumption that a conflict represents a particular social system, a conflict system, constitutes an initial basic hypothesis, which is evidently enshrined in the comprehensive systems theoretical worldview behind this project. The reconstructive approach in this work aims at uncovering and substantiating this rather general and abstract hypothesis by iteratively formulating new and more specific hypotheses (e.g. on the legitimisation of violence during conflict escalation) based on the many discursive references embedded in communication. Therefore, conflict systems are understood as relational entities that are indeed not physically visible as such but reconstructable (see Vogd 2005: 295). This, in turn, can be implemented within the framework of a constructivist methodology (see chapter 4.2 above) that does not primarily ask for *what* is observed but for *how* observers observe:

“An observer is a recursive and bounded network of observations. [...] Observers are observers *of* the world *in* the world, located in particular networks of self-similar and related observations.” (Fuchs 2010: 82)

Based on that, reconstructive research on conflict here draws upon a second working principle according to which a scientific analysis of conflict systems ought to be conceived of as “second-order observation” (see Luhmann 2002: 128-152; Weller 2005b: 316-321). As mentioned earlier, this kind of analysis approaches the social construction of conflict by observing observations. Reconstructive work thus includes scrutinising modes of observation or, more precisely, patterns of selection ‘behind’ communicated observations, particularly those that discursively co-produce a conflict via contradictory normative expectations.

Preliminaries II: some bounds

This study's approach to reconstruction and its handling of empirical data (see in detail chapter 4.4 below) shares some common characteristics with what is frequently referred to as ‘discourse analysis’.⁹⁴ In this context, in order to be able to describe what constitutes conflict as a social phenomenon or, as introduced earlier, as a social system, this contribution draws on terminologies like *discursive field*, - *arena*, - *space*, - *representation*, - *cluster* and others. In general, research about discourse distinguishes between ‘discourse theory’ and ‘discourse analysis’ while both are linked to each other. The former involves a genealogy of intellectual concepts that deal with a theory-oriented problematisation of power and knowledge in linguistic, cultural, social or political orders; the latter represents the more practically ‘grounded’ approach to empirical discourses

⁹⁴ In an interdisciplinary dictionary of discourse research, discourse research is described as a theoretically *and* empirically consolidated broad field of research. Therein, the key concept of discourse can be broadly defined as “a linguistically or, more general, semiotically performed social practice in a context of knowledge and power” (Wrana et al. 2014: 7; own translation).

which aims at analysing linguistic material related to a social praxis (see Angermüller 2014: 21-28; Herschinger and Renner 2014: 11-12).

As far as its parallels to discourse analysis are concerned, this study shares the understanding that social reality is communicatively constructed. Thus, the production of meaning represents a socially framed and situational praxis that can be studied on the basis of text data, i.e. particularly “protocols of natural statements” (see Keller 2010: 259) in order to bring out empirically grounded hypotheses to answer the research questions raised. However, contrary to the basic (theoretical) impetus of discourse research, this study is not primarily interested in unveiling power relations or hegemonic structures in society as a whole. Here, the definition of discourse is rather pragmatic and thus bounded: it is understood as a specific empirical field of communication, e.g. as conflict-related communication or as conflict discourse; in this context, it is particularly seen as a space where processes of subject/identity formation are linguistically performed and have a structuring impact on conflict development (see Wrana et al. 2014: 7-8).

The idea behind the reconstructive work presented here is to enable readers to understand how modes of observation develop and interact in the process of a conflict system’s discursive constitution over time. As the case study chapters below will show, the reconstruction of modes of observation represents a fine-grained work, which requires a close examination of communication. Even though this reconstructive approach aims at unfolding processes of collective attribution of meaning, it does not claim to provide an absolute procedure. Therefore, it does not suggest to be able to decode intersubjectively shared meaning in communication (see Roos 2013: 12-13). Such an ambition would insinuate, at least partly, that there is a hidden and fixed meaning out there, in discourse, waiting to be discovered by smart researchers operating from a more or less objectivated standpoint. Rather, when analysing recorded discursive traces of the social, a reconstructive procedure is about systematically and transparently reading those traces in order to develop a distinct *analytical narrative*. An analytical narrative thus consists of a set of iteratively gained hypotheses that have been bound together in a consistent overall story. However, this story is told in the knowledge that it represents one possible reading among others. Against the background of the above-mentioned working principles and bounds, the next section backtraces important sources of this study’s reconstructive method within empirical social research.

Reconstruction all the way down: Grounded Theory and Documentary Method

In empirical social science literature, there are various methodological approaches that combine an epistemological orientation with a clear-cut methodical procedure. Concerning the broad constructivist “pool of methods”, notably two approaches show parallels to the initial idea of reconstruction outlined above and its systems theoretical background as a whole: *Grounded Theory* (GT) and the *Documentary Method* (DM). In the following, this section briefly presents four spots where both strands converge – a circumstance that has been relevant for developing a proper empirical working procedure within the framework of this study.⁹⁵

⁹⁵ It would certainly go beyond the scope of this section to provide a complete introduction to history, evolution and recent developments of both GT and DM. For this reason, this section restricts itself to explain why certain parts of both approaches were incorporated into this study’s own method of handling empirical data. In doing so, it essentially draws on a number of key reference works including Corbin and Strauss (2008), Przyborski and

(1) To begin with, it can be stated that GT and DM are most notably inductive approaches, which means, broadly speaking, that they are both dedicated to work very closely along empirical data.⁹⁶ Based on that, in GT, reconstructive research is understood as a permanent process of exchange between data collection, analysis and making theoretical statements (see Przyborski and Wohlrab-Sahr 2008: 194-195); in DM, it is further understood as a process of “opening up” the object of research in as many facets as possible, which means to force oneself to look very closely on the empirical material (see Vogd 2010: 122). Likewise, even though a systems theoretical worldview was taken as a basis⁹⁷, the present work pursues an inductive approach inasmuch as inferences about conflict escalation in Mali and Ukraine are strictly drawn on the basis of text data that has been produced in the discursive contexts of both conflict systems. In other words, although existing deductively oriented literature on both case studies was taken note of, the newly assembled text corpus (including texts that have been attributed to the conflict discourses) was the major guideline for formulating hypotheses.

“All is data.” (Glaser 2001: 145)

(2) According to this much-quoted Glaser dictum, there is manifold potential empirical material that represents the social world linguistically or, more general, symbolically. However, GT and DM have particularly developed as approaches dealing with documented traces of the social in the form of text analysis: By means of a highly structured text interpretation procedure, DM intends to reveal “collective structures of meaning” and “orientation frameworks” behind various social phenomena.⁹⁸ GT, too, aims at developing “grounded” concepts, categories and hypotheses out of text data in order to be able to give abstract answers to research questions raised, especially concerning social change (see e.g. Roos 2010: 18-21). Picking up this empirical orientation towards text analysis, the present study sets out to give an answer to the question of how social reality in a conflict system is (re-) produced. At this point, DM and the systems theoretical understanding of conflict developed in this study show striking parallels: Both indeed

Wohlrab-Sahr (2008: 183-310), Roos (2010: 48-110), Franke and Roos (2013: 7-30), Thronberg and Charmaz (2013), Vogd (2005, 2007, 2011), and Bohnsack (2010, 2014).

⁹⁶ This author is well aware of the fact that, particularly in GT, the reconstructive research process is understood as a triad of induction (simplified: inferences from cases to hypotheses), deduction (inferences from theory/hypotheses to cases) and abduction (review of existing/formulation of new hypotheses) (see e.g. Franke and Roos 2013: 13-15). However, when labelling the present approach as an *inductive* one, this author intends to emphasise that the examination of empirical data is in the very centre of attention.

⁹⁷ As a proponent of DM, Vogd (2007: 298; own translation), states, “There is no cognition without theory.” For GT, see also Roos (2010: 89; own translation): “Since it is impossible to fade out one’s theoretical knowledge and beliefs, any research is always deductive.”

⁹⁸ Karl Mannheim (1893-1947) is considered to be one of the intellectual forefathers of DM (see e.g. *Ideology and Utopia: An Introduction to The Sociology of Knowledge*, 1936). Mannheim proposed to think of the social as a duality of two layers of knowledge: “conjunctive” and “communicative” knowledge. The former describes implicit or tacit knowledge that is rooted in collective social experiences and serves as an intuitive practical orientation (e.g. personal experiences of conflict on a personal level or delivered collective memories of violent conflict in the past). The latter refers to generalised or standardised knowledge that finds its expression at different levels of theorising the social (e.g. about a conflict’s composition, i.e. role models, legitimacy of violence etc.). Based on that, the interpretation of text data in DM knows two main steps of interpretation at different levels of meaning production. As outlined below in greater detail, “formulating interpretation” is about systematically analysing the topical structure and thus approaching the explicit/immanent meaning; “reflecting interpretation” implements the transition from asking what to asking how: it aims at identifying frameworks of orientation behind the topics dealt with (see Bohnsack 2014: 217-225; Vogd 2010: 126, 128-137).

intend to figure out the “modus operandi behind the unfolding of statements” (Vogd 2010: 124). Or, to refer to this study’s systems theoretical framing, both try to identify patterns of observation that structure the discursive field of conflict (see chapter 3.1/4.1). Hence, the present reconstructive method foregrounds the “genesis of meaning” (Vogd 2010: 126) and thus operates on the level of second-order observations.

(3) Another overlap between GT and DM that underpins the reconstructive approach of this study refers to the aspect of change. Most often, social phenomena are not static but dynamic research topics. Evidently, conflict escalation, for example, requests being analysed as a process over time. Both GT and DM attach importance to the immanent changeability of social phenomena and, by proposing a sequential analysis, take it into methodical consideration. The interpretation of text material thus follows a chronological procedure that preserves time structures of data relations, e.g. release dates of statements referring to preceding statements in communication about conflict.

“The meaning of a single utterance is determined by its relation to the context of other utterances which sequentially take place. In the case of the interpretation of texts, the relation between utterances and on the one hand and their context on the other hand is a *sequential* relation, a relation between utterances and the succeeding ones.” (Bohnsack 2014: 224)

Related to this, the comparative element plays a crucial role: Both in GT and DM, opening up (text) data happens against the background of permanent comparison of data (within its respective timeline). Accordingly, reconstruction means constantly contrasting data, revising inferences, hypotheses, categories, concepts etc. In GT, this process is implemented in coding procedures. According to Thornberg and Charmaz (2013: 156),

“Coding is about naming segments of data with a label that simultaneously categorizes, summarizes, and accounts for each piece of data. [...] By coding, researchers scrutinize and interact with the data as well as ask analytical questions of the data. They create their codes by defining what the data are about.”

Similarly, while repeatedly “zooming through the material” (Vogd 2010: 130), asking questions and relating parts of data to one another, DM intends to structure the empirical field and thus to iteratively refine findings (i.e. hypotheses, typologies) on a rotating basis.⁹⁹ It can be stated that the reconstructive procedure within the framework of this study, too, proceeds by sequential analysis and systematic coding that seeks to substantiate hypotheses, e.g. on specific turning points during conflict escalation, based on the innermost tracks of empirical data.

“Methods generate data
from other data.” (Vogd 2010: 123)

⁹⁹ Generally, DM is presented as a method consisting of three to four successive and more or less separate steps (see e.g. Bohnsack 2014: 224-230). Besides formulating interpretation (step one; tag: topical structure) and reflecting interpretation (step two; tag: frameworks of orientation) briefly introduced earlier, DM includes a “comparative analysis” (step three) comprising the abstraction of identified orientation frameworks as compared to respective results beyond the actual case. Finally, after having collected/analysed further data and cases, various cross-case findings on the societal formation of orientation frameworks can be paraphrased in form of a “typology” (step four). However, in this study, the four steps are not seen as strictly separate, but rather as coinciding principles that help structuring the analytical procedure within a single case study (see also Przyborski and Wohlrab-Sahr 2008: 296-299).

(4) Since GT and DM can be ascribed to the extensive reservoir of constructivist method(ologie)s, they both lay value on the reflexivity of the research process.¹⁰⁰ In this context, according to Roos (2010: 84-90), GT suggests that reconstruction is essentially about a researcher's ability "to let oneself be surprised by one's results". In other words, each inference (i.e. "data from other data": hypotheses, concepts, categories formulated during processes of analysis and interpretation) has to be considered as falsifiable, or, at least modifiable, while already analysed data as well as newly gathered data are subject to a process of continuous revision.¹⁰¹ Similarly, DM proponents declare the need to systematically control and reflect on the contingencies of data interpretation in order not to read findings and knowledge into the empirical material that the researcher has already seen and known before (see Vogd 2007: 310). Following this, DM argues for reflecting on the "situatedness" of knowledge and thinking, which not only relates to "common-sense constructions" represented in empirical material but also to "scientific knowledge" itself (see Przyborski and Wohlrab-Sahr 2008: 274-277). In this sense, the present reconstructive approach follows both GT and DM in their ambition to take researchers' (and each observer's) situatedness¹⁰² into account: Systematically comparing and contrasting empirical material from different origins played a crucial role in the process of formulating hypotheses (and the analytical narrative as a whole). This leads over to the next section that gives an account of the sources of the empirical material analysed in both case studies and illustrates the discursive working levels that have been put in place as analytical auxiliary constructions.

Reconstructing the development of conflict systems: discursive working levels

Reconstructive conflict research, as presented here, draws on empirical material that mirrors the discursive construction of conflict over time. To this end, this approach documents and compares patterns of observation that are considered as constituting a conflict. Hence, it systematically deals with knowledge of different observers and their collective realities of conflict. But who or what is an observer, empirically? How does research get hold of them, on the level of concrete data collection?

As stated earlier, observers represent networks of observations; they do not need to be understood as human beings (see Preliminaries I; Fuchs 2010: 82).¹⁰³ Within the context of a conflict – and this is an elementary figure of thought in the present study – various networks of observations are centred around a common reference frame understood as a conflict system.

¹⁰⁰ On reflexivity and constructivist analysis see particularly Weller (2005c: 36-39).

¹⁰¹ In this context, as mentioned earlier, GT emphasises the role of *abductive* inference, i.e. "explain new and surprising empirical data through the elaboration, modification, or combination of pre-existing concepts." (Keller 1995: 34, as cited in Roos 2010: 86).

¹⁰² To recall a fundamental perspective on the situatedness of this author see again chapter 4.2; cycles of research, pragmatic factors and individual moments do indeed not only play an influential role in case selection but also during data collection and analysis.

¹⁰³ It ought to be stated that a human being as such does not represent an analytically relevant entity within the framework of systems theoretical thinking. Indeed, human beings do exist. However, according to Luhmann, "A human being may appear to himself or to an observer as a unity, but he is not a system. And it is even less possible to form a system out of a collection of human beings." (Luhmann 1995: 40) The individual human being, following systems theory, represents a conglomerate of different systems: while the body represents a biological system, consciousness represents a psychological system or "a person", which, in turn, can be a part of different social systems.

The knowledge of observers about the conflict or, in other words, the reservoirs of meaning embedded in observations can be found in the totality of communication within the discursive context of conflict. Here, the reconstruction of both conflict systems is based on analysing conflict communication that is transparently documented and accessible. In the beginning of this research project's empirical part, text data collection started with single texts that were identified because of their explicit and nominal references to conflict. In other words, texts were selected according to signal words and catchphrases and thus taken as first-order observations containing relevant distinctions and indications about the respective perception of conflict.¹⁰⁴ During the course of this, the three dimensions of meaning (see 3D conflict model) as well as Messmer's stages of conflict functioned as a heuristic in order to recognise characteristics of communication in its factual, temporal or social dimension and thus to identify and assess further text sources. In this way, the initial run-through of texts reveals references to other text sources that are to be followed, and so forth. In this sense, since the conflict system with all its networks of observations is already in place, the text corpus gets extended by moving hand over hand from text to text (in a potentially endless field of relational references; see Nonhoff 2011), thus searching for texts as if using a kind of snowball system.¹⁰⁵ Exemplarily, this can be illustrated on the basis of the following 'chain of texts'. For the purpose of illustration, assuming that the compilation of the text corpus starts with the following texts (here excerpts; own translations from French original):

“The capital of the new region of Ménaka was attacked by an armed group, Tuesday, at daybreak. [...] The National Movement for the Liberation of Azawad (MNLA) could be behind this attack, since this secessionist movement had been founded there, in November 2011.” (GovMali 19.01.2012a)

Based on this segment published within the framework of regular government announcements (i.e. “Actualités”), the office of the president states that there is an obvious adversary (i.e. the MNLA) adopting violent means in order to implement clear plans (i.e. secession). In the phase of text data collection, the reference to MNLA's founding in November 2011 directly entailed searching for further first-hand documents from this period, which lead to the following text:

“It has been decided to create a new political organisation called ‘National Movement for the Liberation of Azawad’ (MNLA) to take the place of the ‘National Movement of Azawad’ (MNA). This movement aims at leading the people of Azawad out of the illegal Malian occupation of Azawad's territory.” (MNLA 16.10.2011)

In this statement, on the one hand, the MNLA confirms its role as adversary of the Malian government and clarifies its analysis of the political situation (i.e. the Malian occupation of Azawad). On the other hand, however, the MNLA's declaration suscitates an interest to ask for

¹⁰⁴ Nota bene: This procedure includes that texts are entirely read in the first place (and not selected because of the headlines only), even if they are not selected ultimately. Hence, the interpretation of text data and thus the analytical work already begins at the stage of *prima vista*.

¹⁰⁵ As the overview of the text corpus shows (see Appendix A.1/A.2), text data collection also took the origins and circumstances of the genesis of the texts into account. Evidently, when a preliminarily selected press release of the government was assessed as relevant, other preceding/succeeding press releases from the same source were also looked through.

the reasons to create a new organisation and thus to ask for the differences between MNA and MNLA. For text data collection, this means to look for the founding statement of the MNA, which has been published a year before:

“Today, we are declaring the birth of the National Movement of Azawad (MNA) which is a political organisation of Azawad that defends and approves a peaceful policy in order to achieve legitimate goals.” (MNA 1.11.2010)

Evidently, there are differences in tone and content concerning the founding statement of the MNA (in November 2010) and the first declaration of the MNLA (in October 2011). As the founding statement and other statements in the same context suggest, at that time, there was no intention to necessarily question the Malian state as such. So, what did Malian authorities announce in reaction to the first founding statement, if there was a reaction at all? How did the government’s statements on the situation in northern Mali and towards MNA/MNLA change over time? And, how was the communicative ‘ping-pong’ between Malian authorities and MNA/MNLA picked up by the media and presented to a larger public (see an exemplary reaction to MNA’s founding statement below)?

“In plain terms, there is actually no point of view that can justify a new rebellion. The creation of a new movement is possibly nothing but blackmailing. In the future, the government has to be firm concerning all questions of security, rebellion and banditry.” (Le Combat/Maliweb 4.11.2010a)

As these text examples show, this study’s reconstructive procedure resembles a kind of exploration of the conflict discourse. By following hints and references in texts already read and thus literally going back and forth within the conflict discourse, the text corpus gets gradually thicker.¹⁰⁶

To recapitulate: In the beginning, this procedure started with text data that had been previously identified as communication of self-proclaimed parties to the conflict. In other words, at a high level of escalation, conflict parties could be recognised by means of their characteristic of power communication (see Messmer’s heuristic above).¹⁰⁷ In subsequent steps, text data gathering consisted in exploring the conflict system by criss-cross searching for other observers or networks of observers articulating themselves with reference to conflict (i.e. its parties, issues or special events) and, therefore, being part of the same discursive field. In this context, media coverage and reporting of non-governmental organisations, be they international and/or domestic, became important foci of interest. The gradual emergence of this study’s text data corpus and its sources can be visualised by means of a ‘conflict observation map’ that reflects two discursive working levels.

¹⁰⁶ In retrospect, building up the text corpora in this way was one of the time-consuming parts of the research project. Seen from a more practical perspective, rather than getting the text corpus gradually thicker, this task is about reducing an endless field of potentially meaningful discursive representations to a manageable size.

¹⁰⁷ This is not to say that conflict identities (i.e. conflict parties) represent absolute and immutable entities. Indeed, it is their changeability during the process of conflict escalation that is focused here. Referring to ‘conflict parties’ in the same way as it is usually done in conflict research is just a starting point of an analysis that aims, to a certain extent, at deconstructing and denaturalising the seemingly constant observation of a static conflict party.

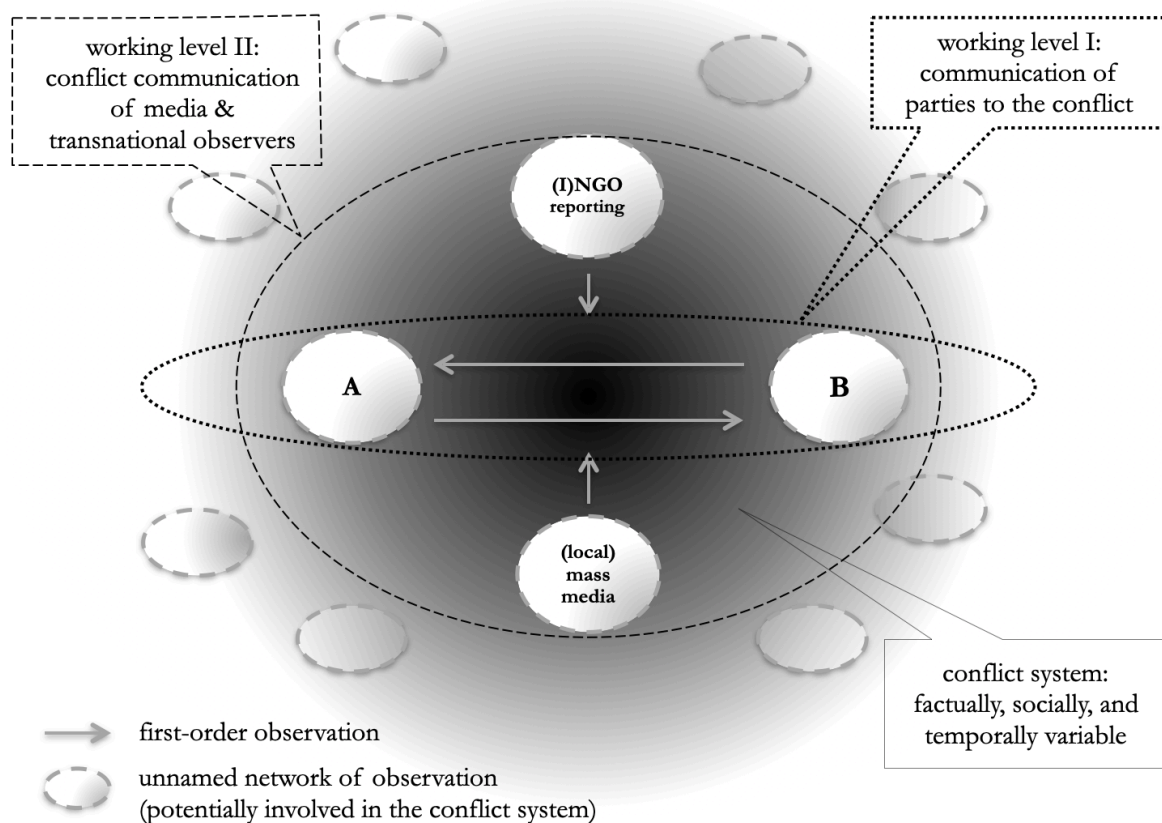


Figure: Conflict Observation Map with Discursive Working Levels; own graph

As the figure is intended to show, the discursive (re-) production of a conflict system, which is factually, socially and temporally variable, takes place at different levels.¹⁰⁸ Again drawing on the maelstrom metaphor, an escalating conflict system is characterised by the increasing incorporation of communication from its environment. While expectations of a repeated no begin to stabilise, certain communicative paths become a habit, and conflict identities emerge (see idealised parties A and B), other surrounding networks of observation (unnamed grey or half grey spheres) are sooner or later stimulated to react to the contradiction in question.¹⁰⁹ Some show up in particular, which means in evident and regular ways, such as international non-governmental organisations (INGOs) and locally based mass media. Based on the textual empirical material produced by the aforementioned networks of observation or, in other words, based on this kind of first-order observations, this study aims at identifying regularities behind perceptions, interpretations and descriptions expressed therein. It therefore provides a second-order observation of a conflict system.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁸ The present visualisation picks up the “3D conflict model” presented earlier: the conflict system is thus represented by the weakening grey tones from the centre to the edge of the graph and thus corresponds to the spherical image in Chapter 3. Both figures emphasise that conflict escalation is understood as a permanent process of demarcation between the system (conflict communication) and its environment (any other communication).

¹⁰⁹ Nota bene: In principle, networks of observation are not clearly definable (see dashed edges in figure above); their identity and thus actorness is permanently (re-) constituted within communication in terms of attributed persons, roles, programmes and norms.

¹¹⁰ Hence, readers of the present work (and of any other scientific work) face two options: On the one hand, this study in itself represents a second-order observation that can be adopted as such and productively ‘applied’ for

Hence, the map illustrated above embodies a systems theoretical model of conflict observation. Therefore, visualisations (spheres, colour gradients, arrows etc.) serve as practical work aids. In a practical research perspective, these work aids, particularly the distinction of two discursive working levels, can be understood as working hypotheses that came up during the first steps of the present study and consolidated later on: Working level I focuses on communication attributed to institutions, organisations, or groups referring to themselves as conflict parties expressing a contradiction and their part in the collective discursive making-of of the conflict. In this context, press releases, speeches and other official statements represent relevant constituents of communication between the self and the other addressing the self with permanent contradiction and vice versa.

Nevertheless, during the process of conflict development, the relationship between contradicting parties does not remain an isolated communicative realm. Transnational observers, e.g. INGOs, and (local) mass media particularly observe this relationship and, at the same time, make the conflict accessible, 'connectable' and thus meaningful in a broader (world) societal context.¹¹¹ In both case studies, working level II is focused on local print media coverage and INGO reports, which produce, for their part, first-order observations of the relationship of parties to the conflict and thus become a part of the conflict system themselves. In anticipation of the cases studies (chapter 5/6), it can be stated here that each case study chapter, in order to concretise the discursive working levels, provides a detailed overview of data sources including their significance within the text corpus. This leads over to the work plan that instructed the case studies.

4.4 Reconstructing Conflict Escalation: A Work Plan

Based on the methodological foundation of the concept of reconstruction and drawing on the conflict observation map with its discursive working levels outlined above, this section further explains the work plan at the bottom of the case studies.

As a preliminary point, it is stressed here that the case studies neither provide an extensive introduction to the Ukrainian and Malian history nor a systematic account of analytical literature. Accordingly, the case studies refrain from deducing explanations about conflict escalation from a detailed chronology of historical events, which are more or less loosely attributed to the more recent developments in question. So, for example, when the Orange Revolution in

own research purposes. On the other hand, readers can, for their part, undertake a second-order observation of this study with all its more or less implicit distinctions and indications (e.g. concerning research design, selection of sources and cases etc.).

¹¹¹ In the present study, 'transnational observers' relate to networks of observation which are also referred to as "producers of knowledge about conflict" (Bliesemann de Guevara 2014: 545) or "rationalized others" (Nabo and Stetter 2012: 191). The International Crisis Group (ICG), for example, whose short reports are parts of the text corpora in both case studies, is commonly regarded as a non-governmental and cross-border expert group on conflict development worldwide. In communication about conflict in world society, or, as Bliesemann de Guevara (2014: 545) puts it, "in the conflict-related knowledge market", transnational observers (e.g. ICG, HRW, AI etc.), first of all, are ascribed a relevant actorhood; they represent "rationalised others" because they are attributed an objective intention "to search for the 'rational core' of conflict parties and follow an inclusive approach of taking the opinions of all conflict parties into consideration" (Nabo and Stetter 2012: 206). In this context, by shaping narratives about conflict settings, they function as special observers at the interface, or, in other words, as part of the structural coupling of political and mass media communication. As Beck and Werron (2013) demonstrated, the attentiveness of transnational observers is particularly affected by conflict parties using violent means.

2004 gets addressed in the case study chapter on Ukraine later on, it is not because this study necessarily or standardly considers any major event in recent Ukrainian history in order to understand the protests on Maidan by every trick in the (history) book.¹¹² Rather, as the systematic analysis of conflict communication has gradually brought to light, it shows up because it has been picked up as an important discursive reference during the respective period of investigation. In other words, this procedure is based on the assumption that all kind of meaningful information is supposed to forge ahead in manifold ways within the given discursive frame of conflict communication.

As developed in the preceding sections, within the scope of its case studies, this contribution reconstructs two sequences of conflict-related observations or, in other words, two discursive clusters that emerged around a common conflict reference. Following the remarks on case selection, in text data collection, too, there is an ineluctable moment of contingency since a potentially endless amount of text data gets reduced to a necessarily limited text corpus. In this context, however, even though the case studies' text corpora have been structured according to different discursive working levels, particular groups of data sources are not as such in the focus of attention. Rather than portraying the evolution of group-specific programmes and norms, the case studies are supposed to show the development of the conflict system as a whole, including its intensification, its processing of violence as a topic and its dynamic boundaries.

Following the points of intersection between GT and DM sorted out earlier (in section 4.3), hypotheses can only be formulated on the basis of the text corpora. To figure out the *modus operandi* behind the unfolding of statements, the reconstructive approach presented here proceeds by sequentially analysing and systematically coding and contrasting text material in order to substantiate hypotheses (e.g. on turning points during conflict escalation). During the phase of data collection, as the text corpora had become increasingly larger, it was decided to continue the project with the help of computer-assisted qualitative data analysis. The next section briefly introduces this kind of research tool that plays a crucial role in handling empirical text data material.

Working with qualitative data analysis software: MAXQDA

According to Kuckartz (2010: 12-15), qualitative data analysis (QDA) software is able to support research processes in many regards (even beyond qualitative research designs), including the following functions and features:

- a simultaneous management of a project's texts (quick access to each single text);
- organising texts in form of subgroups and user-defined criteria;
- defining categories/ a category system;
- attributing categories to selected text segments;
- compiling all coded text segments within a category;
- clustering/visually illustrating categories in networks and hierarchies;
- drafting/attaching memos to each text segment, code, or category;

¹¹² In this context, even without explicitly mentioning Ukraine's history of revolutions, referring to "Maidan" or the "Maidan protests" (see particularly chapter 5.2) already represents a historical and thus political pointer or, in more analytical terms, an initial hypothesis among others that has been substantiated during the research process, namely the following: The protests can not be seen as just any protest. They are to be mentioned in the same breath with past protests in Ukrainian history that had an enduring effect on the Ukraine's independence and future.

- searching for words, word combinations/ expressions within text corpora;
- teamwork and consensual coding procedures.¹¹³

Against the background of this heavy but non-exhaustive list, it should be emphasised that QDA software serves as a “technical” support in research processes, especially concerning the organisation of empirical text data and its structured interpretation. As a matter of course, it cannot enable researchers (and has not been developed to do so) to conduct any kind of automated analysis or interpretation. Also, it does not limit researchers to a specific theoretical orientation. Whatever the methodological approach may be, at each point in time, text data treatment, i.e. interpreting, comparing, reflecting, is under the control of the researcher.¹¹⁴ Therefore, QDA software simply offers a toolbox in order to implement a systematic and transparent analysis of (text) data.

Within the framework of this project’s case studies, text data has been analysed with the help of MAXQDA.¹¹⁵ Following its developers, MAXQDA, one of the pioneers in computer-assisted qualitative text analysis, enables importing, organising, analysing, visualising and publishing of all forms of data that can be collected electronically (see MAXQDA 2012). Furthermore, it has a focus on mixed methods research, “not least to bridge the conventional qualitative versus quantitative divide.” Turning to the present research project: Against the background of the large text corpora in both case studies, MAXQDA proved to be a useful support to keep track of both text data and inferences (i.e. codings, memos, categories, hypotheses) from data. In particular, MAXQDA provides an open and clearly structured four-window user interface (see screenshot taken from the Ukrainian case study below) that literally enables researchers to keep tabs on key functions, such as archiving, exploration, coding, or categorisation.¹¹⁶

¹¹³ The present list is based on Kuckartz’s template (2010: 12-13; translation R.B.), although some points were condensed here. For a brief valuation of QDA software in qualitative research contexts see also Przyborski and Wohlrab-Sahr (2008: 190-191).

¹¹⁴ A common critique towards QDA software in interpretative research holds that there may be theoretical assumptions inscribed in software features and thus determining a certain style of analysis. In contrast, MAXQDA (see below), for example, shows that programmes indeed offer room to match them with (different) individual research interests.

¹¹⁵ Although an updated version 12 of MAXQDA was released in late 2015, MAXQDA’s version 11 (first applied at the beginning of 2015) was used throughout the case studies’ analytical procedure for pragmatic reasons.

¹¹⁶ Since the following sections will draw upon it, here is a brief description of the interface: the window in the top left corner shows an overview of all analysed documents, which can be organised in folders and subfolders; the window in the top right corner contains a document browser, where the (initial) coding procedure essentially takes place; the window in the bottom left corner shows the code system that gradually grows and branches out in the course of the analysis; finally, the window in the bottom right corner can be used to display selected sets or (combinations of) codes in order to substantiate hypotheses that “emerge” during the process of interpretation.

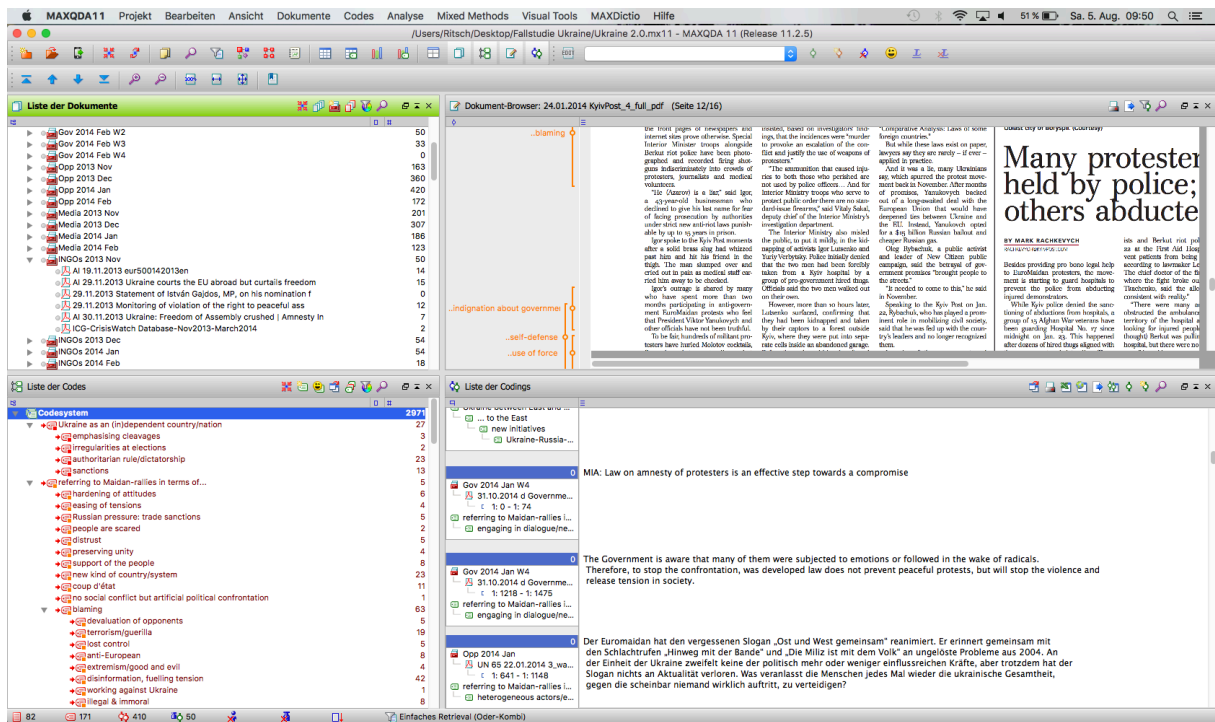


Figure: Screenshot/MAXQDA Four-Window User Interface

The prelude: organising the text corpora

As mentioned earlier, the analysis of the text corpora proceeds in a *sequential order*, which means that texts were analysed according to their date of publication in order to reveal a chronologically founded development. In Appendix A.1.1 and A.1.2, the texts are organised like a usual bibliography, showing authorship and date of origin. Also, they are classified according to the discursive working levels and, therefore, to groups of sources. In MAXQDA, for the purpose of conducting a sequential analysis along respective analytical units, the lists of texts were reassembled in weekly sets (Ukraine) and monthly sets (Mali). In other words, to manage the large text corpora, the analysis was prepared on a week by week/ month by month basis.¹¹⁷ Technically, documents were pooled in respective chronological subfolders (see examples from both case studies in figures below).

¹¹⁷ Nota bene: These temporal graduations have no analytical value as such. They can be understood as auxiliary constructions, which mirror considerations on the efficient use of resources regarding the quantity of text data and the respective period of investigation. Similar to a picture's resolution, one can imagine approaches that are more or less fine-grained, depending on the capacity and the fine-tuning of the photo camera.

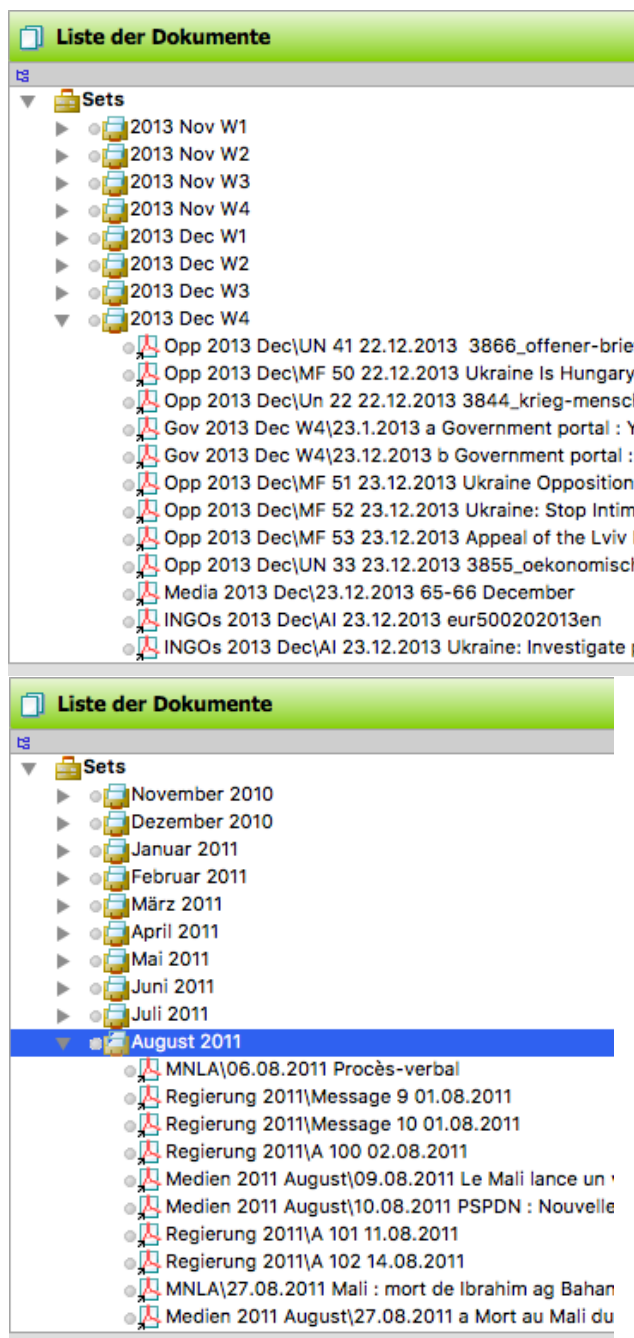


Figure: Screenshots/Lists of Documents and Sets Ukraine (left) and Mali (right)

Starting with initial coding

In a strict sense, approaching the text material begins with *open* or *initial coding* of the documents in order to create an overview in form of a schematical outline. Inspired by the concept of *formulating interpretation* (see DM above), the text material gets explored, i.e. accurately read, which aims at identifying and documenting the thematic content and its stratification in form of topics and subtopics. Here, a number of questions are asked vis-à-vis the empirical material (see main questions below):

- When does a topic appear?
- How does an issue evolve (and, possibly, supersede another issue)?
- Are there cycles of topics, i.e. “booming”/disappearing topics?
- Is there a ramification of topics (e.g. into subtopics, side topics etc.)?

- Are there cross-references between issues?

Having these questions in mind, initial coding is technically implemented by assigning codes to text passages and recording these codes within a list of codes that, while increasingly growing, gets continuously restructured. In doing so, the codes, i.e. particular notions or paraphrases, are taken from the texts themselves (“in-vivo coding”) since they were rated as representing a relevant topical content. As the example of the code “terror” shows (see sample text passages below), in-vivo coding has been implemented across the entire text corpus, thus including the different discursive working levels and groups of text data sources respectively:

“Cynism and amorality of the *terrorists* came to the point that they threw [sic] Molotov cocktail in people and young guys – our children too – light up with the fire! [...] And tonight, *terrorists* from Maidan had broken into hotels, they captured dozens of citizens, whom they consider their opponents and brutally beat them.” (GovUkr 22.01.2014a)

“[The regime] has unashamedly seized power in the country and has blocked all ways of a constitutional and democratic solution of the social and political conflict. The regime behaves like a *terrorist* taking hostages and threatening them by holding a knife to their throats.” (UkrN 25.01.2014c)

“But blackmail and threats are also some of the favorite tactics of Yanukovych. [...] Under Yanukovych’s watch, *terror* is common. In EuroMaidan, police [sic] have acted with hired thugs to clear protesters off the street and *terrorize* peaceful demonstrators.” (KyivPost 31.01.2014)

To recapitulate: Since “terrorist(s)” and “terrorise” appeared in these text passages, all three were assigned with the code “terror”.¹¹⁸ In view of the questions listed above, the text passages illustrate the following: According to the analysed text corpus, in January 2014, references to “terror”, i.e. attributions that qualify observed actions or actors as terrorists, appear for the first time and, from then on, increasingly superseded other terms, such as “political rival”, “opponent” or “protestor”. Furthermore, as it turned out in the course of the analysis, “guerilla tactics” or “guerilla fighting” appeared as being used in a subsidiary relation to “terror” or, in other words, as its subtopic.

Following the way of working illustrated by the examples outlined above, initial coding leads to, in the literal sense of the word, a *topographic* map of the discourse’s thematic content. Thus, oscillating between expansion and summing-up, an increasing number of codings get developed into a thematic catalogue. During this process, new umbrella terms or, in other words, conceptual codes set by the researcher find their way into the catalogue, as the example of “blaming” shows.

¹¹⁸ Nota bene: When there were relevant references, many text passages were multiply coded. Exemplarily, the three text passages were also assigned with the code “attributions of violence” under which all qualifications of actions as violence in discourse were recorded. In this sense, all text passages coded as “terrorism” are coded as “attributions of violence”, too. But, the other way round, not all passages coded as “attributions of violence” are coded as “terrorism”.



Figure: Screenshot/Code System/Subcode “Blaming”

As illustrated in the case of “terror”, a broad range of codings (“devaluation of opponents”, “losing control”, “anti-European” etc., see figure above) are attributed to a discursive setting where the responsibility for a situation that is generally assessed as worsening gets assigned to the respective opponent (“blaming”). Now, by selecting sets that are chronologically assembled, it is possible to comprehend the sequence of the discourse’s changing topographic map. This, in turn, is already part of the next analytical step (see following section), which, rather than being understood as separate, is implemented in parallel to previous steps.

A permanent task: asking questions, comparing, combining, and reflecting

While being engaged in a fine-grained analysis of the text corpora, the overall research question serves as a permanent orientation guide. *How do conflicts escalate?* Against the background of this fundamental question and the growing topographic map of the text corpus, the analytical procedure also includes paying attention to linkages and references between codings. Inspired by the concept of reflecting interpretation (see DM above), this analytical step intends to, bit by bit, get to the bottom of text production. The latter is understood as a manifestation of observations, whereby observers select what is worth being articulated from their perspective and, at the same time, make recourse to articulated observations already existing in the discourse. Thus, in order to identify generic patterns behind text data, a second set of questions is used, shifting from, broadly speaking, *asking what* to *asking how*:

- To what extent does the coded text passage include explicit/implicit differentiations and indications?
- How does the coded text passage actually or potentially connect/refer to other text passages and/ or codes?
- How are features attributed to communicative addresses?
- How do persons, their societal roles, their programmes (i.e. interests, strategies) and norms (ideas, values, moral concepts) appear and change in communication?
- How is the present, i.e. the difference between before and after, ordered in/by communication? How is the present extended into the past and/or the future?
- To what extent does the analysed sequence refer to different aspects of conflict? What is presented as known, what is not?
- How does the coded text passage at hand can help answering the overall research question?

When directing these questions to empirical data, texts, as it was introduced in groundwork Chapter 3, can be thought of as solidified observations. In this sense, observations are not random; there are models of perception regulating what is being observed in the first place and

then articulated. In this context, each text includes *explicit* (i.e. articulated/written/spoken) and *implicit* (i.e. a reservoir of alternative/unuttered) communication. In other words, each piece of the present text corpus or, in other words, each documented communication represents the result of an assessment that is embedded in a specific discursive setting, namely a conflict system. To understand how this process works, the present research project's work plan for the case studies makes use of the concept of second-order observations.

Communication, as it is analysed based on the text corpora at hand, takes place within frameworks of orientation or, to put in more systems theoretical terms, as a result of modes of observation. In this context, what is articulated oscillates between a positive horizon ("seeking for") and a negative anti-horizon ("turning away from"), which mark idealised side rails opening up room for alternative options of communication (see Bohnsack 2014: 217-225; Vogd 2010: 126, 128-137). Collective frameworks of orientation point to roles, programmes and norms within a discourse. Thus, the case studies' aim is to approach and to identify these structures behind the topics dealt with. In doing so, the second set of questions (introduced above) is intended to help explicating and interpreting the topographic map that resulted from previous analytical steps.¹¹⁹ In reference to the following sample paragraph from the text corpus the direction of impact of these questions will be illustrated:

"Representing the people of Azawad, the MNA appeals to the Malian people and to the authorities of the Republic of Mali to simply recognise its rights that have been ridiculed for 50 years. The people of Azawad is politically isolated, socially marginalised and economically paralysed. For five decades, its soul has been gradually dying. Now, the people of Azawad decide to wage a peaceful and merciless combat against the occupation." (MNA 15.07.2011; translation R.B.)

Proceeding from the text passage above¹²⁰, an exemplary sequence of reflecting interpretation and its preliminary results look like as follows (here in parts, taken from the case study/chapter 6):

explicit form	implicit difference	
original citation	articulated side (paraphrase)	unuttered (opposite) side
"[...] the people of Azawad [...] MNA appeals to the Malian people"	population of northern Mali (Azawad) and the Malian population as separate ethnic entities	the Malian population as a whole being at the basis of the Malian nation-state

¹¹⁹ In parts, this method is inspired by an approach in text data analysis that focuses on differences (see Titscher and Mayer 1998). In this context, analysing explicit (i.e. outspoken) and implicit (i.e. within the framework of the discourse potential but not mentioned) differences leads to an assessment of negative and positive horizons within which social roles, norms and programmes develop. Practically, revealing those differences is implemented by addressing appropriate questions to the texts. For an example of working along a similar set of questions against the background of DM see Moser (2015: 163-184).

¹²⁰ Nota bene: As it was explained in previous sections, the present work plan includes different steps of analysis and interpretation. Thereby, comparison plays a key role in spotting linkages in the text corpus, e.g. concerning intersections between codes and categories. In this way, hypotheses (or: answers to the overall research question) are generated, iteratively tested and reshaped with respect to the sequential composition of the text corpus. Against this background, a single text passage can not be viewed in isolation. Any analytical statement on a selected text passage stands in the context of other analytical statements made hitherto.

“Representing the people of Azawad, the MNA [...] to the authorities of the Republic of Mali [...]”	MNA as legitimate representation of the population in northern Mali; Malian state as disputable authority concerning the northern part of the country	MNA as a player among others in Malian society, participating in the Malian political systems with justifiable interests
“[...] simply recognise its rights that have been ridiculed for 50 years.”	population of northern Mali has naturally given rights, especially the right of a people to self-determination; deliberate violation of international law since independence of the Malian state (50 years ago)	history of rapprochement between (ethnic) groups in Mali since independence, both with setbacks and successes
“[...] the people of Azawad decide to wage a peaceful and merciless combat against the occupation.”	(again) Azawad as a separate people; declaration to pursue agenda without violence but also without any restraint; depiction of the Malian state’s power as unlawful “occupation”	option of carrying out the conflict with open violence/ declaring war; understanding the Malian state as sovereign and thus as guarantor of law and order and holder of the state monopoly on violence

Based on this sequence illustrating elements of reflecting interpretation and others from the Malian case study, analytical conclusions could be drawn and later on be consolidated: First, in MNA’s perspective, the population of northern Mali and other parts of the population in Mali are considered to be separate entities.

Second, as this short piece of the text corpus shows, the MNA is presented as the only legitimate representation of the population in the north. Against the background of various ethnic groups living in the north, the statement does not only suggest that the MNA is able and willing to pick up interests and claims of all parts of the population in north but also that it could do so with the consent of the people.

Third, the struggle for independence of the Malian nation state in the 1960s is not seen as a success story for the population in northern Mali but as a historical fallacy. It is suggested that the history of the northern population as a whole up to the current situation is one of discrimination and marginalisation in each societal realm. The narrative is presented as a history of suffering and conveys the idea of an injured and unfulfilled identity. What is not represented in the narrative (“blind spot”), on the other hand, are episodes of successful and consensual development and cooperation between different ethnic groups and the Malian state.

Finally (but without claiming to be exhaustive; see chapter 6), the efforts to overcome the given situation are perceived as a “combat”, thus at least rhetorically exceeding the field of non-violent political contest. At the same time, it is declared that this combat is conducted “peacefully”, which is a reference to an existing norm of non-violent resistance behind. As it becomes clear later on, the declared commitment to non-violent political action can be seen as a pointed reference to the violent history of Tuareg rebellions and bloody crackdowns. In this sense, despite this history of suffering and in contrast to earlier endeavours, the MNA chooses

the way of non-violent resistance to pursue its goals. However, the political combat is supposed to be fought “without mercy” which opens up the rhetorical way towards softening the non-violence norm.

Based on suchlike cumulative reflecting interpretation of the text corpora, the results of the case studies (chapters 5/6) are presented in form of analytical narratives. An analytical narrative can be understood as a ‘conflict story’ that links up grounded hypotheses on the knock-on effect of certain observations in escalating conflict systems. An analytical narrative thus integrates formulating and reflecting interpretation into a case-based description of a discursive process. Within the framework of the present research project, the analytical narratives offered here rest on a mosaic of codes gained during the first steps of research and structured according to three basic dimensions of meaning presented earlier (see 3D conflict model in chapter 3.1). Therefore, an analytical narrative consists of three paths of reading the conflict with different but overlapping foci (see chapters 5.2/5.3/5.4 and 6.2/6.3/6.4) that are finally brought together in a synopsis (see chapters 5.5 and 6.5). The synopsis offers a discursive reconstruction of an escalating conflict system along a multitude of hypotheses of varying ranges. In doing so, turning points of conflict development that have been identified during the analysis are highlighted. These turning points stand in line with a number of ‘escalating moves’ of the discourse that could be identified.

Special observation spots: escalating moves, structural couplings, and normative shifts

The concept of an *escalating move* developed on the basis of case study research here refers to, at least to some extent, the concept of “securitizing move”, which has been developed in Copenhagen School’s securitisation theory (see Buzan et al. 1998). At its core, securitisation theory intends “to explain how an issue evolves (or is made to be) a security issue and how conflicts emerge and escalate due to securitization processes” (Bernshausen and Bonacker 2011: 26). According to Buzan et al. (1998: 25), securitisation can further on be understood as “the inter-subjective establishment of an existential threat with a saliency sufficient to have substantial political effects.” Based on that, a securitising move consists of a discursive practice, or more precisely, a set of speech acts asserting an existential threat against the self and, as a consequence thereof, claiming whatever means to encounter that threat (see Bonacker 2007: 16-19).¹²¹

Similar to the definition of securitising move above, an escalating move refers to a discursive practice, too. However, observing a cluster of speech acts as an escalating move is part of an analysis that aims at understanding how, in communication, an issue or an identity evolves into (or is made to be) a *conflict* issue or identity.¹²² Broadly speaking, an escalating move

¹²¹ It would certainly exceed the framework of this subchapter to give a full account of securitisation theory (for a key reference see Buzan et al. 1998). Having said that, here, it can at least be stated that securitisation theory and the present study’s mode of systems theoretical conflict research share the same roots inasmuch as both rely on the fundamental idea that ‘security’ and ‘conflict’ are phenomena fabricated within the social and thus need to be understood as communicatively constructed.

¹²² Nota bene: Compared to the concept of securitising move, the concept of escalating move does not exclusively refer to the discursive construction of *security* and its consequences concerning conflict development. Also, the observation of escalating moves is not limited to rather late conflict phases that are characterised by the perception of an existential threat against self and other (see Messmer’s phase of “power conflicts”). Rather, within the framework of this study, escalating moves can be identified at different points of conflict development, even in its early phases.

describes a discursive cluster of events whereby parts of communication that were not observed as such before become then observed as meaningful and relevant within a conflict lens. This leads to a discursive expansion of the conflict.¹²³ Based on the case studies, it can be stated that escalating moves are linked to two discursive momenta, here conceptualised as (1) “normative shifts” and (2) “structural couplings”.

(1) As it has been addressed earlier in the context of Luhmann’s identity layers (see chapter 4.1), norms can be regarded as quite robust manifestations of reciprocal expectations in social relationships. In a systems theoretical understanding, norms, e.g. intersubjectively shared ideas, values and moral concepts, develop within communication and, at the same time, regulate future communication. Albeit understood as stable structures of expectation, norms can and do change. As the case studies elucidated, escalating moves, on the one hand, are characterised by *normative shifts*. A normative shift represents an analytical figure of observation developed in the context of the present study; it refers to dynamics entailing new or changed ideas and values that become discursive references and thus deeply shape structures of expectation.

Exemplarily, in the case study on Maidan protests in Ukraine, when more and more actions and groups were declared “terrorist” and the category became commonly accepted, this can indeed be understood as a normative shift since it not only included a fundamental change of opinions and moral judgements between alter and ego; it also discursively triggered off a certain set of measures to be adopted.¹²⁴ Likewise, in the Malian case study, evidence suggests that, up to a particular time, there was a clear commitment to non-violent political action. However, towards the end of 2011, this norm was taken over from the idea that political objectives can also be legitimately advanced by means of organised collective violence (see exemplary statements documenting the shift of the discourse below).

“Since more than 50 years, the people of Azawad is committed to a *peaceful political struggle* against the occupation to which it is exposed.” (MNLA 3.11.2011d; italics added)

“We, the nomadic people of the North, are all united by the certitude that *only the threat of force and violence can bring us what we long for.*” (MNLA 6.11.2011; italics added)

(2) A second momentum characterising an escalating move can be seen in the idea of *structural coupling*. Originally, the terminus comes from Luhmannian systems theory; it refers to a standard kind of relationship between different social systems. Based on to the concept of autopoiesis (see chapter 3.1), social systems feature the ability to reproduce their own constitutive elements and thereby to demarcate themselves from their environment. In the political system, for example, the world is observed in the light of having power or not. Therefore, communication in the political system continuously processes the allocation of power to persons or specific roles, e.g. as to opposition and government. Although, from the perspective of a single social system,

¹²³ Even though escalating *move* raises connotations referring to actions (e.g. of individuals), “move” in this concept rather describes a certain dynamic of the whole discourse or, in other words, of the social systems towards an intensifying and thus escalating conflict system.

¹²⁴ See exemplary text passages above (in subsection “Starting with initial coding”; GovUkr 22.01.2014a; UkrN 25.01.2014c; KyivPost 31.01.2014). On norms in general, it can be stated that they represent intersubjectively shared expectations of behaviour. In specifiable social settings or situations, they do distinguish appropriate from inappropriate behaviour and are shared by a critical number of actors in a respective social realm (see e.g. Weller and Bösch 2015: 5).

other social systems are part of the environment, any social system implements certain adaptations to its given environment since it is permanently exposed to irritations from the outside. Irritations induce a resonance in the inside and, after being ‘translated’ into the respective system’s language, turn into processible informations. In so doing, a structural coupling between social systems can develop (see Luhmann 1997: 92-119; Simsa 2002: 149-154).

To make recourse to a classical empirical example: In various ways, the economic and the political system are structurally coupled since communication from both systems can be mutually interpreted within the framework of both system’s respective currencies: money and power. For instance, the economic system is able to process the political system’s communication, which aims at implementing decision-making power in form of taxes or other binding financial institutions. On the other hand, the political system is able to respond to the economic system’s communication in the context of a money-based market meant for organising supply and demand (see Miebach 2010: 275-279).¹²⁵ Other examples would be the structural coupling between mass media, public opinion and politics outlined earlier in chapter 4.2 (see Luhmann 1996; Weller 2002, 2004) or between the systems of science and politics (see Luhmann 1990; Martinsen 2006).

Within the framework of this study’s approach, the present work plan calls attention on the formation of structural couplings as crucial elements of conflict development. As mentioned earlier, metaphorically, conflict systems correspond to communicative maelstroms that urge their environment to take a stance. In this sense, the essence of a conflict system lies in its ability to successfully irritate and bind its environment, i.e. other social systems. Since conflict systems are “parasitical social systems” (Luhmann 1995: 390), they grow by incorporating host systems so that, henceforth, new communication gets connected in a conflict lens. In other words, based on their inner dynamic, conflict systems are ‘extroverted’ social systems: they permanently irritate their environment which represents a strong incentive concerning the formation of structural couplings. With that said, the present study pursues a rather pragmatic and adapted empirical approach to conflict systems that identifies structural couplings to be active when communication (from a specific social subsystem) gets articulated, observed and reacted to (by another social subsystem), and, in the course of this, becomes mutually processable, understandable, connectable and contradicted on a regular basis.¹²⁶ Two examples from the case study on the Maidan protests in Ukraine can illustrate this (see exemplary passages from the text corpus below):

¹²⁵ Beyond this rather holistic perspective on structurally coupled systems in these general terms, it can be stated here that these systems consist of myriads of ‘micro’ communications effectuating structural coupling in interactions, organisation and functional systems as a whole. Against this background, business deals of certain politicians during the Corona pandemic that have been referred to as “mask deals” in the media and, furthermore, political debates referring to a lobby register with the German parliament do indeed represent a facet of structural coupling between political and economic communication (and the media).

¹²⁶ According to John et al. (2010: 324) “systems theoretical empirical research does not implicate to take Luhmann’s entire theory and possible advancements as a basis”. Rather, ‘using’ particular concepts from system theory should be guided by an empirical problem. In this sense, the interpretation of the concept of structural coupling introduced above saves to integrate all aspects from Luhmannian systems theory.

“Euromaidan – Citizens of Ukraine stand up and try to make their voice heard in Europe which does not end at the eastern border of the EU. They fight for their European future in a united Europe. [...] Today, more than ever, Ukrainians need Europe’s attention. They need attention and support of the European citizens who already enjoy those European values.” (UkrN 24.11.2013)

“Ukraine can never make a sacrifice of economic sovereignty, so the recent Governmental decision of Nov 21 concerning signing the Association Agreement with the EU was adopted in order not to afford social and economic fiasco and achieve more favourable conditions for Ukraine.” (GovUkr 27.11.2013e)

Right from the beginning of the Maidan protests in late November 2013, contradictions concerning Ukraine’s future model of politics and society and its either western or eastern orientation were not the only topics (see passage above on the left). Apart from political communication about, for example, the organisation of responsibilities and power in Ukraine’s transitional society, economic considerations played a central role right from the start. More precisely, in the first phase of conflict development, the conflict system’s communication not only turned on a political contradiction about a single foreign policy decision and possible consequences for the perceived (international and domestic) balance of power; it also included reflections on economic rationality (see passage above on the right). In doing so, the decision on the EU Association Agreement was assessed against the background of the logic of the market concerning e.g. the competitiveness of Ukrainian companies or the ups and downs of certain scarce resources and goods. In sum, as the analysis of communication in the first period of investigation (Nov 21-30, phase I; see chapter 5) reveals, the discourse mirrors a structural coupling of political power claims and economic profit and loss accounts with regard to the alternatives raised.

The second example of a structural coupling deals with the first turning point of conflict escalation that has been identified in the case study on the Maidan protests. As mentioned above, phase I, in a nutshell, is characterised by a dispute over Ukraine’s ‘right way’ in domestic and international politics and, in doing so, by a dominance of politico-economic arguments. After the turning point (i.e. the first attempt to ‘clean’ Maidan square by force), which marks the passage to phase II (Nov 30 – Dec 17; see chapter 5), communication increasingly circles around the question of law and lawfulness of government action.

“Unlawful use of force to subdue the Euro-Maidan demonstration: President Yanukovich’s brutal and unsparing use of force to quash Ukrainian citizens’ rights of peaceful assembly and speech.” (MMIC 2.12.2013a)

“On behalf of the government, I’d like to apologize for the actions of our law enforcement agencies on Maidan. Both the president and the Government deeply regret what happened.” (Prime Minister Mykola Azarov, speech in Parliament; GovUkr 3.12.2013d)

As the text passages above exemplarily show, communication in the context of law (e.g. references to “citizen’s rights of peaceful assembly and speech” or to “law enforcement”), which has not been referred to before, gets straightforwardly processed and incorporated within the conflict system. In this way, it captures a further reservoir of meaning so that the conflict system’s communication gets even more connectable or, in other words, irritating for the system’s environment.

In summary, it can be said that a conflict system's escalating moves, on closer empirical inspection, are composed of normative shifts and structural couplings realised through and documented in communication. In this context, as introduced in chapter 3.2, conflict systems are understood as arenas of world societal communication. While developing and thus bringing about escalating moves, conflict systems necessarily draw on different communicative reservoirs including existing and just contrary modes of differentiation in world society, e.g. concerning political communication that mainly circles around a still dominant but at least questioned idea of organising power around the nation state; at the same time, there is economic communication suggesting to observe the world as a globalised market (see examples from the case study on the Maidan protests below).

original text passage	selected code memos
“The Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine has adopted the resolution on conclusion of the Association Agreement between Ukraine and the European Union in accordance with which for the benefit of Ukraine’s national security the process of preparing for signing of the Association Agreement between Ukraine and EU is suspended.” (GovUkr 21.11.2013a)	- national security as key factor of political assessment - rapprochement to EU as a quasi loss of sovereignty
“The young people protesting in the square rejected the game of political tit-for-tat. For them, the EU represents modernity, transparency in political life [...]. Young Ukrainians see themselves as part of the global community of youth.” (The Ukrainian Week 23.12.2013: 19)	- EU as a desirable model - rejection of authoritarian exercise of political power
“We must [sic] to take vigorous measures to improve the performance of industrial production. First of all, it depends on the markets and the prices of manufactured goods produced in Ukraine. Unfortunately, we have a long-term decline in demand for our products on world markets.” (GovUkr 21.11.2013f)	- world market as main benchmark for economic activities

Theoretically, based on the fault lines hypothesis (see Albert 2010: 57), it is postulated that (violent) conflict is a key element of the social within world society. Empirically, as the present case studies are intended to illustrate, the world societal footprint of conflict escalation can be unveiled since the analysis pays particular attention to the world societal horizon in communication (see selected text passages above). In other words, both analytical narratives presented in the case study parts of this contribution also address the aspiration to scan the text corpora for evidence indicating the discursive performance within the broader framework of world society.

4.5 A Method(ological) Motto: Taking Communication Seriously!

“The thesis of operative constructivism does not lead to a ‘weltverlust’; it does not deny that there is a reality. However, it does not presume the world as an object but as a horizon, hence, as being beyond reach. Thus, there is no other option but constructing reality and, possibly, observing observers how they construct reality.” (Luhmann 1996: 18-19)

In the following paragraphs, the above presented work plan that served as a guideline for the case study research, is summarised by recalling the key tags. At this, the motto “Taking Communication Seriously”¹²⁷ can be understood as the golden thread of the work plan. In a nutshell, chapter 4 begins by outlining the epistemological basics of constructivist empirical research, particularly by recapitulating the essence of interpretative and reflexive approaches to conflicts: the discursive construction of conflict collectively happens within communication and, even more far-reaching, the social world as a whole emerges from communication. And sciences/scientists are part of it, not bystanders (chapter 4.1).

Following this focus on communication, the concept of case studies as plausibility probes is unfolded. In terms of case selection, Messmer’s conflict model is thereby introduced as a helpful heuristic tool of exploration to get a structuring overview on communication about potential cases in research, media and politics. However, despite all efforts to keep case selection transparent and systematic, it is worth to bring the principle of contingency in mind: there are path dependencies of case selection, here explained as cycles of research, pragmatic factors and individual moments that shaped the personal and scientific interest in both selected cases (chapter 4.2).

In this contribution, the motto of taking communication seriously is furthermore implemented by the concept and method of reconstruction. The working principle behind analysing the recorded traces of the social construction of conflict is the idea of second-order observation, or, as Luhmann puts it in the introductory quote to this subsection, the idea of “observing observers how they construct reality.” Practically, as outlined above, this claim is realised by combining elements of *Grounded Theory* and the *Documentary Method* (including systematic coding, comparison, and contrasting of text data and hypotheses; sequential analysis; focus on collective structures of meaning). In this context, text data selection was carried out with the help of a conflict observation map that shows discursive working levels, which represented an orientation for the growing text corpora. Broadly speaking, reconstruction, based on an inductive discovery through text data, is aimed at iteratively gaining hypotheses and, hence, developing an analytical narrative (chapter 4.3).

¹²⁷ This motto refers to an often-cited article from Andrew Moravcsik (1997) titled “Taking Preferences Seriously”. Therein, Moravcsik introduces a ‘liberal theory of international politics’, which, at its core, claims that state preferences in foreign policy are linked to the assertiveness of domestic actors. In a sense, Moravcsik thus advocates for making IR more oriented towards society (which is not evaluated equally important in other prominent IR theories, e.g. in neorealism). Even though the liberal or realist idea of state behaviour in IR can be seen as superseded in the light of the present systems theoretical approach, it is stated here that Moravcsik’s point of taking societal forces more into account is highly significant. In a way, Moravcsik’s considerations find a distant sequel in this study’s focus on communication and discourse as sources of the social (albeit from a different meta-theoretical perspective).

As the work plan behind the case studies outlined above shows, in order to technically support the methodological proceeding of this project, qualitative data analysis software is used as a tool to organise the text corpora, particularly to prepare text data for a sequential analysis; also, QDA software offers important features to realise a comprehensive coding procedure that not only enables to sketch a ‘topographic map’ of the discourse’s thematic content but also to manage the permanent tasks of asking questions, comparing, combining and reflecting. In doing so, the whole process aims at identifying and understanding the turning points of conflict escalation, which go hand in hand with escalating moves of the conflict discourse (chapter 4.4).

In conclusion, referring back to the introductory quote of chapter 4.1 – “We must be careful not to confound map with territory” (Luhmann 2013[1997]: 178) – it is once again emphasised that the analytical narratives offered here, in the form of case study results, do certainly not claim to be the “territory” in Luhmann’s quotation. Since observation, in principle, implies an infinite regress, the “last observer” cannot be identified (Luhmann 1996: 210; see chapter 3.1) and, therefore, the “territory” as such can never be looked at. Rather, to use the same metaphor, a case study represents an analytical ‘map’ that comes into being by a systematic synopsis of other maps.¹²⁸ Against this background, the ‘story’ of conflict escalation that is told in the case studies represents a possible reading among others. Hence, the approach developed in this contribution is not intended to postulate ‘what actually happened’ in a conflict setting. Being highly sceptical against this kind of essentialist claims, this approach is not about covering a maximum possible number of events or about representativity. Rather, it develops a “reading of readings” (Nonhoff 2011: 101) and offers “analyses of production processes of constructions” (Weller 2005b: 318). Now, by investigating discursive representations with the help of an open methodological proceeding, Part II puts the present approach into practice.

¹²⁸ This comparison may remind some readers of *Geographic Information Systems* (GIS; see e.g. National Geographic 2017 at <https://www.nationalgeographic.org/encyclopedia/geographic-information-system-gis>). Indeed, GIS applications do literally work with a myriad of maps, each of them illustrating different main topics. In map overlay processes, i.e. digitally combining selected maps with one another, geographers draw conclusions on relationships, patterns and trends concerning spatial development against the background of respective research questions.

PART II: CASE STUDIES

“People do not commit political violence without discourse. They need to talk themselves into it.” (Apter 2001: 2)

In Part I, the theoretical and methodological foundations of a reconstructive systems theoretical approach to constructivist conflict studies are outlined and discussed in greater detail. Based on that, in Part II, the results of two empirical case studies on the Maidan protests in Ukraine from late November 2013 to February 2014 (chapter 5) and on the antecedent of the armed conflict in Mali from October 2010 to February 2012 (chapter 6) are presented. These case studies are understood as plausibility probes, i.e. they are designed to empirically illustrate the analytical framework developed above (see chapter 3/4). This contribution focuses on two sequences of conflict-related observations or, in other words, two discursive clusters that emerged around a common conflict reference as two cases of developing conflict systems.

In comparison to other more conventional designs of case study research (see e.g. George and Bennett 2005), the present case studies are by and large refraining from a comprehensive reappraisal of a classical case study background, such as extensive introductions to the Ukrainian and Malian history or systematic accounts of the existing analytical literature. Thus, instead of deducing more or less explicit hypotheses about conflict development from suchlike considerations, the case studies were conducted on the basis of documented text-based communication that had been produced within the respective periods of investigation (see Appendix A.1.1/A.1.2). This approach sees itself as a kind of approximation procedure and is based on the general assumption that all kind of analytically relevant information, be it, for example, references to meaningful events experienced in the past, is supposed to be activated or reproduced in the given discursive frame of the analysed conflict communication (see details in chapter 4.4).

In the first sections of the case study chapters, the practical starting points and procedures of the implemented analyses are outlined, including explanations about the composition of the text data corpora (particularly concerning the selection of sources). As introduced in chapter 4, within the framework of the case study design here, the processing of the text data was effected by means of a multi-step analysis inspired i.a. by the *Documentary Method* and drawing upon elements of *Grounded Theory* (see Bohnsack 2014; Thornberg and Charmaz 2013). To present the results of the case studies (i.e. reconstructions of escalating conflict systems), the following chapters portrays a great deal of particular analytical elements that are gradually assembled to an overall picture of conflict escalation in the end. For this purpose, the Luhmannian dimensions of meaning (factual, temporal, and social) not only served as a useful tool to conceptually guide the coding procedure during the analysis but also as a superstructure to organise and present the case study results in form of three initial ‘paths of reading’ to grasp the process of conflict development. In this sense, chapters 5.2/5.3/5.4 and 6.2/6.3/6.4 are dealing with a portrayal of what has been said, depicted or discussed and what has become the topic of discourse. In other words, this corresponds to a kind of “formulating interpretation” (Bohnsack 2014: 225-228) which can here be characterised as a methodical step that does not produce

abstracting language and theorising results but bounds itself to an accurate representation of the topical structure. However, a full understanding of the case studies in the sense of the present contribution is unfolded in the synopsis chapters (5.5/6.5) where critical moments of conflict development, particularly *escalating moves* composed of *structural couplings* and *normative shifts*, are presented. They are identified based on a systematic reflection of the modes of observation lying behind the factual, temporal and social structure and are thus results of a kind of “reflecting interpretation” (Bohnsack 2014: 225-228). In this context, the world societal grounding of conflict communication plays a crucial role.

In summary, it can be stated that the case studies here are presented as analytical narratives consisting of a multitude of iteratively gained hypotheses that are cast in scientific prose. They represent the outcome of a close-meshed examination of text data and thus provide a direct connection to the conflict system’s dynamic. To invite readers of the present study to delve into this kind of representation of a conflict discourse, the analytical narratives systematically use exemplary citations from the text corpus that support respective interpretative and analytical statements. Even though the text corpora of the case studies are structured according to two discursive working levels, particular groups of data sources are not as such in the focus of attention. For the case studies here, it is the discursive construction of conflict taking place collectively within communication that matters most.

Chapter 5 (“Observing a Developing Conflict System: The Maidan Protests in Ukraine 2013/2014”) deals with the Maidan protests as a developing conflict system. Since the Maidan protests represent a spatially and temporally condensed microcosm of conflict development, we are dealing with a very special and exceptionally convenient case of a conflict system. Therefore, based on the analysis of the text corpus in several steps according to the methodological approach outlined earlier, Chapter 5 presents the Maidan protests as a succession of six escalating moves the conflict discourse carries out during four phases. Therefore, the case study begins to trace conflict development in Ukraine in an environment where new forms of attributing political power (esp. supranational integration) encounter strong ideas of national emancipation and self-determination, up to the end of the investigation period when the legitimate use of force is claimed by different sides and degrading the other has become a widespread phenomenon.

Chapter 6 (“Ways into Armed Conflict and War: Observing Mali’s Crisis in 2010-2012”) addresses the process of conflict escalation in the context of the Mali’s crisis from November 2010 to January 2012. The results of the case study presented in chapter 6, too, are based on the analysis of the text corpus in several steps according to the methodological approach outlined earlier. Hence, Mali’s crisis in 2010-2012 gets portrayed as a succession of three escalating moves the conflict discourse carries out in three phases. At the beginning of the investigation period, the case study’s tracing of the conflict development starts with a presentation of (northern) Mali as part of a conflict-shaken region in the past and as still being an object to external power dynamics that operate according to a centre-periphery model. The case study traces the process up to the end of the investigation period when the use of force becomes a generalised and legitimate means to achieve or defend democracy.

Finally, a remark concerning the handling of the following case study chapters: At this point, readers are invited to find their way through the following presentation of the case studies. The obvious way would be to read the case studies from beginning to the end and thus to

track and understand the research process, as passed through by this author. The other possible way would be to start reading with the big picture (chapter 5.6/6.6) and then gradually go back into the case study details.¹²⁹ Hinting at this kind of ‘zooming’ through the case studies is not only meant as a tip to get a feeling for the abundance of the material and the amount of text; it has also a wider methodological significance for this work. Therefore, readers may also directly switch to chapter 7.1 on “How to use the Zoom” and then come back to the case studies.

¹²⁹ By referring to these *two* ways of reading the case studies, this study, of course, neither intends to encourage unreflected binary thinking nor to exclude many other non-linear ways of approaching these texts in a meaningful mode.

CHAPTER 5. Observing a Developing Conflict System: The Maidan Protests in Ukraine 2013/2014

“The Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine has adopted the resolution on conclusion of the Association Agreement between Ukraine, on the one hand, and the European Union, on the other hand, at its meeting on November 21, 2013, in accordance with which for the benefit of Ukraine’s national security the process of preparing for signing of the Association Agreement between Ukraine and EU is suspended.” (GovUkr 21.11.2013a)

Immediately after this statement had become known, about 1.000 citizens came to *Maidan Nezalezhnosti* (“Independence Square”) in the centre of Kiev to protest against president Viktor Yanukovych and his government’s plans not to sign the EU Association Agreement. According to the *Maidan Monitoring Information Center* (MMIC), a Ukrainian non-governmental organisation, social media played a crucial role in helping the protests to gather momentum right from the outset.¹³⁰ Only three days later, on November 24, the largest demonstration since the Orange Revolution in 2004 took place, as the *Kyiv Post*, a Ukrainian newspaper based in Kiev, headlines in its weekly print edition.¹³¹ According to the newspaper, estimates from people on the scene ranged from 50.000 to 100.000 participants protesting against Ukraine’s abrupt U-turn in foreign policy while dubbing their peaceful rally as “EuroMaidan”. Moreover, despite all the serious fears and claims the people on Maidan were determined to express, the atmosphere on Kiev’s central square in those days reminded a bit of a public festival: bands performing on different stages, people singing and dancing while provoding themselves with food and warmth in the tents of the EuroMaidan camp that covered the whole square (see *Kyiv Post* 29.11.2013: 18-20).

Less than three months later, eyewitness reports draw a fundamentally different picture of Kiev’s Maidan:

“It’s an on-going crumping of flash grenades. Ukrainian policemen shoot at Ukrainian citizens. Only 15 meters away from me, a protester lost his hand from a grenade. He’s stretchered off. Pungent smoke, soot, Molotov cocktails everywhere.”¹³²

¹³⁰ The official “EuroMaidan” Facebook page, established by journalists and civil society activists, has garnered more than 102.000 subscribers since its beginning late on November 21. During the first days of the demonstrations the page appeared in the top 20 of Ukrainian Facebook pages (see *KyivPost* 1.12.2013). However, in the aftermath of the protests, a large-scale research project dealing with the role of social media relativised the widely unchallenged strong role of social media, saying that facebook in itself (or social media in general) did not make people protest (see Onuch 2015).

¹³¹ As it will be outlined, the “Orange Revolution” of 2004 represents a key reference for observers of the Maidan protests in 2013/2014 (see below 5.3; for a detailed historical perspective on the Orange Revolution in Ukraine apart from the present study see Kappeler 2014).

¹³² This statement first and foremost represents a personal perspective of an individual observer on the situation on the Maidan, February 18, 2014 (see Dathe and Rostek 2014: 9; statement by Andriy Vovk). Yet, it stands for a huge number of eyewitness reports that were published in the aftermath of the protests (see also Andrukhovych 2014; Kurkow 2014; Schuller 2014) and are exemplarily cited here to illustrate how completely different the scenery is perceived compared to the beginning of the protests. Nevertheless, within the framework of this case study, such observations would be analytically relevant only if they were broadly articulated in the (real-time) context of conflict communication (which is obviously not the case here since the reports were published in late 2014).

On February 21, the Kyiv Post refers to central Kiev as a “war zone” where protesters catch fire as they run from burning barricades and, during the pauses, the bodies of persons slain during the clashes are inspected (Kyiv Post 21.02.2014). On the same day, after president Yanukovych and opposition leaders had signed an agreement that includes the return to the 2004 constitution and new presidential elections, Andrej Kurkow, a Ukrainian novelist, commented, “So far, there is no victory. And probably there won’t be one. Ukraine has already lost. More than 100 citizens of our country are dead.” (Kurkow 2014: 128). In sum, there are between 500 to 600 casualties and more than 100 deaths (protesters, policemen) that were officially declared victims of Maidan and later on referred to as the “Heavenly Hundred Heroes” (Kyiv Post 26.06.2014; see also Marples 2014: 25).

From a present-day perspective, the Maidan protests in Kiev seem to mark the starting point of a long-lasting crisis in Ukraine that brought about a contested modification of the status of Crimea, separatism and war in the south-eastern regions of Donetsk and Lugansk, and newly emerging contradictions between the policies of Russia, Ukraine, the EU and the USA that led to long-term tensions (e.g. a new regime of mutual political and economic sanctions; see UCDP 2020b). Even though the overall development of the Ukrainian crisis in the long run may be highly interesting, the present case study concentrates on how the situation on Maidan, both in a material and metaphorical sense, was observed in a relatively short time frame from late November 2013 to February 2014. Throughout the history of Ukraine, particularly since the country’s independence in 1991, the central square in Kiev has been perceived as a symbolically charged site.¹³³ During the 2013/2014 protests, once again, Maidan was seen way beyond a simple geographical venue of pro-European or anti-government demonstrations in the capital of Ukraine, it became the epitome of the country’s future or, as a comment on MMIC’s website says, of “Ukraine’s soul” (MMIC 24.12.2013a).

Obviously, within a short period of time, the political, economic and social landscape in Ukraine changed in a dramatic way. Protests that had widely been observed as peaceful expressions of political will turned into civil war-like conditions within less than three months. How exactly did the protests on Maidan escalate? More particularly, how could violence become a part of the dispute? Based on the analysis of the text data, the following sections present the condensed results of the empirical case study on the Maidan protests and thus answer the questions raised.

5.1 Communication about the Maidan Protests: Cutting Swathes into Unclear Terrain

“Maidan! Ukraine, Europe.”¹³⁴

As outlined earlier, conflicts are understood as social systems in their own right. In this sense, ‘Maidan’ here is conceptualised as a conflict system or, in other words, as a discursive arena where contradicting communication got interlinked and stabilised over time. In order to

¹³³ See documentation “Ukrainian Maidans are 25 years old” (MMIC 2015; see also MMIC 4.01.2014a, Kappeler 2014).

¹³⁴ This is the title of a book that depicts personal experiences and eyewitness reports from the protests on Maidan 2013/2014 (see Dathe and Rostek 2014).

approximately reconstruct the process of conflict escalation in the given time frame, this case study aims at setting marks into this unique discursive field of relational references called Maidan. Of course, there is a myriad of stories about how the Maidan protests are perceived by its observers at any given moment. Thus, the constitution and composition of Maidan as a conflict system or, more precisely, the attribution of issues, parties and actions to the frame ‘Maidan protests’ or ‘EuroMaidan’ was continuously changing in the course of conflict escalation. To capture this dynamic, it was necessary to clearly stake the claim of the case study’s empirical basis.

In this case study, the analysed corpus of texts involves 575 documents that were selected according to the methodological approach.¹³⁵ First, there are official government documents. These mainly include speeches, statements, announcements, and press releases of the president, the prime minister and other government members that were released via the “Government portal”, i.e. the official web-portal of the Ukrainian government.¹³⁶ Second, to grasp the widespread political contradiction from civil society that had been articulated through a wide range of public channels after the government’s suspension of the EU Association Agreement, this analysis drew on a pragmatic auxiliary means.¹³⁷ All documents analysed were gathered from “volunteer community resources” that are attributed to “civil society opposition”, i.e. websites that collect news, articles, and posts from other websites and social media as well as commentaries from its own staff to make them available for a larger public, virtually in real-time, during the protests.¹³⁸ Third, according to the procedure on working level II, Ukraine-based mass media, i.e. print media coverage of the Maidan protests was also an essential part of the analysis. For this purpose, all weekly issues of the *KyivPost* and all biweekly issues of *The Ukrainian Week* that had been published during the investigation period were analysed.¹³⁹ Finally, the text corpus

¹³⁵ For an explanation of the empirical working levels of this study see chapter 4.3; for details concerning sources of the text corpus see Appendix A.1 and figure below.

¹³⁶ Official government statements are published in Ukrainian and Russian, which are the official languages in Ukraine. However, already well before the period of investigation, Ukrainian authorities changed over to the praxis of simultaneously releasing all official statements in Ukrainian, Russian *and English* as standard (see Appendix A.1.1).

¹³⁷ Indeed, at that time, civil society experienced a kind of awakening considering the growing number of online fora, platforms, and organisations (see e.g. “Maidan Press Center”, at <http://maidanpresscenter.com.ua>; “Euro-maidanSOS”, at <http://euromaidansos.org/en/>; “EuromaidanPress”, at <http://euromaidanpress.com>; “Institute of Mass Information”, at <http://imi.org.ua/en/>), not to mention the massive increase of discursive input from social media via facebook and other social media (see Onuch 2015). Yet, it would be next to impossible to analytically cover the totality of all these sources within the framework of the present case study.

¹³⁸ This case study particularly operated with texts (re-)issued by the Maidan Monitoring Information Center (MMIC) (see figure below for the website titled “Maidan – A Free Person in a Free Country”). The MMIC was chosen because it is one of the very few volunteer community resources that covers the whole investigation period and offers all documents in English. Additionally, documents from “Ukraine-Nachrichten” (UkrN), an internet platform providing German translations of much-quoted news and agency reports as well as facebook posts and blog commentaries were included (at <http://ukraine-nachrichten.de>). Since information is provided only if it is evaluated as particularly significant “for the cause”, volunteer community resources represent a kind of self-regulating mechanisms of selection on their own.

¹³⁹ The *KyivPost* is Ukraine’s leading English-language newspaper. It was founded in 1995 and went online in 2002. Its circulation amounts to 25.000 copies. In 2010, the *KyivPost* began to publish in Ukrainian and Russian. The *Ukrainian Week* is a weekly (in Ukrainian language) resp. biweekly (in an English edition) magazine. It was founded in 2007. Its circulation amounts to 41.500 copies. Both newspapers are managed by Ukrainian journalists and are widely referred to as independent media. In 2014, the staff of *KyivPost* won the prestigious *Missouri Honor Medal for Distinguished Service in Journalism*, at <https://journalism.missouri.edu/the-j-school/the-missouri-honor-medal>, accessed December 8, 2020). The *KyivPost* and *The Ukrainian Week* were chosen for pragmatic reasons; even though both are published in English and thus, as such, do not fully participate in the broad Ukrainian-

includes statements and reports from different international non-governmental organisations that reported on the Maidan protests on a more or less regular basis, particularly from *Amnesty International* (AI), the *Centre of Policy and Legal Reforms* (CPLR), the *International Crisis Group* (ICG) and the *Ukrainian Helsinki Human Rights Union* (UHHRU).

Source Type	Document Type	Number of Documents	Sample Period
Ukrainian Government*	official statements: announcements, press releases, speeches	305 documents (each between 100 and 2.000 words)	November 21, 2013 – February 22, 2014
“Civil Society Opposition”**	statements, press releases, articles, commentaries, posts (social media)	200 documents (each between 100 and 1.000 words)	
Local Print Media (KyivPost; The Ukrainian Week)***	weekly/ biweekly issues	20 documents (each between 15 and 20 pages)	
(International) Non-Governmental Organisations (AI, CPLR, ICG, UHHRU)****	articles, alerts, briefings, reports, chronicles, commentaries	50 documents (each about 500 words)	

*Available at <http://www.kmu.gov.ua/control/en>

**Available at <http://world.maidan.org.ua> and <http://ukraine-nachrichten.de>

***Available at <http://www.kyivpost.com/newspaper/archive> and <http://ukrainianweek.com/Magazines>

****Available at <https://www.amnesty.org/en/countries/europe-and-central-asia/ukraine/> and <http://pravo.org.ua/en/> and <http://www.crisisgroup.org/en/regions/europe/ukraine.aspx> and <http://helsinki.org.ua/en/index.php>

Nota bene: All text data from websites were collected by this author in a period between 2015-2016. See also Appendix A.1.1.

Figure: Overview of the Text Data Corpus (Ukraine)

As a matter of course, all documents collected from one of these four groups of sources express distinct observations that are specific products of the respective mode of observation behind. Although these sources represent separate perspectives, they have a stake in the (re-) production of the discursive field of the Maidan protests and thus in the joint construction of the conflict system's plot.¹⁴⁰

language discourse in society, they are assumed to adequately mirror major parts of public discourse and thus of conflict development.

¹⁴⁰ As part of the implementation of this case study, a network of resource persons was established. This network includes Ukrainian researchers from *Viadrina European University* in Frankfurt (Oder), from the *Research Centre for East European Studies* at the University of Bremen, from the *Institut für Auslandsbeziehungen* in Stuttgart as well as

To provide assistance to navigate in the course of conflict and its presentation here, one of the main results of the sequential analysis of the data is highlighted at the very beginning: According to the week-by-week analysis, there are a few observation spots that are strikingly often referred to as turning points across the whole text corpus.¹⁴¹ Sequencing these dates reveals phases of conflict development that, at this point, serve as a guidance for the following sections:

	November 21, 2013	suspension of Association Agreement
Phase I	(to) November 30, 2013	“cleaning” of Maidan by force
Phase II	(to) December 17, 2013	“Russia-Ukraine-deal”
Phase III	(to) January 16, 2014	adoption of “anti-protest-laws”
Phase IV	(to) February 22, 2014	breakup of Ukrainian government

The following sections show how the Maidan protests, theoretically speaking, absorbed more and more attention and resources from its communicative environment. In order to show this, the sequential mapping of the text corpus was translated into an iteratively generated analytical narrative, whereby the main threads are outlined as three paths of reading the conflict with different but overlapping foci. First, in the *factual dimension*, the key themes are portrayed (chapter 5.2). In this context, beyond a simple register of discursive topics, the section illustrates how themes chronologically link together. At that, “EuroMaidan” played a crucial role as a kind of integrating umbrella term for an increasing number of thematic emphases during the protests. In a second step, the analytical focus lies on the “temporality of Maidan” (chapter 5.3). Since the whole case study is already structured according to a sequential principle, the temporality of Maidan is not intended to be an outline of the chronology of events on Maidan. Rather, the *temporal dimension* elaborates on how certain aspects of the past are actualised at a given moment of the conflict’s present and, accordingly, how plans and ideas about the future are condensed in the here and now of the conflict. The temporal limits of pre- and post conflict are thus variable, depending on those past events or future ideas being referred to as relevant to the conflict in the experienced present. In a third step, the case study deals with “Selfs and Others on Maidan” (chapter 5.4). Thus, focussing on the *social dimension*, the dynamics of emerging conflict identities and their relationship are illustrated. Beyond a mere development of the main parties to the conflict, the section is about the perceptions of each other and the corresponding

contact persons from the *Consulate General of Ukraine* in Munich. The successive composition of the text corpus is a result of personal consultations within the circle of these resource persons.

¹⁴¹ According to the work plan introduced in Chapter 4, the sequential analysis was implemented via summarising weekly folders. Within the framework of MaxQDA, the texts in these folders were coded both in chronological order and in due consideration of their origin/source. After the first step of the coding procedure (i.e. open coding of topics and subtopics) had been completed, the code system comprised 2.971 codings (i.e. passages in the texts that were attributed one or more codes; see Appendix A.2.1 for a MAXQDA extract displaying the management of documents in monthly folders/example: January 2014/Week 4; see Appendix A.2.2 for a screenshot of initial coding, i.e. the topographic map of “EuroMaidan”).

expectations in the course of conflict.¹⁴² In the synopsis section (chapter 5.5), by recombining the previous three paths of reading the conflict and outlining the modes of observation that operate in the background, critical moments of conflict development are represented in detail.

5.2 EuroMaidan: Tracing the Career of a Pregnant Buzzword

“Come on guys, let’s be serious. If you really want to change something, don’t just ‘like’ this post. Write that you are ready, and we can try to start something. Let’s meet at 10:30 p.m. near the monument to independence in the middle of Maidan.”
(Nayem 2014)

Phase I (Nov 21 – Nov 30)

In the evening of November 21, 2013, hundreds of activists and journalists immediately reacted, particularly via social media services like Facebook, Twitter and VKontakte¹⁴³, to the announcement that Ukraine’s government would suspend the signing of the Association Agreement with the EU (see Onuch 2015: 227-231). In the course of this, Mustafa Nayem’s Facebook post (see quote from Nayem 2014 above¹⁴⁴) was portrayed as a major trigger for the early stage of protest mobilisation on that day (MMIC 22.11.2013a; see also Onuch 2015: 217). In the first night of the protests about 1.000 protesters met at Maidan, Kiev’s Independence Square.

The outset of the investigation period (starting with the early protests on November 21) is characterised by a certain moment of surprise. Indeed, there were many wary voices from Ukrainian civil society towards the government, notably concerning its commitment to an unquestioning orientation to the West.¹⁴⁵ However, concerning its public image, the government had beaten the big drum in favour of European integration for months and, both rhetorically and concerning parliamentary decisions, left little doubt about its firm intention to sign the

¹⁴² Nota bene: Internally, chapter 5.2. (factual dimension) and chapter 5.4. (social dimension) are structured by means of subtitles indicating the conflict phase (see definition of phases I to IV above). In order not to confuse chronology with temporality (as explained above), chapter 5.3. on the temporal dimension of the conflict, in turn, is structured according to the groups of sources.

¹⁴³ Similar to Facebook in the English-speaking world, VKontakte is a multilingual social media platform that is mainly used by Russian-speaking users.

¹⁴⁴ Mustafa Nayem is a Ukrainian journalist who became widely known through his work for the internet newspaper *Ukrayinska Pravda* and an independent Ukrainian television channel, the *TVi channel*. In the October 2014 parliamentary elections, he was elected to the Ukrainian parliament on the then president’s party list “Petro Poroshenko Bloc Solidarity”.

¹⁴⁵ Since there were several unannounced meetings between Yanucovych and Putin shortly before the summit in Vilnius, people became suspicious. At the same time, leading figures of the ruling Party of Regions declared that they would not support European integration “at any price” (UkrN 15.11.2013; see also Kyiv Post 15.11.2013: 3). Additionally, the categorical refusal of the government to decide the “Tymoshenko-question”, which was a central condition of the EU, raised scepticism in Ukrainian society. Nota bene: After the Orange Revolution of 2004, Yulia Tymoshenko was Prime Minister in 2005 and from 2007 to 2010. When Yanucovych became president in 2010, Tymoshenko was sent to prison for seven years in court proceedings that international observers criticised as being politically motivated (see AI 19.11.2013).

Association Agreement at the imminent summit in Vilnius¹⁴⁶, as e.g. First Vice Prime Minister Serhiy Arbuzov's remarks before leaders of parliamentary factions illustrates:

"We need to take the final steps that will lead our country to a higher level of relations with the EU. I'd like to remind you that our responsibility is extremely high. [...] The positive effects of integration the country can feel when our economy will interact with European economies on an equal footing. Your legal work will help ensure European standards of life of our citizens. I hope that the proposed drafts [in preparation of the AA] will be taken." (GovUkr 18.11.2013)

Hence, in an atmosphere of (albeit slightly sceptical) EU-enthusiasm, the announcement of suspending the process of rapprochement with the EU for an indefinite period of time was clearly perceived as an abrupt U-turn in civil society. After the first wave of indignation had erupted online and then crystallised around the notion of "EuroMaidan"¹⁴⁷, the political contradiction on the streets followed immediately:

"Closer to midnight, hundreds of citizens came to Maidan Nezalezhnosti. Some of them had EU flags, some came with posters in support of the European future of Ukraine." (MMIC 22.11.2013a)

"On Thursday, November 21, Ukrainians went on the streets to show their pro-European stand. Promptly, quickly, and motivated." (UkrN 23.11.2013)

Right from the outset, the decision of the Ukrainian government was linked to the larger topic of security ("[...] for the benefit of Ukraine's national security"; see introductory quote to Chapter 5, GovUkr 21.11.2013a). Thereby, economic considerations were described as a central part of national security, which was at this point declared to be intimately associated with a close (economic) cooperation within the framework of the Commonwealth of Independent States¹⁴⁸:

"The Resolution has been adopted with a view to study and work out a complex of measures in details, which Ukraine has to take in order to restore the lost production output and areas of trade and economic relations with Russia and other CIS member states, form an appropriate level of domestic market, which would provide equal relations between Ukraine and EU member states that is the basis of economic security of the state." (GovUkr 21.11.2013a)

"Ukraine can never make a sacrifice of economic sovereignty, so the recent Governmental decision of Nov 21 concerning signing the Association Agreement

¹⁴⁶ The third Eastern Partnership summit was held in Vilnius, Lithuania, on 28-29 November 2013. It brought together heads of state or government from the 28 EU member states with those of Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine (see Joint Declaration of the Eastern Partnership Summit in Vilnius, 2.12.2013).

¹⁴⁷ During the analysis, it became apparent that the central reference term has been used in two orthographical versions: "Euromaidan" and "EuroMaidan" with a capitalised internal letter. As further illustrations will show, observations referring to EuroMaidan do highlight *both* the desire to undoubtedly orientate Ukraine towards Europe ("Euro-") and the idea of a sovereign country determining its fate independently through the will of its people, even when people express themselves apart from the conventional political institutions, for example on "Independence Square" ("Maidan"). Hereafter, to equally satisfy both dimensions, "EuroMaidan" will be used.

¹⁴⁸ The member states of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) are Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Moldova, Russia, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan. The regional organisation was formed after the breakup of the Soviet Union in 1991. In 2010, under the aegis of Russia, members of the CIS have established the Eurasian Customs Union (member states in 2015: Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Russia), referred to as "Customs Union" hereafter.

with the EU was adopted in order not to afford social and economic fiasco and achieve more favourable conditions for Ukraine.” (GovUkr 27.11.2013e)

In marked contrast to the statements that highlight the government’s foreign (security) policy decision as an economic necessity without any alternative, voices from civil society disagreed and picked up the idea of national security differently. Under the header of EuroMaidan, the protesters highlighted security notably as sovereignty of the Ukrainian people and, therefore, as the possibility and the right to realise Ukraine’s self-determination as a European country through the will of its people:

“Euromaidan – Citizens of Ukraine stand up and try to make their voice heard in Europe which does not end at the eastern border of the EU. They fight for their European future in a united Europe. [...] Today, more than ever, Ukrainians need Europe’s attention. They need attention and support of the European citizens who already enjoy those European values.” (UkrN 24.11.2013)

In this context, EuroMaidan is mentioned in the same breath with desirable European values “that have been commonly achieved after wars and crises in Europe’s history” (UkrN 24.11.2013). In this regard, the Ukrainian civil society is represented as a “natural” member of the “European family” that expects other members to accept responsibility for each other.¹⁴⁹ Moreover, civil society’s unequivocal expectation towards the Europeans is not to be passive and, particularly, not to give in towards neighbouring Russia that is observed as a hegemonic power, which ruthlessly plays its trumps in the post-Soviet orbit:

“What happened on November 21 in Kiev – the illegitimate decision of the Ukrainian government to stop the proceedings of the Association Agreement – is a moral, psychological and political defeat of the EU. [...] Russia doesn’t know compromise, nor balance of interests or win-win-situations. Russia’s policy is exclusively targeted at preserving its interests. In its foreign policy, Russia is guided by the idea that its role as a trading partner for energy resources like natural gas, crude oil, coal or nuclear power is unique and indispensable.” (UkrN 28.11.2013)

As the analysed statements from civil society sources reveal, communication with reference to the Maidan protests tends to locate itself in a geopolitical context of “sink or swim”, e.g. relating to issues of energy supply. On that account, the statements are particularly characterised by direct addresses towards the political, economic and social environment in Europe and beyond.¹⁵⁰ Hence, as the example of the references to European values shows, observers are more

¹⁴⁹ As it can be retained from the topical analysis, the idea of being an obvious and self-evident part of Europe regularly appears in all phases of conflict development. Thereby, the images of “European family” and “common European values” run like a golden thread through civil society commentaries and media reports (see exemplarily MMIC’s (17.02.2014a) commentary on “Ukraine’s returning to the European family” or The Ukrainian Week’s (22.11.2013) article on the “Homo Europaeus”).

¹⁵⁰ As the opening (which was triggered by an unprecedented “storm” of social media) made clear, EuroMaidan immediately adopted a “corporate design” (e.g. EuroMaidan as catchphrase, use of national and European colours, no political party symbols; see Kyiv Post 29.11.2013: 16-18) and developed professionalised media strategies. “Attention can only be gained through media campaigns: Short reports about people on the many EuroMaidans; telling their stories will make it possible to raise other Europeans’ awareness for what is happening in Ukraine.” (UkrN 24.11.2013)

or less called upon to take up the point and to react in one way or the other. This is all the more true for media coverage.

According to the analysed media reports, EuroMaidan, at least in its initial phase, represents a kind of unconventional societal venue for debating a specific foreign policy issue: the decision of the government to suspend the signature of the AA with the EU.¹⁵¹ Largely, media reports adopted the interpretation after which this decision constitutes a turning away from the process of European integration in the west and thus a turning to Russia in the east, although the government frequently made an effort to balance this reproach:

“The Government guarantees: Ukraine will further its course towards European integration, as is for the benefit of Ukraine, for the benefit of our nation.”
(GovUkr 28.11.2013)

In sum, the analysed media reports offered three main views of the situation: First, the Government’s decision is located between the (normative) poles of Europe as the embodiment of “established values, self-improvement, discipline and development” as opposed to “the world of complete unpredictability, paternalism, hierarchies, absolute power and inert obedience” (The Ukrainian Week, 22.11.2013: 6). Second, the suspension of the AA with the EU is portrayed as a policy question that can be, in principle, rationalised in terms of economically quantifiable pros and cons:

“President Viktor Yanucovych in a recent speech said that the total cost would be \$217 billion, roughly equal to the nation’s annual economic output. Kyiv officials insisted on compensation. [...] EU enlargement commissioner Stefan Füle said the so-called adjustment costs cited by Ukraine are ‘neither proportional nor credible. This deeply contradicts the experience of the EU accession countries’.”
(Kyiv Post 29.11.2013: 7)

However, the image of the societal debate about European integration, as the analysed media sketched it, is not only shaped by economic considerations. Third, it is also described as a strategic decision, which is directly linked to great power politics:

“Russia intensified its trade and other economic-related sanctions toward Ukraine this year to dissuade it from pursuing closer ties with Europe.” (Kyiv Post 29.11.2013: 7)

It can be stated that, in the first phase, the protests on Maidan were principally referred to under the nominal header of EuroMaidan, according to the sources of the analysed text corpora. Thereby, the political contradiction crystallised around the announcement that the Ukrainian government would not sign the AA with the EU at the imminent summit of Vilnius. After the government definitely carried out its announcement, this decision seemed to sound the bell for a period of strained relations between the EU and Ukraine. Subsequently, EuroMaidan again

¹⁵¹ Following the example of EuroMaidan in Kiev, the media reported on further “EuroMaidans” coming up in Lviv, Lutsk, Ternopil, Donetsk, Kharkiv and other Ukrainian cities in all parts of the country: “Organizers of EuroMaidan have been spectacularly successful at turning out tens of thousands of people on the streets of Kyiv and other cities in Ukraine and enlisting support internationally in opposition to the government’s decision.” (KyivPost 29.11.2013: 6).

attained an unprecedented level both concerning the throng and the determination, as published interviews with protesters on Maidan illustrate:

“EuroMaidan will turn into a ‘massive watchdog’ focused on putting pressure on the government to follow through with its initial promise to sign the association and free trade deal with the EU at a later date. [...] Smaller, more radical factions of EuroMaidan [can] organize themselves and storm government buildings. But [we] would prefer peaceful, ‘more European’ demonstrations. [...] We would like to see methods of civil disobedience.” (Interview with Oleg Rybachuk¹⁵², Kyiv Post 29.11.2013: 6)

Related to statements as the above cited, the topic of public security and – associated with this – a debate about legitimate means of protest increasingly dominated the discursive agenda of EuroMaidan in the aftermath of Vilnius where, from the perspective of the protesters on Maidan, a unique opportunity had been missed while the movement realised that it was not able to change anything in Ukraine’s policy to this date. This moment of self-awareness, together with the protesters’ (and INGOs’) observations in the night of November 30/December 1 mark the first turning point in EuroMaidan’s topical sequence:

“At 4 a.m. this morning the troops of riot police, Berkut, violently dispersed the peaceful Euromaidan at Independence Square.” (MMIC 30.11.2013b)

“According to eyewitnesses interviewed by Amnesty International, Berkut officers first told the demonstrators to disperse because the demonstration was ‘illegal’, then started to beat those that remained. Video footage shows Berkut officers beating protestors and in some cases pursuing men and women in order to beat them. About 35 people have so far been charged with hooliganism under the Administrative Code and dozens of people are being treated for their injuries.” (AI 30.11.2013)

Phase II (Nov 30 – Dec 17)

After police forces began to clear Maidan by force, at one blow, EuroMaidan was observed in an altogether different light. Immediately, the main topics debated changed from the rather abstract controversial subject of geopolitical, economic and social merits of European integration to very concrete issues, e.g. concerning the right to peaceful assembly and freedom of expression.

Due to EuroMaidan’s high level of attention from (social) media and INGOs, reports on the incidences on November 30 spread immediately. In fact, for the first time since the beginning of the protests, large-scale collective violence between protesters (throwing stones) and police forces (deploying teargas and batons) was observed. According to the analysed documents from civil society opposition, November 30 was also the starting point for new human

¹⁵² Oleg Rybachuk served in high-level state functions, e.g. as chief of staff to former president Viktor Yushchenko. During the Maidan protests, he is referred to as a public activist and leading Euromaidan figure (see e.g. Kyiv Post 29.11.2013: 6).

rights initiatives emerging from EuroMaidan.¹⁵³ In this context, the responsibility for the outrages was clearly attributed to the authorities:

“Unlawful use of force to subdue the EuroMaidan demonstration: President Yanukovich’s brutal and unsparing use of force to quash Ukrainian citizens’ rights of peaceful assembly and speech.” (MMIC 2.12.2013a)

“The context of the events leaves no doubt that the order to commit crimes against peaceful citizens came from the highest echelons of power.” (UHHRU 1.12.2013)

Referring to this, the analysed media reports involved detailed accounts on the night of November 30, which resulted in hundreds of casualties, including particularly protesters, at least 40 journalists and about 100 officers of special police units.¹⁵⁴ Thus, media coverage addressed the use of force both by the police and by the protesters:

“On Nov. 30, all the evidence shows that police were the instigators of a deliberate and violent crackdown on 400 or so demonstrators. Eyewitnesses and video showed indiscriminate beatings. [...] As for Dec. 1, we’d definitely like to know who commandeered a bulldozer and three Molotov cocktails at police. Those are illegal, violent and potentially dangerous acts that can be punished, not merely ‘provocations’”. (KyivPost 6.12.2013: 4)

In the light of these incidences, massive public indignation translated into resurgent protests early in December when about 100.000 protesters gathered on Maidan. Shortly after this new wave of protests started, the government, at least rhetorically, accepted responsibility for the events on November 30¹⁵⁵ and, at the same time, pointed out that state authorities had enough power to put the Maidan protests in their place at any time:

“On behalf of the government, I’d like to apologize for the actions of our law enforcement agencies on Maidan. Both the president and the Government deeply regret what happened.” (Prime Minister Mykola Azarov, speech in Parliament; GovUkr 3.12.2013d)

“We are ready to discuss with peaceful demonstrators all terms of our agreements. We stretch out our hand. If we find a fist, I say frankly – we have enough forces.” (Mykola Azarov, GovUkr 3.12.2013e)

¹⁵³ See e.g. “EuromaidanSOS” mentioned earlier; the organisation was committed to collecting and publishing information on human rights violations. For this purpose, an independent public commission to investigate actions of the authorities (and the protesters) in Kiev and across Ukraine during the protests was established, whereby existing human rights organisations and lawyers were invited to join the commission (see UHHRU 3.12.2013a).

¹⁵⁴ To be exact, considerations about the concrete attribution of responsibility (in the sense of order/execution) played an important role in media reports, see exemplarily KyivPost (6.12.2013: 8): “It is unclear who exactly gave the order for Berkut to attack. Speculation ranges from President Viktor Yanukovich and Interior Minister Vitaliy Zakharchenko.”

¹⁵⁵ At the same time, government officials tried to portray the use of force by the police as a reaction to “provocations” from the protesters’ side (e.g. throwing of bottles and stones), tracing back to the far-right spectrum on Maidan (see GovUkr 5.12.2013l). In contrast, according to the assessment of KyivPost (6.12.2013: 4), even if there were such provocations, chasing people down the streets and beating them indiscriminately is here seen as an entirely disproportionate reaction. According to the analysed media reports, those overreactions can also be explained by miscalculation, or, in other words, by the “unpreparedness for the scale of the rally on November 24. [...] It appears that the government counted – and still does – on organizational impotence of the protesters” (The Ukrainian Week 3.12.2013: 10-11).

Notwithstanding the above, in the first week of December, protesters began to openly term their project as a “revolution” (e.g. in statements, on banners and as graffiti) and started to block and/ or occupy government buildings (e.g. Cabinet building, Kiev’s city administration). Furthermore, feeling certain about the broad support of a cross-cleavage mass movement behind, EuroMaidan’s revolutionary voices confidently called for the president and the government to resign as a precondition for any peaceful transition.¹⁵⁶

As opposed to this, the government straightaway appealed to the protesters that those practices do not represent the “European way” of expressing civil society’s will (see GovUkr 3.12.2013f), especially as a majority of Ukrainian citizens beyond the capital is described as being supporters of the government.¹⁵⁷ Therefore, the government rejected the blocking of governmental bodies as an illegitimate means since it is equivalent to a blocking of the state’s social life veins (e.g. entailing negative repercussions for the payment of pensions and social assistance; GovUkr 4.12.2013a). Concerning the demands to resign, it was clearly stated:

“We stand for an issue of power to be solved exceptionally through elections.”
(GovUkr 5.12.2013c)

Together with other statements confirming the role of the Ukrainian military as a guarantor of security and stability on occasion of the Day of the Armed Forces (see GovUkr 6.12.2013a), those messages show a certain determination on the government’s side to defend the “national interest”, i.e. the interests of the majority of Ukrainians that had elected the president and were not (yet) present on Maidan (see GovUkr 6.12.2013e). By contrast, protesters on Maidan and supporters of the political opposition who arrived from all parts of Ukraine “don’t always behave as they should” were thus portrayed as being a “serious threat to the security of our citizens” (GovUkr 6.12.2013f). At the same time, while confirming to continue negotiations with the EU, the government announced its new initiative to conclude a strategic partnership with Russia. Thereby, speculations about Ukraine’s clandestine orientation to the east were fuelled:

“Russian leadership has stated clearly that the signing of the [Association] Agreement means that it makes no sense to further discuss trade and economic regimes. We were told clearly: we are ready to discuss the problems in a tripartite format but you should postpone the signing of the Agreement, then we’ll sit at the table for negotiations, and then sign it.” (Interview with Prime Minister Azarov, *The Ukrainian Week* 3.12.2013: 8)

Although pertinent statements suggest that the president and the government denied to prefer (and aim at) a closer integration within the framework of the Russia-led CU, other statements confirmed that issues of industrial cooperation, trade and economic relations and gas issues

¹⁵⁶ In this context, the protagonists are pointing to an increasing “common sense of Ukrainian identity” that is believed to sustain a peaceful transition realised by “a short-term unity government of technocrats” that would be empowered to implement “tough reforms Ukraine needs to avoid short-term economic collapse and to restore credibility to a judiciary” (MMIC 4.12.2013b).

¹⁵⁷ Here, government statements refer to sessions of Ukrainian regional councils, “in which three fourth of our population” is represented and “the support for the course of the President and the Government had been approved” (GovUkr 2.12.2013a; see also GovUkr 6.12.2013c). It was one of the most cited arguments in government communication that society, by a majority, supported the president and its government. In contrast, at this point, media reports increasingly attested “an enormous disconnect between the government and the people.” (KyivPost 6.12.2013: 1).

were topics of newly opened negotiations with Russia (see e.g. GovUkr 7.12.2013a). In marked contrast to these government statements that outlined the rapprochement to Russia as a necessary counteraction to an externally caused recession¹⁵⁸, the analysed media point to the “home-made nature” of the economic decline and the possible dire consequences for the government:

“Chronicle of a systematic recession: The factors triggering this decline are at home, not abroad, as the government insists.” (The Ukrainian Week 3.12.2013: 18-19).

“But time is against them. Every day that the protests persist, political risks increase, and the economy, already in recession, suffers more and more. The government’s debts, such as wage and pension arrears, which already amount to some \$10 billion, are increasing, diminishing the government’s chances for survival.” (KyivPost 6.12.2013: 4)

At this point, in an effort to correspond to the still pressing claims of EuroMaidan, the parties of the political opposition noticeably entered the stage of EuroMaidan.¹⁵⁹ Yet, neither the initiation of a no-confidence vote in parliament (on December 3) nor the attempt to block the parliament simply by absence (December 4-6) advanced the declared purpose: the resignation of the government.¹⁶⁰ Against this background, the protests on Maidan rapidly sparked at a higher level. According to the analysed civil society sources and media reports, on December 8, between 500.000 and one million protesters gathered on Maidan in a “March of Millions” seeking the resignation of the government within 48 hours. In the course of this, further government buildings were blocked, existing barricades were reinforced and additional tents were set up. Following civil society sources, the protests in this phase again changed their character:

“There are more people on the streets today than last week, and more than we ever saw during the Orange Revolution. [...] Whereas last week people were guided by their emotional reaction to the Nov 30 beatings, today people [come] motivated by a rational desire to be part of a revolutionary change.” (MMIC 9.12.2013)

Moreover, supporters of EuroMaidan referred to themselves in terms of strategic advances: Even though special police forces tried to dismantle the barricades, protesters were able to

¹⁵⁸ In this context, president Yanucovych stressed trade the turnover with Russia as an essential factor in Ukrainian national economy: “If trade with Russia deteriorates, jobs would be lost. This year 85.000 people lost their jobs in industry, 32.000 in trade, 17.000 in transport and 15.000 in construction.” (Interview with four Ukrainian TV channels on December 2, cited in KyivPost 6.12.2013: 6)

¹⁵⁹ At that time, there are three political opposition parties referred to as the most important ones: 1. *All-Ukrainian Union Fatherland*: Arseniy Yatsenyuk (leader), party of imprisoned opposition leader and former Prime Minister Yulia Tymoshenko, Ukraine’s biggest opposition party (89 seats in parliament; total: 450 seats); 2. *Ukrainian Democratic Alliance for Reform* (UDAR): Vitali Klitchko (leader), second largest opposition party (42 seats in parliament), ideology similar to Germany’s Christian Democrats, strong parliament faction, weak regional units; 3. *All-Ukrainian Union Svoboda* [Freedom]: Oleh Tyahnbok (leader), grassroots party that gained mass popularity, with an aggressive radical wing and xenophobic ideas, goal: creation of a nationalist state, methods: political and militant (characterisation based on KyivPost 14.02.2014: 2-5). For a detailed account on the role of political parties during the Maidan protests see Malygina (2013: 4-5), Marples (2014: 11-12) or Banakh (2014).

¹⁶⁰ On the contrary, the government’s reaction suggests that it interpreted the situation as if it had gained further legitimisation to stay in power: “Yesterday the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine has expressed confidence by a majority vote to our Government. This is an unambiguous solution of the only legitimate legislative body of our country. And it must be accepted as a legal fact by all.” (GovUkr 4.12.2013a; see e.g. KyivPost 6.12.2013: 4)

maintain their positions on Maidan square and in the occupied buildings (particularly Kiev's city administration).¹⁶¹ To underline their immediate claims (release of arrested protesters, punishment of those responsible for the beatings, end of repressions), even survey data¹⁶² was brought into public effect:

Among reasons, which made people came out to the Maidan, three most widespread were: brutal beatings of demonstrators at the Maidan on November 30 night and repressions (70%), Viktor Yanucovych's refusal to sign the AA with the EU (53.5%) and desire to change life in Ukraine (50%). Rather pronounced were also desire to change authorities in Ukraine (39%). The majority of Maidan protesters (72%) answered that they would stay there 'as long as necessary'. (DIF 10.12.2013)

Based on the analysed statements, the government's reaction at this point was twofold: On the one hand, the president carried out the (former presidents') idea of inviting all political forces, the clergy, and representatives of EuroMaidan to a national roundtable in which Yanucovych would participate in person. In this context, under the header of dialogue and compromise, the government again confirmed its pro-European course, promised a complete investigation of the violent incidences of the preceding weeks, and offered a broad participation in order to manage the current crisis. On the other hand, it accused its addressees of being responsible for the situation by provoking and fuelling tension on the streets, by spreading misinformation and insecurity, by endangering essential state functions, by being unorganised and not able to bear political responsibility and, most importantly, by confusing a noisy minority with the pro-government majority in Ukraine's society as a whole (see e.g. GovUkr 11.12.2013a).¹⁶³

The analysed media reports picked up these Janus-faced public signals of the government: While the president issued invitations for a national roundtable of dialogue,

"Early on Dec. 11 the stakes were raised when riot police and National Guardsmen attempted to disperse the protest calling for the government's ouster." (KyivPost 13.12.2013: 1).

Moreover, based on an increasing number of reports about violent incidences (e.g. concerning the use of teargas and batons while trying to "clear" the city administration and dismantle

¹⁶¹ Spurred by the encouragement on *International Human Rights Day* (December 10), the protesters unfearfully articulated that their rights and freedoms had been violated and that they would continue this struggle for the right to live in a democratic and European country (see e.g. MMIC 10.12.2013c). As media coverage highlighted, this struggle was backed by a successful fundraising campaign since EuroMaidan activists were not only able to raise monetary donations but also tangibles worth millions, such as food, clothing, fuel, medicine and labour (as to logistic organisation, public relations, and legal assistance).

¹⁶² On December 7 and 8, the *Democratic Initiatives Foundation* (DIF) (in cooperation with the Kyiv International Institute of Sociology) conducted a survey among protesters on Maidan (random sample, 1037 respondents) to figure out key motivations and demands. The DIF calls itself a "leading Ukrainian think tank and focuses its activities on developing reasonable recommendations in the sphere of democratic transformations and Ukraine's European integration for decision makers and civil society representatives." It was founded in 1992 and is particularly engaged in research, monitoring and dissemination of information about political processes and public opinion polls (see DIF 2015).

¹⁶³ In this context, EuroMaidan was even blamed for jeopardising the chances to host the 2022 Winter Olympiad in Lviv (GovUkr 12.12.2013a).

barricades) and about the first severe court sentences of arrested protesters, media coverage was particularly characterised by further signals of “raising stakes”:

“EuroMaidan supporters emerged from their all-night clashes with police early Dec. 11 even more defiant and determined. They built even bigger barricades after police and emergencies ministry workers removed them during the night. Moreover, new massive rallies are planned through the weekend starting on Dec. 13. [...] For its part, the ruling Party of Regions is planning a rival rally. Andriy Pinchuk, leader of the party’s youth wing, said 200.000 people are expected to arrive in Kyiv to oppose those at Independence Square. Many observers fear that all on the government payroll will be forced to take part (KyivPost 13.12.2013: 14)

At this point, statements from the protest movement on Maidan were not only marked by a certain distrust concerning the credibility of Yanucovych’s roundtable but also, and particularly, concerning the negotiations about the new cooperation agreement between Ukraine and Russia that had constantly been promoted¹⁶⁴ and would be signed on December 17:

“Yanukovych and Putin penciled a significant economic rescue package for Ukraine, but the Russian President added a condition: all protests in Kyiv must be cleared before the December 17 official signing date. For this reason, Yanukovych, in a hurry to clear the protesters from Independence Square, ordered riot police into the streets of Kyiv.” (MMIC 12.12.2013a)

Distrust mounted up even more, when, on December 15, the European Commission announced that talks (about any form of cooperation) with the Ukrainian government would be suspended due to contradictory signals from president Yanucovych.¹⁶⁵ In sum, in this phase, releases associated with the civil society opposition depicted an atmosphere of increasing confrontation and insecurity.¹⁶⁶ At the same time, however, after severe common experiences, the attitude of having reached a certain point of no return became more and more apparent, even despite most difficult weather conditions:

“The stand-off between the protestors on Independence Square and the regime continues with no end in sight. The Euromaidan is in no hurry to disperse. [...] The regime has attacked peaceful demonstrators in the center of Ukraine’s capital three times (Nov. 30, Dec. 1, Dec. 11). This fact has consolidated Ukraine’s

¹⁶⁴ In doing so, the government lost no opportunity to point to the economic disadvantages of the alternative, see e.g. GovUkr (13.12.2013f): “In September the three countries of the CU approved a decision that in case the agreement on free trade area with the EU was signed, Ukraine would lose advantages of a free trade area with the CIS member countries. During the year it would add to the negative balance another USD 8 billion. And then the negative balance of trade with the countries of the CU in 2014 would make up USD 15 billion.”

¹⁶⁵ Besides Ukraine’s obscure initiatives to intensify relations with Russia and the harsh crackdown of the Maidan protests, incidences in the context of the parliamentary by-elections on December 15 raised EU’s scepticism: While 4 of 5 seats were won by Yanucovych allies, irregularities (including vote buying and unauthorised persons present inside the polling stations) had been observed (see e.g. MMIC 17.12.2013b).

¹⁶⁶ INGO reports substantiated this widely shared perception by highlighting single cases of disproportionate use of force and ill-treatment of detained protesters by police forces, especially by Berkut units (see e.g. AI 13.12.2013). Nota bene: The Berkut (Ukrainian for “Golden Eagles”) was a special police force in Ukraine. This unit was particularly deployed to contain demonstrations and violent upheavals. In late February 2014, the new government dissolved the Berkut.

people in protest: people want personal dignity, rules-based government, and peace. (MMIC 15.12.2013a)

“It is ridiculously cold out there. As the week wore on, protesters learned how to make the cold their ally. Protesters poured water outside Revolution HQ to create an ice-rink for the officers to slip on. Demonstrators chipped the ice and used it to reinforce the barricades. They built walls by stacking sacks of snow. The Maidan is no longer a public square; it’s a winter fortress.” (MMIC 15.12.2013b)

Seemingly not being responsive to the determination of EuroMaidan protests at this stage, statements from the government place special emphasis on the economic situation. In this view, due to the new deal between Ukraine and Russia, which was ultimately negotiated and signed on December 17, a decisive turning point was reached: As Russia agreed to buy statebonds worth 15 billion USD and to reduce the gas price from 400 to 270 USD/1000m³, Ukraine would not only be able to face the severe economic crisis in all markets (under conditions of a global crisis) but also, as Prime Minister Mykola Azarov outlined, to become

“[...] perhaps the only European country that continues the policy of raising social standards, an increase wages, pensions and social security. [...] Agreements of presidents of Ukraine and Russia allow us to plan the coming years, as the years of development and confidence of peoples in stability of course of life. Therefore, we will not allow anyone to undermine the situation, which has been normalized in such difficult efforts. (GovUkr 18.12.2013a)

Phase III (17 Dec – 16 Jan)

After the “Russia-Ukraine-Deal” had been concluded, the government’s public communication was marked by an effort to send appeasing signals: Once again, European integration and the rapprochement to European (normative) standards were declared key priorities of the government (see e.g. GovUkr 19.12.2013a). To emphasise this intention, the parliament adopted a law on the amnesty of detained Maidan protesters. Though, the law was also intended to grant amnesty for those members of the police and special forces that had been accused of disproportionate use of force against protesters. The parliamentary opposition parties responded to this perceived affront by quitting the president’s roundtable (which Yanukovich yet left before) while protesters on Maidan felt even more vindicated “to remove a corrupt regime and link their nation’s future to the values and norms of the EU” (MMIC 19.12.2013b). According to the analysed media, Yanukovich flaunted the deal with Russia and enjoyed to present himself in the role of a skilful negotiator. At the same time, the population, at least the EuroMaidanian part of it, was supposed not to follow his assessment:

“‘This loan was definitely very lucrative because Russia didn’t make any conditions for us’, Yanukovich said. He confirmed a freeze in relations with the EU in favor of a tilt back towards Moscow. [He] insisted that he did not offer in return to join Putin’s pet project – a Eurasian customs union. [...] He called the EuroMaidan demonstrations against him a ‘low blow’.” (KyivPost 20.12.2013: 2)

“The nation now knows two things for sure: Russia is our new friend, and it paid a price of \$15 billion and cheaper gas for this friendship.” (KyivPost 20.12.2013: 4).

Notwithstanding the above, further government releases stated the declared merits of the deal, including a strengthening of Ukraine’s (economic and financial) independence and an improvement of its social stability (e.g. by acquiring a stronger position in IMF negotiations and by enabling the state to increase its welfare spending; see e.g. GovUkr 21.12.2013d). Driven by the sudden dynamics in the course of the Russia-Ukraine-deal¹⁶⁷, as portrayed in the analysed media, protesters on Maidan were put on the spot to change their strategy in order to achieve progress concerning the long-term goals and thus not to lose their broad public support.¹⁶⁸ At this point, opposition party leaders discovered their chance to offer EuroMaidan a political venue:

“Opposition leaders today announced the creation of the Maidan political movement [...] that will target ‘a new constitution and removal of corrupt judges and prosecutors’, said Arseniy Yatsenyuk.” (MMIC 23.12.2013a)

Triggered by the beating of a prominent journalist and opposition activist on December 25, Tetyana Chornovol¹⁶⁹, the protests again picked up pace and drew attention to the newly established “alliance” of opposition party leaders and EuroMaidan activists. Motivated by restored passion, protesters claimed the resignation Ukraine’s interior minister (see MMIC 26.12.2013a).

As the year was drawing to the end, government statements are characterised by a mixture of stressing the main achievements and blaming the (civil society) opposition. In this context, the government referred to its positive economic performance, including e.g. the fulfilment of social obligations (salaries, pensions, allowances etc.), the stabilisation of the economy (stopping recession, removing trade restrictions) and the improvement of consumers’ situation (stopping devaluation of the currency, stabilising tariffs and prices). According to the government, all of this was even exceeded (and backed up) by the decision to suspend the course of European integration in order to materialise national interests within the framework of a strengthened cooperation with Russia, referred to as “historic”:

“Current year ends by historic agreements of presidents of Ukraine and Russia. Restoration of full partnership with Russia averted the worst scenario for our economy. Finally, the fair market price for gas was determined, restrictions in mutual trade were lifted, and strategic projects in industrial cooperation were determined. Russia in a very short time had decided to allocate Ukraine a credit

¹⁶⁷ Against the background of Yanucovych’s repeated public warnings to Europe and the US not to meddle in Ukraine’s domestic affairs, INGOs observed an increasing number of violations of freedom of assembly, of freedom of expression, as well as unfair trials and abusive use of force against activists and journalists (see AI 23.12.2013).

¹⁶⁸ Indeed, difficult weather conditions and increasing repression by the government began to demoralise the protest movement. At the same time, as the analysed media reports highlight, there was a quite presentable list of EuroMaidan’s victories: “Virtually all people arrested after December 1 clashes were released; several top officials were under investigation for the violent crackdown on peaceful protesters, and the main thing: Ukraine did not enter the CU!” (The Ukrainian Week 23.12.2013: 4).

¹⁶⁹ Tetyana Chornovol is a 36-year-old deputy (People’s Front) of the Verkhovna Rada. During (and already before) EuroMaidan she worked as a Ukrainian opposition activist and journalist. Thereby, she was known for her investigations about corruption among senior state officials. According to civil society sources, she was assaulted “near the capital Kiev hours after an article she had wrote on the assets of top government officials was published.” (MMIC 25.12.2013b)

in the amount of \$ 15 billion on very favorable terms. Now there is no doubt in financial stability of Ukraine.” (GovUkr 31.12.2013a)

On the other hand, the government blamed EuroMaidan for campaigns of disinformation about the government’s agenda (concerning an alleged Moskow-induced accession to the CU; GovUkr 24.12.2013a), for economic naivety (concerning rising consumer prices after the AA; GovUkr 27.1.22013a) and, most importantly, for hiding their true intention behind noble speak of Europe and democracy: the fight for power (see GovUkr 27.12.2013d).

In contrast, end-of-year reviews from civil society opposition make use of a broad “historic” perspective to spell out their attributed meaning of EuroMaidan:

“In Kiev’s Independence Square, hundreds of thousands Ukrainians have gathered, and there they remain, demanding that the regime respect their dignity. The actions have demonstrated more than just the courage and resilience of the Ukrainian people. They have allowed us to see the cowardice and treachery of the ruling regime. They have laid bare to the world Vladimir Putin’s new doctrine and his attempts to create a new version of the USSR (MMIC 31.12.2013d)

As further statements show, in this perspective, EuroMaidan represented itself as an all-Ukrainian movement (including “traditional” opposition parties) that not only fights for an elimination of state repression and a democratisation of the political system in Ukraine but also for setting a successful example of reform for other post-Soviet countries (see e.g. MMIC 31.12.2013b, d).

After tens of thousands peacefully celebrated New Year’s on Maidan¹⁷⁰, the beginning of the year was characterised by a sparse information policy of the government while the EuroMaidan camp continued to deliver “status reports”. At this point, more and more nationalist or even far-right militant factions began to become rhetorically and physically visible on Maidan (e.g. by holding a torchlight procession on New Year’s Eve) and to argue in favour of more radical measures. Nevertheless, statements from EuroMaidan suggest that the core of the protesters was still convinced that such strategies would jeopardise the true power of the movement: its diversity. According to this view, in the weeks before, EuroMaidan had developed into an “impressive cross cleavage coalition” which involved like-minded people of all ages and backgrounds: activists, organisations of writers, students, journalists, sports people, experts, show business representatives, ecologists, medical workers, lawyers, military veterans, trade unions, opposition party leaders and their supporters, clerical leaders and believers of all faiths.¹⁷¹ To draw on more radical strategies would thus not only result in a massive bloodshed but also in a possible breakup of the EuroMaidan movement and, as a consequence, in a breakup of the country (see MMIC 1.01.2014). In sum, despite ongoing and new forms of intimidation and repression¹⁷², EuroMaidan described itself as an exceptional social movement that, up to this

¹⁷⁰ On this occasion, the following New Year’s greeting in various languages (along with individual snapshots) from Maidan protesters was published on MMIC’s website: “Dear friends! We, Ukrainians, would like to express our sincere gratitude for your support in our struggle for freedom and human dignity. We wish you all a peaceful and fulfilling New Year!” (MMIC 6.01.2014)

¹⁷¹ See particularly MMIC (3.01.2014a; 4.01.2014a; 5.01.2014a).

¹⁷² Here, the example of “AutoMaidan” can be cited as pertinent: As AutoMaidan had implemented various campaigns in the weeks before (e.g. protests by car to block the streets or car processions to the president’s and other high positions’ controversial residences outside Kiev), the government established a new traffic police special force

point, had achieved a great deal and, on the other side, was uncertain about how to continue the whole project:

“Whatever the eventual outcome, this is an event that has marked the lives of thousands of people and transformed Ukrainian civil society. [...] At present Mr Yanukovych’s position does not appear to be in danger. But it is very hard to imagine that the whole astonishing scene could end with a whimper. The fate of this movement, which took Ukraine by surprise when it started, is scarcely any more predictable now than it was in November.” (MMIC 7.01.2014)

In marked contrast to this self-description, government statements highlighted that protests, barricades, and occupations had achieved nothing so far but creating political, social and particularly economic disturbances (see e.g. GovUkr 8.01.2014a). As compared to this, the government presented itself as guarantor of stability and development that was able to ensure concrete improvements for the people, such as stable gas prices or reliable social payments. In this regard, Prime Minister Azarov particularly vaunted the Russia-Ukraine-deal as an adequate measure to “resolve fundamental problems of sustainability of state finances and economic development” as well as to create “hundreds of thousands of jobs” in relation to the free trade agreements within the CIS (see GovUkr 9.01.2014a; 10.01.2014d).

Considering that the anti-government protests on Maidan had been an uncoordinated association in the first phases, at this point, there was increasing evidence for an unprecedented quality of organisation and countrywide coordination of EuroMaidan. In this context, the constitution of the “All-Ukraine Euromaidan Forum” in mid-January represented both a highly symbolic act and a pragmatic move towards creating a kind of representative planning authority for EuroMaidan.¹⁷³ Therefore, its first resolutions included issues of nationwide communication and coordination:

“The Forum also approved a new joint defense strategy, a transparent and secure budgeting mechanism, a plan for artistic cooperation between cities, a joint information strategy and a civic education plan designed to increase the number of euromaidan activists. In addition, the Forum approved a strategy for spreading euromaidan ideas outside of the protest movement as a top priority.” (MMIC 13.01.2014)

According to EuroMaidan statements, the first meeting of the forum in Kharkiv (January 11-12) was attacked several times: online attacks on the organisers’ website, repeated acts of arson and vandalism against offices, police persecution of activists, and brutal aggression by unknown thugs against leaders and journalists reporting from the forum.¹⁷⁴ In this phase, the analysed reports revealed that EuroMaidan activists observed themselves not only as opposed to the government and its security forces. Also, they acted as counterpart of an emerging pro-

to prohibit demonstrations by car. Moreover, AutoMaidan activists and journalists who took part had visits and were threatened at home (see MMIC 3.01.2014c).

¹⁷³ According to its founders, the forum had its origins in a meeting of Ukrainian pro-democracy activists who participated in Kiev’s EuroMaidan in late December 2013. There, they had the idea to call for a “national conference” of representatives from across the country, to be held in the eastern Ukrainian city of Kharkiv. In response to that call, public assemblies were held in as many as 43 cities or towns. Together they approved about 118 delegates (see MMIC 11.01.2014).

¹⁷⁴ See particularly MMIC (11.01.2014; 12.01.2014) and UkrN (12.01.2014).

government camp from civil society that protested in favour of “law and order”, the Russia-Ukraine-deal and Yanucovich’s stay in office till the end of the term (see MMIC 14.01.2014a). In this situation, reports from INGOs tell about new attempts of police forces to disperse and beat peaceful protesters on Maidan. At this point at the latest, it was taken as demonstrated that there was a well-planned strategy to subdue public debate and activism by force. As a consequence, the immediate resignation of the minister of the interior, Vitaly Zaharchenko, was claimed (see e.g. UHHRU 13.01.2014).

To protest against the government’s dealing with EuroMaidan and the increasing violation of human rights in Ukraine, the political opposition parties decided to block the parliament on January 15, right before the scheduled adoption of the 2014 budget, as long as a commission of inquiry would be installed to shed light on the massive use of force by police units on Maidan. In the government’s view, this measure represented as a serious provocation, as Prime Minister Mykola Azarov’s statements illustrate:

“I want that all citizens realize: the opposition wants to force responsibility to the authorities for possible delay in payments of increased salaries to state employees, social benefits for mothers and children, the disabled persons, etc. due to not passed budget. [...] I ask if the people of Ukraine need a destabilization of the social and economic life. Especially in times of global economic crisis. The answer is clear: those who are blocking the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine continue to work against Ukraine.” (GovUkr 15.01.2014a)

At the same time, other statements suggest that the government continued to do a good job for the country: the bilateral trade turnover and volumes of mutual investments with CU were just about to increase (see GovUkr 15.01.2014j), the work of social patrols and warm-up facilities during the cold weather was ensured (see GovUkr 16.02.2014f), promising initiatives of industrial cooperation with Russia were started (see GovUkr 16.01.2014g) and even the annual program of cooperation between Ukraine and NATO was approved (see GovUkr 16.01.2014a). Ultimately, regardless of the opposition’s blocking of (i.e. absence from) the parliament, the government’s majority adopted the 2014 budget by show of hands, without any opposition representative being present.

Phase IV (Jan 16 – Feb 22)

In the parliamentary session of January 16, in addition to the 2014 budget, the government majority adopted a legislative package commonly titled “anti-protest-laws”.¹⁷⁵ From EuroMaidan’s perspective, apart from the dubious adoption procedure (no preceding debate, opposition parties excluded, and adoption by simple show of hands without systematic registration), those amendments implied an unprecedented limitation of citizens’ freedoms and rights and thus corresponded to a permanent state of emergency that was proclaimed “to disperse civil society and get rid of the civic protests across Ukraine” (UkrN 16.01.2014). In detail, the legislative package involved:

¹⁷⁵ Officially, the Draft Law No. 3879 included 10 amendments and is named “On making Amendments to the ‘Law of Ukraine on the Judiciary and the Status of Judges’” and on “Procedural Laws on Additional Measures for Protecting Security of Citizens”.

- libel as a criminal act, e.g. in the context of journalistic investigations collecting information about law enforcement officers (punished by substantial fine up to imprisonment);
- setting up tents or wearing helmets represents a violation of restrictions in context of mass demonstrations (punished by imprisonment of up to 15 days);
- any unsanctioned movement of five or more vehicles (punished by revocation of driver's license for up to two years and confiscation of the vehicle);
- "extremism", i.e. producing and circulating information claiming resignation of government or change of constitution (punished by substantial fines or imprisonment up to 3 years);
- unsanctioned rallies (punished by imprisonment from 10 to 15 years);
- work of internet media not registered as "news agencies" (substantial fines and confiscation of media and equipment);
- blocking of government buildings or private properties of high-level state functions (punished by imprisonment up to 6 years).

According to EuroMaidan activists, as the anti-protests laws came into force, the government not only suspended constitutional rights of Ukrainian citizens and gave itself a mandate of arbitrary crackdown against the judiciary, the press, civil society organisations and citizens but also created an instrument to obscure its crimes of the preceding months. In this regard, the new laws stated that members of the Berkut special police unit, as police forces in general, could not be persecuted for the disproportionate use of force against journalists and protesters on Maidan.¹⁷⁶

Based on the analysis of media coverage in January 2014, EuroMaidan was portrayed as an unprecedented protest movement that has survived despite all adverse circumstances, including severe winter conditions and persistent repression by the government. Regarding to this, media reports left no doubt that the anti-protest laws were widely interpreted as a serious attack on human rights leading Ukraine back into its undemocratic past:

"The Party of Regions on Jan. 16 rammed through, without public notice or debate, a raft of draconian laws that drop any pretense of transforming Ukraine into a European-style democracy. [...] Ukraine will regress back to the dark ages of authoritarianism, indistinguishable from most former Soviet republics where dictatorships flourish." (KyivPost 17.01.2014: 4)

¹⁷⁶ Sources from civil society opposition meticulously substantiated their statements by comprehensive data: According to its statistic, from November 22 to January 13, 386 people were intimidated illegally, 222 people were physically attacked and 23 cars damaged. In detail, the reported "crimes" include: road police stopping buses driving to EuroMaidan in Kiev; mass systemic intimidation of activists via phones, SMS, media; intimidation of journalists (acquiring personal data, publishing to compromising data); turning off electricity; stealing equipment; violent dismissals of EuroMaidan demonstrations by the police (in Mykolayiv, Cherkasy, Dnipropetrovsk, Chernivtsi, Odesa, Kiev); asking internet service provider to switch off services on government order; hacker attacks on media and NGO sites; intimidation of local governments; direct intimidation of participants of protests; direct intimidation of organizations that help the protests; hiring goons ("titushki") for violent actions against protesters; intimidation of opposition politicians (email hacked, phones monitored); intimidation of students who participate in protests (threats to dismiss from Universities); banning the driving license for participants of automotive protests; systemic obstruction of First All-Ukraine Forum of Euromaidans (attacks on buildings, tear spray and pepper gas, noise grenades, loudspeakers used to mute the assembly, attacks of titushki, turning off the electricity during the plenary session, beating of activists); Ministry of Culture threatens to ban Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church because of participation of clergy in protests (see MMIC 16.01.2014b; see also UkrN 17.01.2014).

Nevertheless, according to prominent EuroMaidan figures interviewed by the KyivPost (17.01.2014: 2), the protest movement did not let itself be intimidated by the many attempts of silencing and smashing. Quite the contrary, EuroMaidan spontaneously developed new forms of protest and would continue to do so, as Viktor Kylymar, one of the student strike leaders of the National University of Kyiv-Mohyla Academy, stated:

“We started marches to Mezhyhirya (Yanukovich’s house), we are going to organize the stopping of Yanukovich’s motorcade and we have been picketing government offices and businesses of representatives of Party of Regions.” (KyivPost 17.02.2014: 2)

Related to this, the media draw the attention to a form of protest that became increasingly important: boycotting businesses. Based on the idea of threatening various business groups with revenue losses, initiatives like “Economic Resistance”, a group of civic activists, had already begun to draw up a well-researched list of businesses owned by the president’s entourage in order to offer Ukrainians the possibility to influence politics by means of boycott; as it turned out, according to media reports, with considerable success.¹⁷⁷

In an overall view, both the analysed media and INGO reports are suggesting that the adoption of the anti-protest laws on January 16 represented another fatal turning point in the history of the EuroMaidan protests. Yet, it was taken as demonstrated that the adoption not only constitutes a “circumvention of the usual procedures” in parliament but would also have a “devastating effect on freedom of expression, association, and assembly” (AI 17.01.2014).¹⁷⁸ In order to react to this situation, the analysed INGO statements increasingly and openly claimed to impose EU-sanctions on the president, government members and on further persons and companies in the ruling parties’ environment (e.g. by blocking bank accounts; see e.g. UkrN 17.01.2014).

From EuroMaidan’s perspective, the days after the adoption of the anti-protest laws were characterised by rapidly increasing tension and confrontation. From EuroMaidan’s perspective, the president personally accounted for this new wave of countrywide protests against the government and, more precisely, against the new anti-protests laws that led to a massive use of force between police forces (using batons, flash grenades, teargas, water guns) and protesters (making use of stones, fireworks, batons, Molotov cocktails while reinforcing the barricades). Driven by the dynamic of the events, protesters on Maidan, referring to themselves as incarnation of the “Popular Assembly”¹⁷⁹, even adopted resolutions on “the formation of alternative state institutions”, including the parliament, the government, local police forces and new elections in Kiev (see UkrN 20.01.2014a). However, while rumours about the redeployment of

¹⁷⁷ In January, Economic Resistance’s boycott list included more than 200 companies (and the property schemes behind) (see KyivPost 17.01.2014: 6).

¹⁷⁸ See also a statement from *Reporters without Borders* (“[...] the Law represents a decisive step back from democracy”; cited by MMIC 16.01.2014d), from the *Centre of Policy and Legal Reforms* (“All these laws were adopted in violation of principles of the rule of law”; CPLR 21.01.2014) or from the *International Renaissance Foundation* (“No lawyer in the country could give you a clear understanding of what these laws are about”; cited by MMIC 21.01.2014g).

¹⁷⁹ In Ukraine, the People’s Assembly or, in Ukrainian, “Veche” traces back to medieval times, when in the federation of the “Kievan Rus” free citizens assembled to discuss question of public interest and to adopt legally binding resolutions.

military and police units (from other parts of the country to the capital) that had been blocked by protesters spread (see MMIC 20.01.2014a), the “right sector” and other militant protesters formed a civil defense militia and engaged in organised fights with the police. In the course of this, police cars were torched and rubber bullets were used.¹⁸⁰

Against the background of about 200 injuries on all sides up to that point and given the stand-off on Maidan, political opposition parties declared to be willing to resume the roundtable talks with the president on condition that the anti-protest law package would be withdrawn. According to government statements, “irresponsible politicians from Maidan” who instrumentalised the Russia-Ukraine-deal to inflame fears about a new Soviet Union had induced the current situation. Therefore, the afore-said politicians are not only accused of “cheating people with their demagoguery”, as Prime Minister Azarov stated, but also bear responsibility for those resorting to violence on Maidan (see GovUkr 20.01.2014a). In this context, particularly voices from the ruling Party of Regions advocated for a rigorous application of the “anti-protest laws”:

“We can state for sure: The dramatic events have confirmed the actuality and the punctuality of the anti-extremist laws that were adopted by the Verkhovna Rada. Violence and aggression have to be banned behind a reliable legal shield.” (Party of Regions, cited in UkrN 20.01.2014b)

“Radical people resorted to illegal acts that required the response of law enforcement agencies. These illegal actions occurred despite numerous calls for their cessation, including from some members of the opposition.” (GovUkr 21.01.2014b)

Indeed, as protesters’ sources reported, the government even elaborated its methods of intimidation and repression by using modern technologies of cellphone tracking – a measure that again increased the determination of the protesters.¹⁸¹ Against this background, the government’s plan to initiate a countrywide dialogue while all sides should renounce further violent scenarios and provocations was not taken as a serious plan to promote a peaceful settlement of the situation.

On January 22-23, Maidan’s first lost lives were officially declared. Based on the analysed EuroMaidan sources, between 5 and 7 activists died during battles with the police, most of them were shooting victims. In addition, dozens of people were missing, among them also the leader of AutoMaidan (see MMIC 23.01.2014; UkrN 23.01.2014a). As INGO reports point out, based on the shootings, the use of live ammunition obviously no longer represented a taboo. In the light of these extreme acts of violence by security forces, Amnesty International, for example, observed an environment of “pervasive police impunity in Ukraine” (AI 22.01.2014).

¹⁸⁰ In the light of the violence observed on Maidan, more and more self-critical voices from EuroMaidan spoke up: “The stand-off seems to suit both sides: the regime is getting footage that it can use to justify an attack by riot police on the demonstrations while young protesters have an ideal outlet for their anger, and a means to prove their heroism. Lots of testosterone flowing tonight on the protesters’ side.” (MMIC 20.01.2014c)

¹⁸¹ According to affected protesters on Maidan, the government was able to use provider information to pinpoint the locations of cellphones in use near clashes between riot police officers and protesters. Thereby, protesters received a text message saying, for example, “Dear subscriber, you are registered as a participant in a mass disturbance” (MMIC 21.01.2014e). Moreover, activists reported on the adoption of a “double strategy” of the authorities: Thus, in addition to the “usual” attacks by police forces on Maidan, individual participants were chased and hassled, e.g. by beatings, breakings, torchings of cars and buildings (see e.g. UkrN 23.01.2014a).

Based on the analysed government statements, the responsibility for the escalation of the conflict was exclusively attributed to the protesters, as Prime Minister Azarov stated:

“I officially declare victims, which unfortunately we already have, are on the conscience and the responsibility of the organizers and participants of mass unrests. I require that the law enforcement agencies thoroughly and vigorously investigate these crimes. [...] Obviously, that some extremists by bitter irony are trying to rape all Ukraine, constitutional order and legality.” (GovUkr 22.01.2014a)

On top of that, while the political opposition announced the formation of a revolutionary government and an increasing number of Ukrainian towns obviously refused to apply the “anti-protest laws”, protesters were qualified as “cynical and amoral terrorists” preparing a coup d’état (see GovUkr 23.01.2014e). However, despite rhetorical irreconcilability and ongoing clashes in Maidan, government and EuroMaidan protesters agreed on a temporary cease-fire in order to enable opposition leaders to attend a second round of negotiations with president Yanucovych, in which, according to the government, all critical issues (European integration, democratic elections, anti-protest laws) would be on the agenda.¹⁸²

In the analysed media coverage, the period after the adoption of the anti-protest laws was represented unambiguously: When the protests on Maidan reached another crescendo after the dubious adoption of the January 16 law package whose substance was widely observed as undemocratic, violent repression by police forces increased dramatically and deliberately. As the first deaths became known, this was identified as another turning point:

“Police atrocities awaken nation – As clashes between police and protesters intensified since Jan. 19, including the deaths from gunshot wounds of at least two demonstrators, the nation has awakened to realize the brutality and ruthlessness of its police force. Multiple images of tortured victims, pieces of ammunition and leaked photographs and video evidence exposed mass atrocities.” (KyivPost 24.01.2014: 2)

Moreover, the media particularly focussed on the increasingly violent experiences of journalists on Maidan. In this regard, the obvious finding was that journalists covering the protests were “under attack”. Since journalists received injuries from stun grenades and rubber bullets, there was a strong suspicion that journalists were even specifically targeted despite clear identification as members of media. Based on these experiences, the main message of the media was to “call on security forces to respect the rights of journalists to work in safety” and “to urge the government to repeal the laws, which gave Ukraine some of the most repressive media legislation in Europe.” (KyivPost 24.01.2014: 3).

In marked contrast to the government highlighting its unabated support in major parts of the Ukrainian population¹⁸³, the analysed media suggested that the government’s and the president’s position began to weaken: As public anger stoked after the first roundtable sessions

¹⁸² On this, see both government and civil society opposition sources: GovUkr (23.01.2014f), MMIC (23.02.2014).

¹⁸³ More precisely, the government repeatedly invoked the loyalty of its core clientele, as the following statement of Prime Minister Azarov illustrates: “Our conviction is based on the fact that south-east of Ukraine, where three fourth of GDP output is focused, didn’t yield to provocations and are working stably and support the policy of the President and the Government. We have on whom to rely.” (GovUkr 24.01.2014c)

ended without any result, further public buildings throughout the country were occupied¹⁸⁴ and clashes between police forces and protesters on Kiev's Maidan continued, including e.g. Berkut units storming into the spots marked with the Red Cross and hundreds of militant protesters throwing stones, stun grenades and Molotov cocktails at the police (see KyivPost 24.01.2014: 8-12). In sum, at this point, the media detected a dramatically increasing propensity towards violence on all sides both rhetorically and physically. In an atmosphere of swirling rumours about the imminent proclamation of martial law, protesters on Maidan began to systematically form self-defense units while more and more evidence about the use of life ammunition by the police became known.¹⁸⁵

In late January, based on the analysed statements and reports from all sides, the events followed in quick succession: On the one hand, further government buildings in Kiev were occupied (e.g. Ministry of Justice) or there were attempts to do so (e.g. Ministry of Energy and Coal Industry) (see GovUkr 27.01.2014a). Also, irregular state-sponsored goon squads ("titushki") systematically began to beat up protesters while regular police units started to seize injured protesters directly in hospital (see MMIC 25.01.2014b). On the other hand, the roundtable talks resulted in agreements on unblocking streets and government buildings, on granting amnesty for detained protesters and on revocating the January 16 anti-protest laws in parliament. Ultimately, on January 28, even Mykola Azarov resigned from the position of Prime Minister, in order to defuse the severity and danger the conflict represented for the country, as his last statement indicates:

"The conflict situation which has arisen in the state is threatening economic and social development, constitutes a threat for the whole Ukrainian society and every citizen in it. [...] For the sake of a peaceful settlement of the conflict, I took my personal decision to ask the President of Ukraine to accept my resignation. [...] The most important today is to preserve the unity and integrity of Ukraine. That is much more important than anybody's personal plans and ambitions." (GovUkr 28.01.2014)

Even though Azarov's successor, acting First Vice Prime Minister Serhiy Abuzov, immediately continued to send conciliatory and conversational signals (including e.g. a confirmation of the amnesty for detained activists; see GovUkr 29.01.2014e), EuroMaidan's sceptical voices still dominated its communication. Based on the statements from civil society opposition, protesters were still determined to stay on Maidan since they were convinced that it was their responsibility to hold the government accountable. In this view, Azarov's resignation did not change much about the initial situation, which had been marked by the civil society's profound desire not just

¹⁸⁴ According to the KyivPost (24.01.2014: 12), protesters took over gubernatorial buildings in Lviv, Ternopil, Cherkassy, Rivne, and Khmelnytsky. Attempts were also made on the regional councils of Sumy, Ivano-Frankivsk, Zhytomyr and Vinnytsia, where demonstrations took place. Furthermore, here and there police units were reported to have joined EuroMaidan activists.

¹⁸⁵ As the protests on Maidan took a deadly turn, statements from the US, Russia and the EU were frequently cited in civil society sources as well as in the media: While the Russian parliament blames extremists and Western politicians for escalating the conflict, the US started to impose sanctions against high level government officials. The EU, however, left it at diplomatic warnings and adjourned the decision to impose sanctions to February 10, when the next meeting of the EU Council of Ministers of Foreign Affairs would take place – a fact that was commented critically: "World War III could have, perhaps, changed the old ossified order, but not the bloody events in Ukraine. Bureaucracy in Europe remains as stagnant as everywhere." (The Ukrainian Week 30.01.2014: 20; see also MMIC 25.01.2014a)

to change leading positions but to change the whole system (see UkrN 29.01.2014a, b). Other statements thus portray the situation as an atmosphere of unabated tension:

“Tension is particularly high near the barricades where defenses are most comprehensive, but also where police lines are in plain view of the demonstrators. Standing next to a burning barrel (temperatures have dropped to about -15 C during the day) listening to conversations between helmet-clad young men, it seemed that a single “spark” would be enough to rekindle violence. [...] the regime changed its tune exceptionally quickly. Whereas yesterday the entire country seemed to be preparing for a declaration of martial law, suddenly today, Azarov was fired and the “dictatorial” legislation passed on 16 January was rescinded.” (MMIC 29.01.2014a)

By releasing statements about the renewed rapprochement to the EU (on the occasion of a meeting with a mission of the European Parliament; GovUkr 30.01.2014d) and about other “ordinary” official news (e.g. concerning Ukraine’s selected logo for the Winter Olympics 2022 in Lviv; GovUkr 30.01.2014f), the government tried to convey an impression of easing and going back to normal – with limited success, as media reports suggest:

“On The Brink Of Civil War – Civil war has been averted, for now. But what some are calling a revolution in the making – pitting anti-government protesters against a corrupt government that they say uses terror and state-sponsored attrition – is taking its toll. (KyivPost 31.01.2014: 1)

“During these critical days, time in Kyiv is running out much faster than in Brussels. And if the EU fails to mobilize in the near future, this temporal gap will deepen even more. The problem on the table will not be just the murder of a democratic country, but the EU's own suicide.” (The Ukrainian Week 30.01.2014: 21)

In a nutshell, the analysed media reports characterise the situation as a highly tense and volatile one. Thereby, the status quo, both referring to the capital¹⁸⁶ and the country as whole is portrayed as a kind of ongoing state of siege (see map from KyivPost 31.01.2014: 2 below) whereas the atmosphere was dominated by deep suspicion due to various ambiguous signals of the government: On January 29, the parliament passed an amnesty law, which stipulated that detained protesters would be released and freed from prosecution if EuroMaidan activists vacate occupied government buildings within 15 days. From the government’s perspective, the law on

¹⁸⁶ KyivPost’s “Visual Guide to EuroMaidan” (31.01.2014: 3; descriptions taken over from the article), an illustrated account on occupied public buildings, squares and streets in Kiev conveys the impression of a “report from the frontline”: *Ukrainian House Building* (2 Khreshchatyk St.), one of the latest additions to buildings occupied, taken on Jan. 26, it hosts a medical aid unit, clothing donation point, overnight shelter and canteen; *Institute of History of Ukraine building* (4 Hrushevskoho St.), located at the firing line, has been used as a medical aid unit since the beginning of the clashes on Jan. 19; *Trade Unions Building* (2 Independence Square) was among the first buildings seized by protesters on Dec. 1, it promptly became EuroMaidan headquarters, hosting a press office, hostel, kitchen, meeting hall, a medical aid unit and self-defense headquarters; *Ukrainian Parliamentary Library Building* (1 Hrushevskoho St.) was handed over to protesters by its employees, it is used as a second medical aid unit for those fighting at the front lines; *Zhovtner Palace* (1 Instytutska St.) has been occupied by protesters since Dec. 1 and serves as official headquarters of EuroMaidan self-defense units and a medical aid unit, protesters say the building was taken over peacefully and the staff are allowed inside; *Kyiv City State Administration Building* (36 Khreshchatyk St.) was the first one seized by demonstrators on Dec. 1 and their original headquarters, now the building is mostly used as a hostel and canteen for protesters, it also houses a medical aid unit and a press center with a big screen where protesters watch the latest news, two psychologists are on duty on the second floor.

amnesty represented an “effective step towards a compromise” (see GovUkr 31.01.2014c). At the same time, hired thugs continued to attack and terrorise protesters (see KyivPost 31.01.2014: 4). In the same contradictory way, the government announced that a “promising infrastructure project” of Ukraine and Russia on the construction of a transport crossing through the Kerch Strait¹⁸⁷ had been approved (see GovUkr 31.01.2014b). However, simultaneously, Russia re-started trade sanctions against Ukraine and put its bailout package on hold, a fact that remained unmentioned in government communication (see KyivPost 31.01.2014: 12).



Figure: “Status report of protest in Ukraine” (KyivPost 30.01.2014: 2)

The analysed INGO reports of late January/ early February basically focused on three issues: First, the latest amnesty law is seen as an illegitimate strategic trick that puts “the Ukrainian state on a par with pirates and terrorists who use hostages as a tool to influence the situation” since the destiny of citizens that had been arrested on an uncertain legal basis (i.e. detained protesters) was linked to the behaviour of other citizens that are accused of having committed different crimes (i.e. activists in occupied public buildings) (see UHHRU 31.01.2014). Second, the story of Dmytro Burlatov, the leader of AutoMaidan who vanished for 8 days without a trace, was extensively referred to as a textbook example of brutal state repression, as interviews and reports from Amnesty International illustrate:

“Soaked in blood, covered in cuts and bruises and his clothes stained, he spoke of his ordeal, saying, ‘I was crucified. My hands were pierced. They cut my ear. They cut my face. There is no spot on my body that is not injured’.” (AI 31.01.2014; 3.02.2014)

¹⁸⁷ The Kerch Strait connects the Black Sea in the south with the Sea of Azov in the north. The strait between Crimea in the west and the Russian Taman Peninsula in the east is 3 to 15 kilometres wide.

Third, INGO reports in this period deal with the topic of far-right and anti-Semitic factions present on Maidan. Thereby, the statements openly disagree with an increasing number of accounts from the government and foreign (particularly Russian) media according to which there is a connection between an alleged increase in anti-Semitism and the Maidan protests (UHHRU 3.02.2014). As highlighted by the UHHRU, based on the data from systematic monitoring of xenophobia over many years, there was a consistently low level of anti-Semitic incidents in the context of EuroMaidan.¹⁸⁸ Furthermore, the UHHRU tells evidence that there is a systematic propaganda campaign in progress “aimed at discrediting the political opposition and participants of the civic protests by spreading false information about a wave of extremism [...] supposedly caused by EuroMaidan” (UHHRU 3.02.2014).¹⁸⁹

In contrast to the debates mattering to EuroMaidan protesters, the media and INGOs, the analysed government statements in early February state an easing of the situation and, at the same time, increasingly focus on the economic dimension of the crisis in Ukraine:

“There are no confrontations on the streets. There are peaceful protests without any restriction from the side of the power. In general, the degree of conflict has been reducing and the executive power has to support the process of stabilization. The Government works to reduce the negative impact of the political situation on the economy. Unfortunately, we could not completely avoid such effects (GovUkr 5.02.2014a)

Here, the statements particularly refer to the credit ratings of Ukraine on international capital markets that are expected to deteriorate with every extra day of protests on Maidan and thus with ongoing political instability. Nevertheless, against all odds, the government announced good news as well, including the revocation of the recent sanctions concerning customs clearance of goods imposed by Russia (see GovUkr 6.02.2014a). In sum, as protesters released parts of the streets and the city hall, for the government the negotiation process with the opposition still represented a promising way of tackling the crisis, despite rightwing groups acting as spoilers here and there (see GovUkr 7.02.2014).

Drawing on the topic of economic development, the analysed media reports present a clear interpretation of the situation: As the economic activity is hampered throughout the country and the national currency has lost nearly ten percent of its value since the beginning of the protests on November 21, the protracted crisis obviously began to harm the economy. According to media accounts, Russia took advantage of the situation and conditioned the continuation of its bailout package and the imposition of the trade sanctions on the formation of an even Kremlin-friendlier government (see KyivPost 7.02.2014: 1, 5). Indeed, relating to the Russian influence on Ukraine’s crisis, there is growing evidence that

“[T]he Kremlin propaganda machine is working in tandem with President Viktor Yanucovych’s administration in discrediting and smearing EuroMaidan protesters.” (KyivPost 7.02.2014: 4)

¹⁸⁸ Indeed, as the UHHRU admits, there were radical nationalist groups who joined the protest movement. However, as compared to EuroMaidan’s majority, these groups were marginal and numerically weak (see UHHRU 3.02.2014).

¹⁸⁹ For this, see also UkrN (4.02.2014) and KyivPost (7.02.2014: 9).

In this context, the government's credibility reached a new low-point: As foreign minister Kozhara, for example, casted doubt on whether the kidnapping and torture story of the AutoMaidan leader Bulatov (see above) was true, this was considered as a cynical provocation on EuroMaidan. Also, the government released statements according to which EuroMaidan harbours "a bunch of gun-toting revolutionaries bent on spreading violence and damage to property", as the methods (e.g. "revolution" graffiti) and targets (to be found on EuroMaidan's boycott list) would prove (see KyivPost 7.02.2014: 4). Yet, according to the media, evidence suggests that these incidences were state-sponsored measures in order to discredit EuroMaidan or, in other words, to spread "terror against its own people".

To hold against state propaganda, EuroMaidan professionalised its communication, as detailed media accounts on the "public relations department" of EuroMaidan outline: Operating in the protester-occupied Trade Unions building (since January), EuroMaidan's volunteers press relations group, "Euromaidan PR", not only released information about the protests and helped foreign media to connect to with people on the ground but also combatted

"[...] messages filtered through the many government-controlled news organizations in Ukraine and Russia, and others disseminated by foreign media that have focused their attentions on the more radical side of the protest movement, spreading messages that it is dominated by anti-Semitic, far-right groups." (KyivPost 7.02.2014: 3)

Though, against the background of polling data gathered in late January and early February, a slim majority of the Ukrainian population still supported protests against the government¹⁹⁰ whereas only a quarter expressed hope for a political solution (see KyivPost 7.02.2014: 5). From civil society opposition's perspective, EuroMaidan voices and the leaders of the political opposition parties had little new to say unless claiming regime change (by early elections), constitutional change (by returning to the 2004 constitution) and an end to the persecution of activists (see MMIC 10.02.2014). In this atmosphere, as the protests on Maidan intensified again but without any immediate chance to implement concrete claims, EuroMaidan protesters increasingly articulated a common feeling of having reached a crucial phase, as exemplarily illustrated in the following statement:

"With an economy that is spiraling out of control, and with political forces both in Parliament and on the street at an impasse, an 'end-game' of some sort must be coming. But personally, I have doubts that this end-game will be peaceful." (MMIC 10.02.2014)

The visit of the Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights, Nils Muiznieks, to Ukraine (February 5 to 10) could not change this impression. On the contrary, since the government portrayed the Commissioner's statements as a support for its course¹⁹¹, protesters on Maidan became even more determined in preparing themselves for the "end game" (see e.g. MMIC 11.02.2014).

¹⁹⁰ In this context, voices from civil society opposition also underlined that EuroMaidan as a "mass movement of civil disobedience" enjoyed a qualitatively broad support in population and thus mirrored the Ukrainian society concerning its political, cultural or religious orientations (see UkrN 11.02.2014a).

¹⁹¹ See GovUkr (11.02.2014c): "The Government shares the largest part of approaches to settlement of the political crisis in Ukraine contained in the [Commissioner's] Conclusions."

On February 12, the first detained activists were released within the framework of the new amnesty law.¹⁹² According to its statements, the government was convinced of having kept its side of the bargain and, therefore, firmly claimed the immediate unblocking of streets and government buildings. In effort to ease the confrontation, it also declared to be willing and able to continue the negotiation process and to stabilise the political and economic situation with the help of all means available (see GovUkr 12.02.2014a). However, despite this rather positive tone, two crucial issues marked the beginning of a new “escalation of tensions” (see GovUkr 12.02.2014e): First, while detained protesters still had to wait for their release (until streets and building would be unblocked), policemen and those responsible for violent police operations on Maidan were directly rehabilitated. Second, EuroMaidan sources provided unmistakable evidence referring to Berkut snipers deployed to Maidan in order to target protesters. As the analysed media show, both observations are connected to once again increasing protests on Maidan, including the construction of new barricades and the formation of new self-defense units among the protesters.¹⁹³ Following the basic tenor of the media, at this point, a large part of the protesters reached the peak of a process of radicalisation, as the following quotes illustrate:

“It’s true that Maidan is radicalizing, but the reason is that the authorities aren’t carrying out demands. Every day of delay means a more and more dangerous atmosphere on Maidan (Andriy Parubiy, leader of “Maidan Self-Defense”, KyivPost 14.02.2014: 9).

“I am preparing my people for a possible war. During wartime, the law enforcement system can hardly work. And this chaos is caused by Maidan.” (Evgeny Zhilin, leader of a pro-government protest faction, KyivPost 14.02.2014: 9).

Indeed, as the analysed statements from EuroMaidan sources confirm, the climate for negotiations increasingly deteriorates. While opposition party leader refused the offer to participate in a new government and also declared that they definitely would not vacate Maidan, delegates of the second All-Ukrainian EuroMaidan Forum held in Odesa bluntly articulated the predominant attitude in civil society opposition as follows:

“We consider these occupied buildings as areas free from the criminal dictatorship of Yanukovych. Our objective is to liberate all of Ukraine from this criminal regime.” (MMIC 16.02.2014)

Other statements invoke an overdue awakening of the Ukrainian society, which has finally, with the help of EuroMaidan, worked up the courage to face and fight the post-Soviet “terrorist” state power (see UkrN 16.02.2014). Furthermore, against the background of Russia’s renewed bailout aid for Ukraine (“cementing its influence”) and regarding an increasing readiness to use violence on the government’s side (e.g. concerning Ukraine’s interior ministers who reportedly proposed to use flamethrowers against protesters), the protests again experienced a spreading throughout the country, particularly in Russia-leaning eastern Ukraine (see MMIC 17.02.2014b;

¹⁹² However, the ruling party’s majority still refused to appoint a parliamentary commission to investigate the disproportionate use of force during the preceding months, despite there was an increasing number of accounts from different (social) media and INGO sources that presented well-founded evidence (see e.g. AI 11.02.2014).

¹⁹³ In fact, at a mass rally on February 9 already, opposition party leaders had already called for a nationwide expansion of self-defense units, which would guard protesters in Kyiv and other cities. At this point, a large part of the protesters put the plan into practice (see KyivPost 14.02.2014: 9).

18.02.2014b). At the same time, after the talks between the president and the opposition (involving Western diplomats) failed again, the events on February 18 unfolded rapidly, as observations from different civil society sources clearly illustrate¹⁹⁴:

- new wave of protests claiming resignation of the president and the government, new elections and return to 2004 constitution
- opposition draft law on return to the 2004 Constitution refused by the ruling party majority in parliament, then call for blocking of parliament
- intensification of violence on Maidan: throwing of stones and Molotov cocktails (on both sides), use of flash grenades by the police
- torching of Party of Regions headquarters, Trade Unions building
- (again) occupation of public buildings (in order to establish medical care);
- far-right faction calls for using firearms (in case of attempts to clear the buildings)
- reports about titushki using live ammunition, robbing houses and people in the streets as well as coordinating their activities with police
- ongoing violence against journalists
- call for a general mobilisation in western Ukraine
- lockdown of the capital (quasi “state of emergency”), blocking of all roads
- several police officers shot dead
- shutdown of Poroshenko’s TV channel
- security forces crackdown on Maidan
- burning barricades on Maidan
- some police units solidarising with protesters
- about 25 people dead and 500 people heavily wounded by grenades, rubber and live ammunition

According to government statements, the “outburst of violence and lawlessness” turned out to be a crossing of (red) lines by “radicals” and “extremists” from the opposition, who have nothing in mind but seizing power, even “at the cost of people’s blood” (see GovUkr 18.02.2014b). Therefore, based on the government’s assessment of the events, security forces had no choice but to restore law and order “by all means within the legislation”:

“The so-called protesters have been attacking the public authorities’ buildings, committing arsons, causing grievous bodily harm to law enforcement officials, using firearms and urging upon others citizens to assist them. These illegal activities threaten the lives and safety of citizens of Ukraine and the constitutional order in the country.” (Acting Prime Minister Arbutov, GovUkr 18.02.2014a)

“There is chaos started in Kyiv. At this the opposition leaders appear producers of these crimes. [...] We warn hot irresponsible heads of the opposition – the authorities possess the forces capable to establish order.” (GovUkr 18.02.2014b)

After the president and the government expressed their condolences to those died in the confrontation (protesters, law enforcement officers) the next day, the opposition once again was declared responsible for the escalation, that not only led to the sacrifice of human life and to the destruction of state and citizen’s property but also discredited the country within the international community, foreign investors and trading partners (see GovUkr 19.02.2014a, c). In view of the people shot dead, the government statements highlight that security forces had not

¹⁹⁴ See particularly MMIC (18.02.2014b, c) and UkrN (17.02.2014a, 17.02.2014b, 18.02.2014).

used firearms during the preceding “liquidation of riots”. Vice versa, as corresponding evidence (i.e. used weapons left behind) could be seized afterwards, the protesters had used firearms to attack law enforcement officers (see GovUkr 19.02.2014b). As a consequence, the government started to adopt measures to prevent further theft of weapons, ammunition and other military equipment by strengthening the protection of military facilities (see GovUkr 19.02.2014e). Nevertheless, since “the President of Ukraine has clearly stated that he considers negotiations the most effective way of settling the conflict and restore social harmony”, the president and opposition leaders resumed negotiations and agreed on a ceasefire, including that protests on Maidan were permitted to continue in a peaceful way (see GovUkr 19.02.2014f).

At the same time, while different party offices and national intelligence service bases all over the country were torched, rumours about an intervention of the Ukrainian military in Kiev went around on Maidan.¹⁹⁵ In fact, the national intelligence service indeed announced “anti-terrorist measures across the country” since Ukraine was seriously threatened by “extremists”.¹⁹⁶ Relating to the expression of regret, the attribution of responsibility and the proposals to get out the deadlock, statements from EuroMaidan sources at this point are mirroring government statements, as the following commentary exemplarily summarises:

“There are no circumstances that can legitimise or justify such scenes. We extend our deepest condolences to the victims and their families. We condemn in the strongest terms the use of violence as a way to solve a political and institutional crisis. It is the political leadership of the country that has a responsibility to ensure the necessary protection of fundamental rights and freedoms. We call on all sides to immediately put an end to the violence and engage into a meaningful dialogue, responding to the democratic aspirations of the Ukrainian people.” (MMIC 19.02.2014b)

Based on the analysed statements from civil society opposition of the next day (February 20), the following topics were the most referred to: First, even though the situation was not (yet) seen as a civil war, it was expected that the conflict would further escalate into violence due to miscalculation from both sides leading to an impasse. Second, despite certain fatalism, the protesters called upon the EU and the US to impose political and economic sanctions on government members and the president (see MMIC 20.02.2014c). Third, the analysed documents suggest that the dissent between the (moderate) political opposition parties and EuroMaidan activists became more and more apparent. While the former still believes in a chance to compromise the latter expects a mounting bloodshed (“the regime will finish what it started”; see 20.02.2014b).¹⁹⁷ Indeed, against the backdrop of snipers who continued to target protesters on Maidan and regarding the official firing order against “extremists” issued by the interior minister, the activists’ hope for a stable ceasefire agreement and for any other substantial agreement with the government (e.g. concerning changing the constitution) faded quickly. Finally, voices from civil society opposition brought up their observations of increasingly obvious cracks in the regime:

¹⁹⁵ The government immediately denied information about the deployment of the military to disperse the protesters on Kiev (see GovUkr 19.02.2014e).

¹⁹⁶ This information took an even more agitating effect as the involvement of a Russian member of parliament who worked for the Russian national intelligence service in Kiev became known (see MMIC 19.02.2014a).

¹⁹⁷ In this context, statements also mention that the Greek Orthodox Church decided to withdraw confidence from the government due to the massive and disproportionate use of force against protesters.

Therefore, the “doves faction” (particularly influential oligarchs) overtly criticised the government and pled for de-escalating strategies. Beyond that, several MPs left the parliamentary group of the ruling party and, together with the opposition parties’ MPs, voted for a termination of the countrywide “anti-terrorist operations” (see MMIC 20.02.2014b).

In one of the last official statements, the president called for a truce and promised to continue fair negotiations with opposition leaders. In parallel, the government made another try to appease the population and thus declared “ministries and departments are operating to ensure life support of the country in the complex political situation” (see GovUkr 20.02.2014). At same time, however, reports about violence and chaos in many parts of the country¹⁹⁸ and about heavy clashes and a massive increase of the death toll on Maidan spread like wildfire. On February 21, KyivPost headlined as follows:

“Bloodlust – At least 75 killed in week of carnage – Ukraine spins out of control as death toll mounts. [...] Ukraine’s Health Ministry said that at least 75 people had been confirmed dead as a result of clashes this week – 26 on Feb. 18-19 and at least 49 on Feb. 20. [...] Most of them were protesters. But at least 13 of these victims were police officers.” (KyivPost 21.02.2014: 1, 4)

According to the analysed media coverage, both sides immediately blamed each other “for igniting the deadly conflict”: On the one hand, protesters armed with improvised weapons, Molotov cocktails, stones and shields were accused of attacking police positions, torching police vehicles, firing at police with live ammunition and capturing officers as “prisoners of war”. On the other hand, security forces were accused of using improvised explosive devices packed with nails and of firing at unarmed protesters with shotguns and automatic rifles. Furthermore, based on media accounts, as protesters were shot in head, neck, heart or lungs, there was every indication that snipers deliberately targeted protesters with great precision from ambush. Finally, based on volunteer doctors’ experiences on Maidan, the police did not allow treating protesters immediately. Other eyewitness reports cited in the media and INGO reports put it straight:

“It felt like real war” (AI 21.01.2014)

“Central Kyiv became a war zone just after breakfast time on Feb. 20, shattering a truce reached the night before by embattled President Viktor Yanukovich and opposition leaders. Either police and protesters weren’t listening, or they had different orders. It remained unclear late on Feb. 20 who drew first blood on the country’s bloodiest day in its post-Soviet history.” (KyivPost 21.02.2014: 3)

Though, as further media reports suggested, the breakup of the authorities accelerated: Although the president and opposition party leaders agreed on an ultimate compromise¹⁹⁹, the parliament unilaterally passed resolutions on the return to the 2004 constitution, on the unconditional amnesty of all detained protesters and on the dismissal of interior minister Zakharchenko. Finally, on February 22, after Yanukovich had been ousted from office by

¹⁹⁸ According to statements of the national intelligence service, “insurgents” looted military arms depots throughout the country.

¹⁹⁹ This compromise was mediated by high rank diplomats from Germany, Poland and France and included the immediate return to the constitution of 2004 and prompt new elections.

another parliamentary resolution, all armed groups on Maidan and in Ukraine as a whole agreed to lay down arms.

5.3 The Temporality of Maidan

“The temporal dimension is constituted by the fact that the difference between before and after, which can be experienced in all events, [...] is extended into the past and the future.” (Luhmann 1995: 77-78)

Communication about the Maidan protests includes specific delineations and characterisations of the present. Thereby, the present or, more precisely, the experiencing of the present from different observing perspectives is structured and ordered according to varying differentiations of before and after. This chapter highlights the central tags of Maidan’s temporal dimension based on the text corpus. The following sections show the development of communication in a temporal dimension with a view to three conflict phases and, in addition, on the basis of three separate presentations of sources group codings. In doing so, it becomes evident how certain aspects of the past are actualised at a given moment of the conflict’s present and, accordingly, how plans and ideas about the future are condensed in the here and now of the conflict.

In phase I, right from the beginning on November 21, the Maidan protests were associated with the “Orange Revolution” of 2004, since they started on the eve of its ninth anniversary.²⁰⁰ As mentioned earlier, the media straightaway offered comparisons of both “revolutions”, saying things that EuroMaidan (with at least 100.000 protesters on November 24) represents “the largest public demonstration since the Orange Revolution” (Kyiv Post 29.11.2013: 1). In this context, the media as well as civil society statements left no doubt about the “orange” and thus revolutionary character of EuroMaidan which was described as a country-wide mass movement that included the whole society in its aspiration to continue the path of European integration. Thereby, the Orange Revolution was not only referred to as a simple historical benchmark to illustrate the size and the quality of the protest activities. Rather, EuroMaidan was interpreted as a follow-up of the Orange Revolution, thus suggesting that both protest movements are interconnected phenomena:

“For many people, this decision not only represents the end of Ukraine’s European aspirations. It is also highly symbolic: Nine years ago to the day, on November 22, 2004, Ukrainians gathered on Maidan in Kiev, which became the venue of the Orange Revolution, to fight for justice. On this square, Ukrainians made their European history. Today again, they are there to fight for their European future.” (UkrN 24.11.2013)

²⁰⁰ On November 22, 2004, the so-called “Orange Revolution” began. In the collective memory of Ukrainians, the Orange Revolution, initiated by supporters of presidential candidate Viktor Yushchenko who were wearing orange as a party symbol, stands for a national strike and a series of mass demonstrations that emerged after the presidential elections were observed as being influenced by voter intimidation and electoral fraud on both sides. The bloodless Orange Revolution lasted for more than two months. In the end, the protesters achieved a revote ordered by the Supreme Court of Ukraine, in which Viktor Yanukovich was declared the winner (see e.g. Kappeler 2014).

“We cannot leave it that way, because we lost the victory in 2004.” (Statement of a protester on Maidan, interviews by KyivPost 29.11.2013: 5)

However, in the week before the third Eastern Partnership summit in Vilnius (28-29 November), the revolutionary impetus remained limited to the idea that the Ukrainian government could still decide to sign the Association Agreement with the EU in Vilnius – supposing that EuroMaidan’s pressure on the streets remains high or increases even more.

Although some statements point to the fact that the government tried to renounce any interpretation of the suspension of the Association Agreement as “historical”, later on, it picked up the topic under the impression of the EuroMaidan movement that became increasingly popular:

“I have not seen any tragedy, absolutely, and there is no ‘historicity’ in this moment if we come back to this issue in six months.” (Prime Minister Mykola Azarov, GovUkr 23.11.2013c)

“I’m sure this is a historic moment for our country. No one promised that it would be easy, nobody imagined that it will pass imperceptibly. So today we are going to discuss the issue, which has allowed finding a way out.” (First Vice Prime Minister Serhiy Arbuzov, GovUkr 28.11.2013c)

Other “historical” references that were associated with the claims of EuroMaidan in the days before Vilnius include the idea of understanding the situation between the EU and Ukraine (i.e. the status quo without signing the AA) as one of two entities actually belonging together but separated by “a second Berlin Wall” that should (and could) be teared down (see UkrN 24.11.2013). In this sense, Ukraine is once again presented as a truly European country that started on its way to peacefully overcome an unjust border between Ukraine and Europe, understood as a residue of the “Iron Curtain” in present time.

To sum up, whereas the government’s pointedly unemotional account of the present (“no historicity in this moment”, GovUkr 23.11.2013c) is shaped by economically determined plans and expectations about the near future,

“In the negotiations with the EU or Customs Union Ukraine is guided exceptionally by the interests of citizens and have a pragmatic approach. [...] And now we have no right to take hasty decisions that conflict with the interests of the national economics or industry. [...] in negotiations with these trade and economic blocks everyone had realized that Ukraine would protect its producers. [...] We will become a strong partner, it is an issue to be solved in the near future. (GovUkr 25.11.2013e)

communication in the context of EuroMaidan merges historically charged ideas about a necessary sequel of the Orange Revolution and the overcoming of Europe’s ongoing political, economical and social division (“second Berlin Wall”) into the idea of an exceptional window of opportunity that could be used to politically “fight for a European future” (UkrN 24.11.2013). Yet, when it became known that the government definitely did not sign the Association Agreement at the summit of Vilnius and, one day later (on November 30), police units tried to dissolve EuroMaidan by using extensive physical force for the first time, the here and now of the conflict for all observers changed dramatically.

Ukrainian authorities: “No historicity in this moment”

According to the analysed text corpus, all observers frequently hinted at the Orange Revolution as a historical example that is in some way or other linked to the Maidan protests. However, contrary to the positive meaning attributed in documents from civil society opposition, official statements refer to the Orange Revolution as a rather dark chapter in recent Ukrainian history that should not serve as a model for the current situation. At this point, the government’s key message is to prevent the scenario of 2004 by all means since those “revolutionary events” led to massive economic turbulences, such as price increases and a weakening of the currency. And after all, Ukraine in 2013 is believed to be a “completely different country” than in 2004, i.e. a more European one where such methods have been overcome (see e.g. GovUkr 3.12.2013e, f). While after the first violent crackdown the protests increased in size, the government’s negative comments on the ongoing comparisons of the Maidan protests with the Orange Revolution even heated up in phase II:

“For ten years, this is the third attempt to seize power illegally. First attempt is the orange Maidan, the second – the illegal dissolution of the parliament. Today we have the third attempt. And every time a violation of the Constitution and the law led to serious consequences for Ukraine. It rejected us on the path of development. Do you want it? The people of Ukraine do not want it! I firmly declare that the Government will not allow such catastrophic scenarios!”
(GovUkr 4.12.2013a)²⁰¹

Nonetheless, in contrast to its negative representation of the Orange Revolution in the past, the government signals an intention to draft a positive scenario of the future. While reminding all political forces in Ukraine of their responsibility for a peaceful development and for shaping the “fate of the nation”, the government makes an effort to describe a “third way” for Ukraine’s future. On the one hand, it repeatedly confirms the way towards European integration. On the other hand, the government’s official communication points to the imperative of concluding a “new strategic partnership” with the Russian Federation (see e.g. GovUkr 4.12.2013d; 7.12.2013c). In this regard, the new initiatives of approaching Russia are rhetorically linked to a critique of EuroMaidan that, in this view, revitalises a negative aspect of the Russian legacy in Ukraine: EuroMaidan is accused of invoking the ghosts of the past by favouring the unbounded rule of the people in a revived form of Soviet councils that are both ineffective and not representative for the whole population:

“With all sincere respect for the people who peacefully express their position on Maidan, you cannot realize that they are not the whole Ukraine. The axiom is that the meetings cannot run the state. When the Bolsheviks had used this method of management in the last century, it, as known, finished poorly.”
(GovUkr 11.12.2013a)

Thus, by distancing itself from EuroMaidan’s dubious experiments with ambiguous ending, the government presents itself as being the only force able to act and to offer concrete ways out of

²⁰¹ Based on the government’s assessment here, there was a second attempt “to seize power illegally“. This hint refers to the dissolution of the parliament in April 2007, when former president Viktor Yushchenko (one of the leaders during the Orange Revolution) dissolved the democratically elected parliament, which was dominated by the Party of Regions (due to number of MPs who had changed over to the other camp right after the elections and thus unexpectedly created a majority that was able to change the constitution).

the politically volatile and economically precarious situation. In this sense, the “Russia-Ukraine-deal” is presented as a future-oriented achievement:

“Yesterday a truly historical event took place: in the course of the negotiations the Presidents of Ukraine and the Russian Federation managed to reach extremely significant arrangements [...] that open good prospects for Ukraine for the following years and give an opportunity for the Government to approve today a budget of social, I emphasize, and economic development of the country, being impossible by this time.” (GovUkr 18.12.2013a)

In Phase III, the government’s account of the Maidan protests was no longer only characterised by (economically) justifying the suspension of the AA process but also by publicly backing up its decision to conclude a number new cooperation projects and strategic partnerships with Russia. In its end-of-year reviews, the government thus defended its decisions and plans as measures to regain the stability and unity of the country:

“Restoration of full partnership with Russia averted the worst scenario for our economy. [...] Now there is no doubt in financial stability of Ukraine. [...] Today more than ever we need to feel that we are a single nation, single state. We have a common goal – we want to live in an independent and prosperous country.” (GovUkr 31.12.2013a)

As far as further future plans are concerned, the analysed government statements at the turn of the year are limited to the announcement of long-term plans and measures, e.g. concerning the “the radical modernization” of the economy or measures to develop the infrastructure. At the same time, concrete propositions to surmount the perceived danger of “sinking in a political infighting” in 2014 are rather rare (see GovUkr 9.02.2014a).

In sum, phase III and IV are marked by a certain defensiveness and inaptitude to react to the events (apart from blaming civil society opposition for the situation) in terms of a coherent policy. Instead, the statements convey the impression that the government is caught in the short-term nature of the crisis. For instance, while violence reached an unprecedented level and the first lives were lost on Maidan, government communication, seemingly unimpressed, addressed ameliorating economic data and the successful reconditioning of energy supply during the severe winter season. Beyond that, some statements involve comments on highly symbolic historical dates that formed a marked contrast to the actual situation. Referring to the Day of Unification and Freedom on January 22, for example, which, in normal circumstances, is meant to celebrate Ukraine’s short-lived pre-Soviet independence²⁰², the authorities confirm their determined intention to fight anarchy, chaos and the danger of division caused by the protests on Maidan (see GovUkr 22.01.2014a). In the same vein, in the very last episode of the conflict, when rumours about a possible suppression of EuroMaidan with the assistance of the military persisted among the protesters, the government marks the day of commemoration of participants of war and honours the courage and “real patriotism” of Ukraine’s former USSR troops (see GovUkr 15.02.2014).

²⁰² On January 22, 1919, the two predecessors of the modern Ukrainian state (Ukrainian People’s Republic and West Ukrainian People’s Republic) adopted an agreement of unification, the “Act Zluky” (unification act), in Kiev (see Kappeler 2014: 165-187).

Civil Society Opposition: “Everything is interconnected”

According to the analysed documents from different sources that are attributed to civil society opposition, references to the Orange Revolution run like a golden thread through the statements. From phase II on, however, beyond the mere observation that EuroMaidan represents the largest demonstration since the Orange Revolution mobilising millions of citizens in the whole country, the comparison between the two increasingly gets integrated into a comprehensive narrative that describes EuroMaidan as a logically necessary episode in Ukrainian history.

In an obvious effort to expose its self-attributed historical meaning, EuroMaidan is thus portrayed as the chance of a lifetime to break with the Soviet and post-Soviet past, which is characterised by a “cycle of fierce competition and revenge politics” or, geneally speaking, by a winner-takes-it-all-thinking that produced “tough and determined political street fighters” (like president Yanukovich) and therefore seriously harmed the Ukrainian society already torn between east and west (see e.g. MMIC 4.12.2013b). When a group of Maidan protesters destroyed the statue of Lenin at the top of Shevchenko Boulevard in Kiev on December 8, this historical burden again forged ahead in the here and now of the conflict on Maidan.²⁰³ Another highly symbolic association that was in the “revolutionary air” of phase II referred to a well-known episode in European history:

“Let us remember the student movement of 1968. Were there any concrete immediate economic and political consequences? According to historians, there were rather failures. Only today, we understand the true value of those events: the world was no longer as it was before. A few students from Sorbonne changed reality. Repression continued, but authorities fell apart. One could breathe more freely. In this atmosphere, a new kind of people emerged.” (UkrN 9.12.2013)

Based on the profound social transformation of European societies from 1968 on, EuroMaidan activists in the same vein claim to do away with the “paralysing post-Soviet shadow” and to mentally free the Ukrainian society (and, as a model, other post-Soviet societies) from paternalistic structures. Thereby, EuroMaidan is depicted as one event in a chain of events triggered by the Velvet Revolution in 1989²⁰⁴, beginning with Ukraine’s struggle for independence in 1990/1991, continuing with the Orange Revolution in 2004 and now, with EuroMaidan, completing the “civilising breakthrough from Eurasia to Europe” (UkrN 12.12.2013).²⁰⁵ In this

²⁰³ See e.g. MMIC (9.12.2013). Further comments say that the dismantling of the granite statue of Lenin by the protesters also recalled the scene of “the symbolic fall of Saddam’s statue in Baghdad in 2003” (see MMIC 24.12.2013a).

²⁰⁴ This hint to the beginning of the breakdown of the “Eastern bloc” in what was then Czechoslovakia is supplemented by references to the Hungarian crisis in 1956 in other commentaries: “In October in Budapest, as in Kiev, there were peaceful protests and demonstrations against the harshness and severity of the Russian-controlled government. The Hungarian people wanted to turn toward the West, but their government, like the Ukraine, at Moscow’s urging, turned loose the police to forcibly end the demonstrations. By the beginning of November, it was clear that Moscow would do whatever it took to make certain that Hungary remained within their sphere. When the Hungarian police couldn’t achieve that result, Russian tanks and troops were sent to do the job.” (MMIC 22.12.2012)

²⁰⁵ Other accounts point out that EuroMaidan is also reminiscent of the events in 2000/2001 when under the slogan “Ukraine without Kuchma” thousands of Ukrainians protested for the resignation of then president Leonid

context, from the perspective of those activists who witnessed both the Orange Revolution and EuroMaidan, the latter is characterised as less party political, more relaxed and open-minded. Yet, the atmosphere was described as carnivalesque and as a kind of artistical happening. At the same time, against the background of a less consolidated political system and a more fragmented government in 2004, the Orange Revolution was outlined as being more party politically dominated and thus planned in a more professional and long-term way (see UkrN 12.12.2013).

As the Russia-Ukraine-deal was concluded (phase III), the opponents of a rapprochement with Russia on Maidan tightened the tone by referring to the historical origins of the “unnaturally divided Ukrainian society”:

“East Ukraine was once as nationalistic and Ukrainian-speaking as Western Ukraine is today. The dramatic transformation of the area was a result of ethnic cleansing. In 1932, a famine engineered by Stalin killed up to an estimated 10 million people, mostly in East Ukraine. Beginning in 1933, the Soviets replaced them with millions of deported Russians.” (MMIC 17.12.2013e)

As 2013 was the 80th commemoration of the Ukrainian “Holodomor” (i.e. “genocide by hunger”) and part of the Ukrainian political elite and particularly Russian authorities still refused to term the events of 1932/1933 a “genocide” and “ethnic cleansing”, voices from EuroMaidan picked up the issue to state that EuroMaidan also represents a symbol against Russia’s great power politics and thus marks “the frontline of liberal democracy”.²⁰⁶ In this context of a perceived cold-war-like competitive relationship between the West and Russia, a “civil war or an official breakup of the country” is seen as a “very real possibility” (see MMIC 17.12.2013e; 18.12.2013b).²⁰⁷ To complete these far-reaching warnings, the Maidan protests were sporadically dubbed “Ukraine’s version of the Arab Spring”. However, as the respective statements clarify, unlike the “unfortunate counterparts in the Arab world”, the people of Euromaidan, at this point, are believed to have a “decent chance” of inducing real change, not only concerning the political elite but also the political system and society as a whole (see e.g. MMIC 16.12.2013b; UkrN 6.02.2014c). Here, once again, the Orange Revolution is portrayed as an earlier chapter of the same future-oriented story:

“What we saw in the Orange Revolution, and what we are seeing now, is a fight for the very soul of Ukraine. [...] At issue were not really the minutiae of a trade deal and matters of political and economic reform but something far more profound. The question is whether Ukraine will end years of balancing between the EU and Russia and definitively throw in its lot with the countries to its west, or whether it will return to a Moscow-led order, in which it resumes its traditional role of Russia’s little brother.” (MMIC 24.12.2013a)

Kuchma who was accused of having ordered repressive measures against journalists (see e.g. UkrN 26.12.2013; MMIC 4.01.2014a).

²⁰⁶ In a detailed article published by MMIC (21.12.2013c), the Ukrainian history from the 17th century on to the present is represented as a history “on the edge of empires” characterised by various divisions of the state territory and changing external rule. Ultimately, the article suggests that, due to EuroMaidan, there is finally a chance to overcome this virtual determinism of history.

²⁰⁷ To counter this atmosphere and to promote the unity of the Ukrainian people, as some statements indicate, EuroMaidan activists deliberately reanimated slogans of the Orange Revolution: ‘East and West together!’ or ‘Away with the bandits!’ (see UkrN 22.01.2014).

As the “anti-protest laws” were adopted (phase IV), statements from civil society opposition show an emerging disillusionment given the ambitious claims of EuroMaidan. Since Ukraine’s independence, there had never been a bigger step backwards concerning the rights and freedoms of Ukrainian citizens:

“This is a devolvement of absolute power to the president and his henchmen and thus no less than a relapse into the times before 1989. [This is] dictatorship, totalitarianism, and an open declaration of war.” (UkrN 17.01.2014)

In this context, a number of reports retrospectively deal with the development of Ukraine since its independence and try to explain how it could come to this. Thereby, the situation is explained by referring to an overall inability to transcend the Soviet legacy: lack of experience in democratic processes, a languishing Soviet-style economy, a Soviet-formed elite that persistently dominates the political elite as well as bureaucracies, and, all in all, favourable conditions for a small group of oligarchs to enrich themselves at the expense of the state and the Ukrainian people (see e.g. MMIC 21.01.2014a). Consequently, for those political leaders, the main objective is to stay in power by all available means:

“In 2004, Yanuiovych spoke a sacramental dictum: ‘Once in power, nobody will be able to oust us!’ On this maxim, from 2010 on, they began to establish a completely authoritarian regime – seemingly democratic for the West, but de facto dictatorial for the Ukrainian people.” (UkrN 25.01.2014c)

Based on that, the articulated expectations about the near future at this point definitely implied that it would only be a matter of time before the authorities fall. Indeed, in its post-Soviet history, the Ukrainian society slowly but surely developed a moderate mode of political conflict settlement, drawing on peaceful mass protests and civil disobedience.²⁰⁸ However, against the background of systematic repression and excessive violence against EuroMaidan protesters, the previously still existing optimistic hopes for a *peaceful* way of regime change were ultimately challenged, especially when the protests turned deadly during its last days.²⁰⁹

The Media and INGOs: Reporting on the unprecedented

The observation of EuroMaidan within the framework of the analysed media coverage and INGO reports includes various short-term foci. Here, too, the obvious superordinate comparison to the Orange Revolution and other key events in Ukrainian history played a central role.

After the first violent crackdown on Maidan protests (phase II), media reports frequently used interviews with “experts” and “affected people” to capture the complex situation:

“Police has never attacked peaceful demonstrators at such a large scale with so many people hospitalized. [...] There were fights between protesters in 2001, during the Ukraine ‘Without Kuchma protests’, but not one-sided attacks like this morning on such a big scale.” (Interview with “human rights activist” Yevhen Zakharov, KyivPost 6.12.2013: 8)

²⁰⁸ According to the analysed sources, against all adverse conditions, Ukrainian civil society as such indeed developed in a positive way since its independence, because there are manifold confident and independent political parties and non-governmental organisations with pro-European mindsets. Therefore, a development towards a Belarussian-style autocracy is presented as implausible (see e.g. UkrN 25.01.2014a, 6.02.2014c).

²⁰⁹ See MMIC (21.01.2014d) and UkrN (24.01.2014b, c; 13.02.2014; 16.02.2014; 18.02.2014).

“‘What happened (on Nov. 30), it was bloody and unprovoked,’ says Oleh Rybachuk, one of the most visible members of civil society on EuroMaidan, referring to the violent police breakup of peaceful protesters that night which sent dozens of people to the hospital.” (KyivPost 13.12.2013: 14)

To pin down the events within a broader scope, the media also made an effort to explain the ongoing situation with reference to Ukraine’s history since its independence. In this context, even though the share of supporters of “Ukraine’s European vector” was higher than ever before (particularly in comparison to the Orange Revolution; see e.g. ICG 2.01.2014), Ukraine’s political, economic and cultural independence from Russia was still seen as unfulfilled. In this sense, ‘Ukraine without Kuchma’ in 2000/2001 and the Orange Revolution in 2004 were represented as “missed chances” since none of the political forces really took the opportunity to break with the past and to bring about true societal change (see The Ukrainian Week 3.12.2013: 8-10). Thus, the “lost years” under Yanucovych only represent the latest (albeit the worst) episode of a long record of growing cronyism and increasingly undermined democratic mechanisms fostered by parties of all colours (see The Ukrainian Week 3.12.2013: 6-7). Against this background, media coverage particularly emphasises one of the main differences between EuroMaidan and other mass protests in recent Ukrainian history: Right from the beginning, EuroMaidan deliberately decoupled from political parties and their symbols and thus presented itself as a new and unspoiled political force in Ukrainian society (see e.g. KyivPost 6.12.2013: 3).

As the protests on Maidan mounted when the details about the government’s “Russia-Ukraine-deal” came to light in little slices, Media accounts more and more often address a certain heroic cult that developed around EuroMaidan:

“Heroes are born during momentous times and EuroMaidan is no exception. Some of the heroic deeds inspired the whole nation, while other simply kept their companions warm with a cup of coffee and a chat. There is already a book and a documentary in the works about outstanding EuroMaidan personalities.” (KyivPost 20.12.2013: 1)

Reports emerging from this context include personal stories that draw on highly symbolic historical elements. For instance, KyivPost reported about “the bell-ringer” of St. Michael’s Cathedral, Ivan Sydor, who started to ring the bells of St. Michael’s to alarm the sleeping city and call for help when riot police started to attack protesters camps on Maidan in the night of December 11. Pointing out the singularity of this measure, the bell-ringer stated:

“The last time St. Michael’s sounded an alarm was in 1240, when Kyiv was under seizure from the Mongols. It was also a December, and the Mongols came to the Lyadski Gates, located in the place of modern Independence Square.” (KyivPost 20.12.2013: 10)

Further examples include “the old man”, Oleksiy Kushnirchuk, a highly motivated protester at the age of 85, whose sister had been killed by security officers in Soviet times and who wants to show his anger about the government’s plans to approach the EU, which he perceives as “a new Soviet Union” (KyivPost 20.12.2013: 10).

As the Russia-Ukraine-deal was definitely concluded and the protests on Maidan gained in size and quality (phase III), media reports more and more openly and frequently speculated about the prospects of the “Yanucovych regime”. Thereby, different future scenarios are

simulated with reference to the experiences of the past²¹⁰, particularly concerning the electoral fraud in 2004 that induced the Orange Revolution:

“If the EuroMaidan is neutralized and assistance is provided by Vladimir Putin, Viktor Yanukovich will prepare a wide range of tools to stay in power. [...] So the upcoming presidential campaign [for the 2015 elections] may differ from that of 2004 in the following aspects: those in power may change the election law and amend the Constitution, dilute the votes of the opposition electorate, and bribe voters with ‘fat Russian cash’.” (The Ukrainian Week 23.12.2013: 10)

Even in mid-January 2014, when the protests on Maidan again achieved an unprecedented level in the light of the adoption of the “anti-protest laws”, those future scenarios still see a realistic chance for Yanukovich “to win an honest election next year” since the political opposition is presented as being too fragmented to pose a serious danger in presidential elections (see e.g. KyivPost 17.02.2014: 4).

In sum, media coverage in phase IV is marked by the contrast between ongoing initiatives of crisis talks (president, opposition leaders) and dramatically increasing tension and confrontation. On January 22, media articles particularly refer to Ukraine’s Unity Day, which turned out to be a day of civil unrest and a part of “the biggest test of Ukraine’s post-Soviet integrity” (see The Ukrainian Week 30.01.2014: 10). On January 24, given the first deaths on Maidan, the KyivPost cites one of the prominent rallying cries among protesters on its cover page: “Give me liberty or give me death!”²¹¹

²¹⁰ In this regard, INGO accounts invoke exemplary scenarios such as the storming of the Winter Palace in the context of the October Revolution of 1917 or the revolutionary events on Tahrir Square in Egypt in 2011. However, most of these historically inspired scenarios were overruled since the general framework is seen as completely different (see UHHRU 27.12.2013).

²¹¹ The KyivPost (24.01.2014: 1) itself recalls that this dictum traces back to Patrick Henry (1736-1799), a prominent figure of the American War of Independence and Governor of Virginia.



Figure: Cover Page, KyivPost 24.01.2014

Furthermore, in a both rhetorically and actually violent atmosphere, Yanukovich is talked up as a head of state that is primarily motivated by revenge, despite all initiatives for starting a dialogue with the broader opposition:

“Actually, Yanukovich is seeking violence as a way of pay back, revenge for his 2004 failure. He will keep talking about dialogue, but there are no democratic institutions for a dialogue in Ukraine as he usurped power back in 2010. What he is looking for is not compromise, but a way to excuse the use of state violence for his personal trauma.” (The Ukrainian Week 30.01.2014: 14)

In the same vein, the media reported on “special contributions” to EuroMaidan, such as a widely shared video of protest scenes produced by activists and accompanied by Charlie Chaplin’s final speech in *The Great Dictator* (1940) and therefore insinuating that Yanukovich’s regime, at least since the first lives were lost, could be equated with an inhuman dictatorship:

“Don’t give yourselves to these unnatural men – machine men with machine minds and machine hearts! You are not machines! You are not cattle! You are men! You have a love of humanity in your hearts! You don’t hate! Only the unloved hate, the unloved and the unnatural. Soldiers! Don’t fight for slavery!

Fight for liberty!” (Charly Chaplin in *The Great Dictator*, cited in KyivPost 7.02.2014: 5)²¹²

As the protests turned increasingly violent and deadly, media articles more and more frequently used the metaphor of a closing window of opportunity. Thereby, under the pressure of events that followed in quick succession, external actors (particularly the EU and European countries) were called on to immediately intervene and prevent “the murder of a democratic country” which would also be “EU’s own suicide” (see *The Ukrainian Week* 30.01.2014: 21). Yet, this request remained disregarded. Instead, the “scenario of threatening bloodshed and a new ruin” approached.²¹³ Right before the breakup of the government and Yanucovych’s fleeing from Ukraine, media reports ultimately stated that February 20 represented the bloodiest day in Ukraine’s post-Soviet history (see e.g. KyivPost 21.02.2014).

5.4 The Social Dimension: Selfs and Others on Maidan

As demonstrated in previous chapters (5.2/5.3), within the discursive arena that is reflected by the text corpus conflict topics and themes get differentiated from non-conflict ones (factual dimension). Likewise, the here and now of the conflict gets differentiated from non-conflicting parts of the past and the future (temporal dimension). Considering the evolution of the Maidan protests as a conflict system in its social dimension means approaching the text corpus providing that conflict identities are constituted within communication itself and thus undergo change. Recalling Luhmann (1984: 426-436; see chapter 4.1), identities are understood as stable structures of expectation appearing in reference to four layers: persons, roles, programmes and norms. The synopsis section (chapter 5.5) draws on these layers in greater detail. In preparation for this, the following sections examine how discursive addresses get differentiated and repeatedly actualised.

Phase I (Nov 21 – Dec 30)

When on November 21 civil society activists and journalists met at Maidan to express their incomprehension of the government’s decision to suspend the Association Agreement with the EU, they were already referring and responding to a loosely defined common identity. Indeed, this was not just a simple reflex against government decisions articulated out of a vaguely definable civil society. Since the frame of “EuroMaidan” had already been set with the help of social media, there was a common denominator for those rejecting the government’s decision and thus a common identity (and a communicative counterpart) as a party to an objective political contradiction. However, even though the Maidan protests considerably increased in the first few days and “EuroMaidan” specified its arguments and positions (in a virtual process of

²¹² In this issue, KyivPost published the complete text of Charly Chaplin’s speech. The activists’ video can be accessed via Youtube (at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HpgYu2p9CE4>).

²¹³ In an article also published by MMIC (17.02.2014a), *Transparency International* delineates an imminent future scenario characterised by “continuous strife, civil war, and complete loss of independence” (recalling a “terrible” period of Ukrainian history in the 17th and 18th century) if Ukrainian society and authorities not choose to resolve the crisis soon by returning to the constitution of 2004.

self-understanding; see themes and topics in 5.3.), government statements literally addressed “EuroMaidan” not until November 27:

“I’d like to address to citizens who are on streets, like now, to express their support to the course of European integration. After all, this is the main content of the actions that take place in the last days – what certain political forces would like to turn into conflict with the authorities. It is pointedly that the participants of *EuroMaidan* are trying to distance themselves from politicians. We’ve seen as people literally physically ‘bypass’ opposition politicians, leave them aside from their declaration of will.” (Prime Minister Mykola Azarov, GovUkr 27.11.2013a, italics added)

As the above-cited statement suggests, after 6 days of mass protests that exceeded the Orange Revolution early on, the government rhetorically recognised EuroMaidan as a more or less legitimate political factor, if not as a political force in Ukrainian politics.²¹⁴ On the other hand, however, the situation of a mass movement that grew extremely quickly and is backed up by a wide range of civil society branches seems to engender a certain discomfort within the authorities. Since EuroMaidan (at least in the early phase) had no leadership or management structure an institutionalised communicative counterpart was lacking. In this context, the government makes recourse to an auxiliary structure by insinuating that the opposition (that is obviously far more predictable than any anonymous leader of EuroMaidan) tried to instrumentalise EuroMaidan:

“Unfortunately, some opposition politicians do not leave attempts to convert the peaceful demonstration of will into crew-to-crew clashes. Law enforcement bodies should stop such attempts immediately.” (GovUkr 27.11.2013a)

At this point, it should be stated that, on the basis of the analysed documents from different civil society sources, the Ukrainian political opposition parties played a minor role as a communicative address during the Maidan protests as a whole. Although their leading figures were indeed present on Maidan and tried to influence the protest dynamics, they had never been perceived as protest leaders. Rather, they simply reacted to the moves on Maidan:

“Euromaidan, ultimately a people’s convention in its form and essence, [is] an exclusively peaceful, tremendously massive assembly of active citizens, representatives of non-governmental organizations, youth and students. It [is] a democratic Maidan that stood under the Ukrainian national and European banners and had done its best to keep distance from politicians of all colors.” (MMIC 30.11.2013)

To gather the process of emerging identities in conflict, media coverage acted as an important projection surface since it particularly observed the changing nature of (indirect) communication between members of the government and the activists of EuroMaidan (e.g. via interviews). Now, a common feature of the analysed media reports is that the political contradiction that

²¹⁴ In the first days of EuroMaidan, the government rather ignored the unprecedented size and quality of the mass protests in the first place. Later, the protests were even interpreted as an expression of support for the course of the government: “In whole the situation is stable and calm. [...] The fact that people have taken these events so seriously proves that we are doing everything right. To a large extent, they are supporting our course. (GovUkr 26.11.2013e)

stepped forward through the government's unexpected behaviour was straightaway observed as the expression of a deep historical cleavage in Ukraine's society and thus portrayed in a clear-cut way of reproducing corresponding parties to the standpoints:

"A historical frontier between the world of established values, self-improvement, discipline and development, and the world of complete unpredictability, paternalism, hierarchies, absolute power and absolute inert obedience, and irrational insecurities that can take decades and centuries to cure." (The Ukrainian Week 22.11.2013: 6)

Being in the centre of a clash between civilizations of the East and the West, Ukraine is both a detonator and an object to that clash. In many aspects, its upcoming choice is crucial to itself – and Europe's future." (The Ukrainian Week 22.11.2013: 24)

In the aftermath of the summit in Vilnius, further media articles and headlines like "Betrayal of Hopes" (KyivPost 29.11.2013: 1) or "Ukraine's big moment turns into major bust" (KyivPost 29.11.2013: 7) continued to draw on this major division of Ukraine's society and, hence, fostered the actualisation and (re-) production of pointed positions which, in turn, served as a starting points for dramatic speculations:

"The polarization within Ukraine between Europhiles and Russophiles will intensify and major civil disturbances are now quite possible." (KyivPost 29.11.2013: 5)

Phase II (Nov 30 – Dec 17)

In the light of the first violent crackdown on Maidan on November 30, the analysed media did not neglect to point to further polarisations in Ukrainian society. Here, the finding is that, beyond the traditional linguistic divide between Russian and Ukrainian speaking parts of the population, many other "cracks in the nation" are beginning to show (see The Ukrainian Week 3.12.2013: 8-11; KyivPost 6.12.2013: 1-3):

- a deep crisis of confidence between the political opposition parties and civil society²¹⁵;
- an open infighting between various groups of interest within the ruling party (particularly between the camps of different oligarchs);
- an institutional dispute between those who try to strengthen the parliament's rights and others who want to maintain a president-centered political system;
- and finally, a confrontation between the political opposition and the government while both are "stuck in their bubbles" of winner-takes-it-all-scenarios.

Referring to the last point, the analysis of the government statements in phase II shows that the government represents itself as a legitimate guardian of law and order which was illegitimately challenged by "provocateurs" and "alarmists" who try to invoke a political and economic crisis for no reason. Although expressing understanding and regret concerning the massive use of

²¹⁵ As, for example, the KyivPost (6.12.2013: 3) states, "Over the past week as the political crisis became critical, leaders of the opposition were accused of failing to lead and come up with a workable plan, frequently failing to be at the epicenter of events and formulating a coherent set of demands." Therefore, to a great extent, the protests are presented as being both against the (former) "Orange government" (i.e. the political opposition) and the "White-and-Blue" (i.e. the actual Party of Regions government).

force by law enforcement agencies and showing the government as ready to engage in dialogue and compromise, the statements mainly document the authorities' overall rejection of EuroMaidan as being an anonymous and uncontrollable mass infiltrated by criminals, saboteurs, radicals, extremists, and, most important, by "immoral politicians hiding behind parliamentary immunity" (GovUkr 4.12.2013a).²¹⁶ Moreover, members of the political opposition are presented as craving for power and instrumentalising the Maidan protests for discrediting the government and pursuing their personal power ambitions. In sum, based on the government's communication, EuroMaidan, at this point, not only constituted a temporary challenge for the rule of law (e.g. concerning the protesters' defiance of the legal ban of demonstrations) but also a concrete danger for Ukraine's stability and national security since the functioning of the systems of life support, the operation of state administration and economic activities were directly threatened.²¹⁷ Consequently, the government's suggestions to deal with the situation (e.g. concerning the investigation of the use of force on Maidan) did not include addressing possible interlocutors from EuroMaidan but establishing a "trilateral format" with those understood as full-value representatives: the authorities, the opposition and the international community (see GovUkr 11.12.2013d).

Based on the analysis of documents from civil society sources in phase II, two key developments can be retained: First, referring to various self-descriptions of participants and supporters, the expectations of what EuroMaidan is and should be (i.e. its programme and norms) became increasingly articulated. Hereby, the self-image of EuroMaidan as an expression of an independent civil society that considers itself as a separate entity besides the government and the political opposition parties played a major role. Further elements of EuroMaidan's emerging identity included the programme of overcoming the (above-mentioned) cleavages in view of a common future backed by a young and progressive generation.²¹⁸ What can also be found in the statements is the idea that EuroMaidan represents both a full-fledged "revolution" and a political force able to act. As such, it feels a heavy responsibility for the whole country, as the following declaration of 100 leading EuroMaidan figures exemplarily shows:

"We, the representatives of civil society Ukraine, recognising our responsibility to our descendants, [...] having no doubt that further confrontation and escalation of the conflict threatens independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ukraine and may lead to social and economic collapse." (MMIC 10.12.2013e)

As a part of EuroMaidan's self-image, the statements also implicate references concerning the constitution of its main counterpart: In this context, Yanucovych is portrayed as the personification of an authoritarian and kleptocratic regime that jeopardises Ukraine's independence by emulating a Russian-style political system and fostering societal cleavages and clientilism. However, according to a number of self-critical commentaries, the president only represents the figurehead of an already existing "corrupt and economically dependent police state" that had been tolerated and promoted by a "majoritarian mentality of indifference and passivity".²¹⁹

²¹⁶ See particularly GovUkr (3.12.2013d; 3.12.2013g; 4.12.2013a; 5.12.2013e).

²¹⁷ See GovUkr (7.12.2013c; 9.12.2013c; 11.12.2013a; 11.12.2013e).

²¹⁸ See e.g. MMIC (4.12.2013b; 9.12.2013) and UkrN (16.12.2014).

²¹⁹ See MMIC (12.12.2013a; 12.12.2013d; 13.12.2013) and UkrN (12.12.2013; 16.12.2014).

Second, another important development on the part of EuroMaidan consists in the growing awareness of being dependent, to a certain extent, on the political opposition parties in order to bring about real change. On the one hand, indeed, negative attitudes towards all opposition politicians were widely shared among protesters on Maidan and their role in negotiations with the authorities were Argus-eyed. In fact, the protesters' motivation was virtually independent from appeals of political party leaders, as the DIF poll among protesters shows:

What made you come out to the Maidan?	
Viktor Yanukovych's refusal to sign the Association Agreement with the EU	53.5
Brutal beating of demonstrators at the Maidan on November 30 night, repressions	69.6
Opposition leaders' appeals	5.4
Desire to change authorities in the country	39.1
Desire to change life in Ukraine	49.9

Extract from “Maidan 2013: Survey among Maidan Participants” (DIF 10.12.2013)

Furthermore, 92 % of the protesters on Maidan declared not to be a member of any party, organisation or movement. On the other hand, the protest movement gradually realised the necessity to mandate and thus to empower either leaders of the political parties or non-political civil society leaders in order to be able to effectively influence the proceedings.²²⁰ Therefore, within the framework of roundtable negotiations, EuroMaidan protesters ascribed themselves the role of an attentive guard who urges both the authorities and opposition parties to consider EuroMaidan's claims and, as the above-mentioned poll also shows, who would (at least 72.4 % of respondents) stay on Maidan “as long as necessary”.²²¹

Phase III (Dec 17 – Jan 16)

When the Russia-Ukraine-deal was concluded, EuroMaidan activists felt vindicated with their speculations and fears: Based on the analysed statements, the virtual feelings towards the Russian regime pulling the strings in the background changed to the very concrete impression of a Russian president Putin who, once again, succeeded in coercing Ukraine to stay in Russia's sphere of influence (see e.g. MMIC 22.12.2013). At the same time, from civil society's perspective, the existing cracks within Ukraine's ruling party and the regime became more and more articulated. In this context, Ukraine's oligarch class is observed as being split in at least three

²²⁰ This point is also repeatedly referred to in the analysed media: “Without politicians, the speeches of civil activists were doomed to fail and disdain from those in power. [Therefore] political and civil Maidans announced that they pursued a common goal.” (The Ukrainian Week 3.12.2013: 11)

²²¹ See MMIC (5.12.2013a; 9.12.2013; 10.12.2013d; 12.12.2013a; 16.12.2013b) and UkrN (16.12.2013). In the analysed media reports, this point is repeatedly picked up later on (see e.g. The Ukrainian Week 23.12.2013: 5): “Maidan is not a mere demonstration. It is a long-term action. [...] Maidan will remain the factor of Ukrainian politics in the memory of Ukraine and international community, if not in the minds of those in power.”

factions: one that supports the status quo, one that supports the Russia-Ukraine-deal and a third one that truly supports EuroMaidan and European integration (see MMIC 23.12.2013c). As advocates of the latter openly stated,

“Everyone wants clarity. [...] The fact that peaceful people went to peaceful protests shows that Ukraine is a free, democratic country. No one will take Ukraine from that path. And that is really great.” (Rinat Akhmetov, MMIC 17.12.2013c)

In addition to the one or other renegade oligarch²²², voices from EuroMaidan particularly referred to the many small and medium-size businesses that also sponsor EuroMaidan, for example by directly providing help to maintain the protest infrastructure or by publicly criticising the government and declaring their support for the protesters. In this context, the emergence of a “socially responsible economy” was observed and articulated as a relevant factor in conflict.²²³

Given the analysis of the media coverage in phase III, it can be stated that the media, too, exhaustively addressed the latent infighting between “the hawks” and “the doves” within the ruling Party of Regions, which became manifest. In this context, the massive use of force against protesters on Maidan (especially on November 30 and December 11) is presented as a consequence of the confrontation between different groups of influence within the authorities, or, more precisely, as the hawks’ attempt to get the upper hand by strikingly showing the state’s monopoly on legitimate violence (see e.g. *The Ukrainian Week* 23.12.2013: 12-13). In short, according to media reports, the hawks, at this point, were expected to launch new waves of violence and repression in any form (e.g. persecution, interrogation, intimidation and mudslinging) in order to evoke fear among the protesters. However, the purport of media coverage remains unmistakeable about the attitudes both on Maidan and in the population at large:

“But the experience of effective joint action will not vanish. People have savoured freedom, courage, responsibility and trust for each other. Communities of proactive citizens have to respond with local Maidans to every violation of human rights or abuse of power. No functionary or representative of the regime should now feel impudent.” (*The Ukrainian Week* 23.12.2013: 5)²²⁴

In parallel to this unprecedented level of determinism on the protesters’s side advanced in media accounts, the analysed statements from civil society sources in phase III are suggesting that EuroMaidan indeed entered a critical stage of defining its self-understanding. As mentioned earlier, the common refusal of the Russia-Ukraine-deal derided as “Putin-Yanucovych-anti-

²²² After the violent crackdown on protesters on Maidan and in the occupied administration building of the city of Kiev on December 11, Rinat Akhmetov (head of System Capital Management Group, Ukraine’s leading financial and industrial firm, particularly in mining and steel), Dmytro Firtash (head of Group DF, leading in chemical industries and natural gas) and Viktor Pinchuk (head of Interpipe Group, one of Ukraine’s leading pipe, wheel and steel producers) publicly distanced themselves from the government for the first time (see e.g. *The Ukrainian Week* 23.12.2013: 12).

²²³ See e.g. UkrN (19.12.2013); later on, towards the end of EuroMaidan, see MMIC (14.02.2014).

²²⁴ This assessment mirrors a number of documents from civil society opposition. Thus, comments under the header of “Ukraine’s revolution of dignity“, for example, emphasise that Ukrainians, at last, picked up courage and willingness to take control of their own destiny (see MMIC 27.12.2013c). In the same vein, INGO reports state that EuroMaidan represents an incomparable “civic mobilization” urging for institutionalised ways of political participation (see e.g. UHHRU 27.12.2013).

Western-pact” again boosted the motivation and the consensus among the protesters (see MMIC 31.12.2013d). By the turn of the year, statements increasingly articulate the urge that EuroMaidan should institutionalise and thus equip itself with comprehensive organisational structures in order to be able to accomplish its objectives:

“The task at hand is to spread the values of the Maidan beyond Ukraine’s capital, and to prepare capacity that will ensure a free and fair vote in March 2015. Clearly, this task requires some form of organizational structure that is of a national scale.” (MMIC 1.01.2014)

In an effort to distance itself from the political (party) establishment, EuroMaidan reluctantly started to set up organisational structures. Therefore, within the framework of the “All-Ukrainian Assembly Maidan”, leading figures of EuroMaidan established a governing body including political and “non-political” actors. Against the background of a widespread scepticism towards functionaries, this provisional structure was not only meant to represent the voice of camping Maidan protesters and to coordinate their demands and activities with Ukraine’s numerous real civil society organizations and opposition political parties. Also, the council was meant as a measure to build “institutional trust” in a society that broadly distrusted social institutions and to back the “identity revolution” that had been in progress (see MMIC 1.01.2014). In fact, societal support for EuroMaidan became increasingly broad and diversified, as e.g. a viral video message by more than 50 Ukrainians from all walks of life addressed to president Yanucovich shows:

“The future of Ukraine lies in our hands, not in yours. We are Europeans. We will be in the EU. With you or without you.” (MMIC 3.01.2014b)

Even though the younger generation, particularly the students’ movements, proved to be the strongest protest driver (see MMIC 4.01.2014a), the sphere of EuroMaidan’s highly motivated supporters became increasingly broader, including, for example, religious leaders who began to openly participate in the protests:

“Dear Ukrainians, ignore the corruption of the information, with which they want to discourage us and use to make us fight amongst one another, they want to once again return us into the state of being a helpless grey biomass. We are free, strong and happy. We have our faith and our personal dignity. We are – unique and virtuous. We – shall overcome!” (MMIC 5.01.2014a)²²⁵

In sum, based on the analysis of statements from EuroMaidan voices in phase III, it can be stated that EuroMaidan’s process of self-understanding resulted in a twofold insight: First, in a self- and external perception, EuroMaidan represented the embodiment of an unprecedented level of civil society mobilisation if not the awakening of civil society in post-Soviet Ukraine at all. Second, from a pragmatic perspective, to position itself as an efficacious political force distinct from the government and traditional opposition parties, EuroMaidan protesters realised that at least some basic organisational structures were needed; the “All-Ukrainian Assembly Maidan” mentioned above and the “All-Ukrainian Euromaidan Forums” that followed in mid-

²²⁵ Common statement of a mufti of the Spiritual Administration of Muslims of Ukraine and a representative of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church in Maidan.

January in Kharkiv (for a chronicle see MMIC 14.01.2014a) and in mid-February in Odesa represented attempts to do so.

Regarding the emergence of EuroMaidan as an increasingly “institutionalised” revolution claiming political heft, the authorities, at this point, reacted in two different ways. According to the analysed statements, first, EuroMaidan was officially portrayed as an important impulse that, by “national roundtable talks, political disputes, and honest dialogue”, helped to debate and to confirm the government’s plans to establish “a balance between the East and West without giving up our national interests”, as president Yanucovych summarised in his New Year’s address (see MMIC 3.01.2014b). Second, once again, political opposition parties are blamed for their alleged efforts to “hijack” Maidan protests for the sake of their own power ambitions. In this context, EuroMaidan is partly portrayed as an “illegal and immoral revolution” since it not only blocks state functions and thus deprives the population of indispensable assistance but also because even children are used for their purposes:

“So-called leaders of the Maidan forgot, the moral manifesto of Dostoevsky: ‘No revolution is worth the tear of a child’? I’d like to ask all parents in Ukraine whether you want such immoral orders, as on Maidan for your children.” (GovUkr 15.01.2014a)

Phase IV (Jan 16 – Feb 22)

The adoption of the “anti-protest laws” was accompanied by a tightening of the official rhetoric towards protests on Maidan. While insinuating that the leaders of the political opposition were in cahoots with leading figures of EuroMaidan, voices from the ruling Party of Regions denounced protest leaders as being “criminal” and “immoral”. Thereby, apart from EuroMaidan’s defiance towards the government’s law enforcement measures, its lack of respect for religious authorities played an important role, especially concerning the calls to protest on the Day of the Baptism of the Lord (January 19), which is a central feast day in the Orthodox Churches. Furthermore, according to the analysed documents, protesters were portrayed as ruthless and violent revolutionaries who emerged from an atmosphere of hysteria and hate created by “stage directors” on the sideline. However, at this point, the latter were accused of having lost control over the mass that now shows the “bestly grin of extremism” (see UkrN 20.01.2014b). In sum, it can be stated that the government repeatedly confirmed the allegation that the political opposition was directly responsible for the “escalation of violence and the devastating consequences for the country”. In addition, it once again attributed itself the role of a defender of the constitutional order and the stability of the country, which is – and that is the first time since the beginning of the protests – depicted as being threatened by “pogrom and terrorists” (see GovUkr 22.01.2014a).

“There is a coup d’etat attempt in Ukraine. And all who support this coup must explicitly say: yes, we are for overthrow the legitimate authority in Ukraine and not to hide behind the peaceful protesters.” (Prime Minister Mykola Azarov, GovUkr 23.01.2014e)

Nevertheless, while the language continued in a rather confrontative mode, the analysed government statements still include some passages documenting the willingness to hold a

constructive dialogue with those political forces and those politicians “who are not spoilers and do not destabilized the situation” (see GovUkr 22.01.2014a, g).

Based on the analysis of documents from civil society opposition, the government’s call for dialogue went unheard in the light of the adopted anti-protest laws. From EuroMaidan’s perspective, president Yanucovych, ultimately, not only furnished the evidence for being “ignorant, primitive and, concerning his worldview and perception, literally bestial” but also for being a puppet in Putin’s hands (UkrN 20.01.2014c). In this sense, the anti-protest laws with all the methods of repression were outlined as carrying a blantly obvious Russian thumbprint.²²⁶ Against this background, the protesters’ anger was of course directed at the authorities that allowed the Russian political and economic elite to gain extensive influence over Ukraine (see UkrN 22.01.2014). At the same time, the protesters articulated their frustration about EuroMaidan’s inability to take responsibility and to develop a successful leadership of the movement while the people’s freedom was on the verge of being sold out.

“People are tired of politicians’ flowery words, claiming to know how to save the country [...]. We don’t have a way back. Either we will win, or they will put us in jail.” (MMIC 21.01.2014c)

Indeed, in view of two months long mass protests without any seizable success (compared to the declared goals), the analysed statements show signs of a certain atmosphere of demoralisation both on the protesters’ side and even among police forces (see e.g. MMIC 21.01.2014d). In this atmosphere, the belief in solutions based on roundtable talks dramatically faded:

“Those roundtables during the past two months are nothing but grotesque imitations that convinced the people of that fact that the government only understands a language of violence. That’s why a part of the population proceeded to violent resistance.” (UkrN 25.01.2014c)

As the first deaths of protesters became known on January 22 and, in the same breath, the violent escalation was portrayed (by government sources and some international media accounts) as being invoked by nationalist and far-right elements on Maidan, the protesters’ anger was boosted and immediatly focussed on the supposed “Russian hand” behind the events (see UkrN 24.01.2014c, 25.01.2014a, 27.01.2014a). At the same time, influential oligarchs (like e.g. Rinat Akhmetov) raised their hand to offer commiserations and regret concerning the victims of violence (as the government also did a few days later; see GovUkr 29.01.2014e) and to express their perceived responsibility as business leaders to speak up in crisis:

“Business cannot keep silent when people are killed, a real danger of breakup of the country emerges, when a political crisis can lead to a deep economic recession and thus inevitably result in lower standards of living. [...] Any use of force and weapons is unacceptable. With this scenario there will be no winners in Ukraine, only victims and losers. [...] The only solution is to move from street

²²⁶ As some INGO reports about the anti-protests laws suggest, the Ukrainian and Russian legal texts in this field have a great deal in common, e.g. particularly with regards to “dangerous activities” of civic organisation or the asserted need for continuous censorship of the Internet (see e.g. UUHRU 20.01.2014a). Media reports, too, extensively address the closeness of Ukrainian and Russian legislation. Referring to the raised budget for inner security and the newly adopted rights and instruments of security forces, the media shows gallows humour: “Welcome to the new police state. We call it Little Russia.” (Kyiv Post 17.01.2014: 5)

riots and attempts to curb them to constructive negotiations and results.“ (UkrN 25.01.2014b)

At least since these statements, observers from civil society opposition highlighted that, at this point, the different power groups within the ruling regime, particularly oligarchs divided into doves and hawks began to fall apart whereas the hawks were definitely believed to prevail in view of the massive use of force against protesters and the possible imposition of martial law (see MMIC 29.01.2014a). Therefore, from EuroMaidan’s perspective, the parties to the conflict were cleat-cut: On one side of the frontline, which is physically symbolised by the barricades in Kiev, those who defend themselves, their country and their European future,

“[...] some with Molotovcocktails, some with knitting needles, some with baseball bats, some with texts published on the Internet, some with photos documenting the atrocities.” (MMIC 29.01.2014c)

On the other side of the frontline: the “tyrant and his group of criminals” (backed by a pro-Russian economic and political lobby) who were the first to shed blood of innocent people and thus are not only expected to continue to use violence against their own people but also to threaten Europe as a whole. Based on that, “the protests will not continue in a peaceful way” (see e.g. UkrN 30.01.2014b).

Since the first deaths of protesters on Maidan, media coverage left no doubt about the “dramatic new escalation of violence” and its initiators.²²⁷ Thereby, media reports, too, made use of metaphorically characterising parties to the conflict “on this side” and “on that side” of the barricades:

“On this side” (EuroMaidan)	“On that side” (Government)
people believing in a state as “a guarantee and instrument for natural rights of the people” “people who prefer to earn their living without fear, grow, develop and travel the world, and most importantly be independent from the whims of their domestic or foreign rulers” “people on this side of the barricade will not forgive a conspiracy against themselves, from this government or any other that will replace it” (The Ukrainian Week 31.01.2014: 16) people who “want to make sure that the country allows all its diversity, and that they coexist in a peaceful manner regulated by an efficient, clear and applicable set of rules” (KyivPost 31.01.2014: 5)	“a corporation of personal enrichment” “people who deny market economy, competition and free market and prefer to live on violence and robbery” (The Ukrainian Week 30.01.2014: 16) people who tolerate “hired thugs to clear protesters off the streets and terrorize peaceful demonstrators” “a few handfuls of radicals and facists from western Ukraine” are used are alleged as a pretext to justify violence against all protesters people who “grumble that the government is doing to little to crack down on the protesters” (KyivPost 31.01.2014: 4-5)

²²⁷ As the KyivPost (24.01.2014: 5) stated, there was unmistakable evidence of state-sanctioned snipers firing at EuroMaidan activists from the roofs of buildings flanking Maidan square.

Figure: Parties to the conflict displayed by media accounts in late January

According to the sparse government statements in early February, EuroMaidan was increasingly dominated and controlled by far-right extremists.²²⁸ Seen from this angle, both security forces and peaceful protesters became victims of atrocities committed by a mob, which had been incited by militant nationalists and, at this point, got out of control.²²⁹ At the same time, however, EuroMaidan activists gathered more and more evidence that proved the excessive use of violence by security forces and titushki against unarmed protesters: Eyewitness reports and videos document many cases of beatings, torture, targeted shootings, taking away clothes at sub-zero temperatures, kidnappings from hospital, destruction of properties, and intimidation of family members (see UkrN 6.02.2014a). Based on the analysed documents, the protesters' widely shared feeling of being a victim of state power at any time increasingly led to an emotional dissociation and even to a hate-filled devaluation of the state as a whole and particularly towards security forces on Maidan:

“Those guys are aliens! They are not ours. They have some sort of strange accent. And they don't behave as they should at home. And after all, they are freaks. People like that don't grow up here.” (UkrN 7.02.2014b)

From EuroMaidan's perspective, the atmosphere on Maidan in mid-February dramatically changed from frustration and despair to a scenario of increasing tension and confrontation, as self-reflexive comments show:

“The situation on Maidan is pretty tense. People wish to take vengeance for the victims and, even more important, they are tired of the opposition's failure to act. All these hotheads are full of illusions about real fighting and thus cannot imagine the possible consequences.” (UkrN 13.02.2014)

Against this background of uncertainty about how the majority of protesters and security forces would get out the standoff, media accounts made an effort to present an overview of the complex situation, including, for example, a characterisation of the many factions that evolved from Maidan up to this point (own figure based on KyivPost 14.02.2014: 2-5):

	Name	Goal	Method	Strength/ Weakness
anti-government	Right Sector	creation of a “true” Ukraine	ready to lead revolution and to die for it	prepared to use force against government

²²⁸ As, for example, the KyivPost (7.02.2014: 2) notes, this assessment was not only articulated by pro-government actors and Russian media but also by Western journalists. However, later on, in an obvious effort to counter the widespread rumour of the “Right Sector” taking control of Maidan, EuroMaidan sources published reports about Ukrainian Jews holding leading positions on Maidan, e.g. within self-defense units that were responsible for the reinforcement and defense of the barricades (see e.g. UkrN 13.02.2014).

²²⁹ See e.g. GovUkr (4.02.2014d). In this context, official sources drew attention to the “dangerous and difficult” job of security forces who suffered a great number of injured police officers since the beginning of the protests on Maidan (see UkrN 6.02.2014a).

	“Spilna Sprava” (Common Cause)	complete change of power	takeover of government buildings	highly able to set others in motion; set up as a civic group to support small and medium businesses; became one of the most militant protest units
	Maidan Self-Defense	defend the protests and their bases	paramilitary defense units that patrol the perimeter	highly organized, rigid structure, but accused of using weapons; sprang up after Dec 1, when protests in Ukraine grew massive
	Afghan veterans	defend the protesters	paramilitary defense and guerrilla warfare-style tactics if needed	small group but well-organized
	Student movements	total change of power, reform of education sector	networking, legal proposals	mobile and agile, but lacking experience to transform ideas into change; a crucial part of Euro-Maidan during its first, most romantic stage
	Public Sector of Euro-Maidan	public protests that lead to comprehensive changes	information campaigns, creation of strategies	bright, but small and divided group with no common vision; many types of activists that coordinated protests since Nov 21
pro-government	Berkut (“Golden Eagles”), riot-control police	protect government buildings and quell public protests when ordered	truncheons, shields, water cannons and guns	best of all tactical forces, but often heavy-handed; revered by the pro-government side, despised by many on the other; Ukraine’s elite riot police force, the best and fiercest of those who made it through military training
	Interior Ministry special troops	protect government buildings and quell public	truncheons, shields	strong as a group, weak on their own; not to be confused with the Berkut

		protests when ordered		
	Titushki	destabilize demonstrations, attack anti-government protesters	brute force, beatings, kidnappings	endorsed by the government and Russia, not smart
	Ukrainian Front	federalization of Ukraine, push back internationalists and radicals	unclear	endorsed by the government and Russia; created in Kharkiv on Jan 29 as an attempt by government forces to push back against what they perceive as a neo-Nazi threat from western Ukraine

Figure: Overview on Factions/subgroups on Maidan in mid-February

Given this broad range of subgroups on Maidan²³⁰, the last attempts of roundtable talks between the government and representatives of the different groups present on Maidan faced enormous challenges. Though, they resulted in at least some partial achievements: While some of the buildings and streets were cleared, detained protesters were granted amnesty. However, the leaders of the political opposition parties still rejected the offer to participate in a new government.

“A roundtable with gangsters? We’ve done that one. The trouble is that not a single demand was taken seriously. While we lost time with negotiations, the government took the opportunity to kidnap, torture, and arrest people.” (UkrN 18.02.2014)

Accordingly, right before the death toll on Maidan skyrocketed, the protesters definitely relinquished all hope that the situation could be settled in a peaceful way.

²³⁰ Although playing a certain role on Maidan, groups affiliated to the three political opposition parties were omitted in the figure above for reasons of clarity.

5.5 Synopsis: The Fabric of Escalating Moves

“The fact dimension, the temporal dimension, and the social dimension cannot appear in isolation. They must be combined. They can be analyzed separately, but in every real intended meaning, they appear together.” (Luhmann 1995: 86)

According to Luhmann’s dimensions of meaning, the preceeding chapters presented three paths of preliminarily reading the conflict development within the context of the Maidan protests. Now, the many hypotheses of different ranges that have been iteratively gained during case study research and then cast in form of the chapters above are brought together in a synoptical view. Hence, the following chapters highlight critical elements of conflict development, i.e. *escalating moves* (A-F) consisting of *structural couplings* and *normative shifts*, and, linked to that, the gradual formation of firm conflict identities against the background of a world societal grounding of contradictions.²³¹

5.5.1 The Conflict’s Groundwork (Phase I, Nov 21 – Nov 30)

As it has been shown, right from the beginning of the Maidan protests in late November 2013, “EuroMaidan” appears as a key discursive reference within the analysed communication. Independent of the discursive working levels set up in the case study work plan, EuroMaidan represents a frequent buzzword in the whole text copus and thus displays high connectivity. During phase one, EuroMaidan evolves into a veritable signifier for different discursive “construction sites”. In doing so, economic considerations (e.g. addressing the pros and cons of being a part of the European market) get straightforwardly linked to political communication that suggests understanding the foreign policy decision not to sign the AA with the EU as a question of either Ukraine’s eastern or western orientation and thus as a question of diverging power claims (as the government statement below exemplarily exposes):

“We trade with Russia in approximately similar volumes as with Europe. Hence, we cannot lose someone of them. If an enterprise working with Russia stops, people will remain without work. And it will become our problem. For this reason we spare no effort today so that not to have disagreement with Russia and to maintain absolutely transparent relations with the European Union.” (First Vice Prime Minister Serhiy Arbuzov; GovUkr 27.11.2013h)

In this way, the economic language about the logic of the market, e.g. concerning Ukraine’s competitiveness with regard to certain goods, gets collectively translated into a political one, i.e.

²³¹ Please note: The synopsis chapters of both case studies (5.5/6.5) use a number of tables and charts of contrasting grey colour compared to the main text body. These tables indeed refer to and pick up elements of the continuous text but they do not necessarily contain duplications of it. In other words, they are to be considered as substantial parts of the reflecting interpretation part of this case study’s analysis.

dealing with perceptions of a changing domestic and, at the same time, regional/international balance of power:

“Ukraine could not withstand the economic pressure and blackmail. It was threatened with restricted imports of its goods to Russia, particularly from companies in Eastern Ukraine, which accommodates the greater share of its industry and employs hundreds of thousands of people.” (MMIC 22.11.2013b)

Hence, communication that has previously exhibited *either* a political *or* economic mode of observation now gets understandable in a broader and common communicative spectrum. This becomes apparent regarding the main thematic focus of the first phase (see exemplary text passages above): What used to be interpreted as a one-side balance of trade concerning Ukraine’s standing in world economy (i.e. close economic relations between Eastern Ukraine and Russia) is then also seen as an instrument to exercise influence and power. In short, the relationship between both systems, the economic and the political one, takes the shape of a structural coupling and thus further develops the structures of the conflict system by broadening its communicative basis.

Behind these dynamics, there are offers of meaning, which show a world societal framing. As the term EuroMaidan itself epitomises, competing modes of differentiation find their expressions in the discourse: On the one hand, overlooking the different discursive working levels and the respective groups of text data sources, there are references to *EuroMaidan* on many sides. They suggest understanding European integration and EU as a more or less desirable or, at least, relevant socio-political superstructure that is able to produce collectively binding beneficial decisions and, therefore, to exercise political power in parallel to the nation state (see exemplary text passages from government and civil society actors below; italics added).

“We need to take the final steps that will lead our country to a higher level of relations with the EU. [...] The *positive effects of integration* the country can feel when our economy will interact with European economies. [This] will help ensure *European standards of life* of our citizens.” (GovUkr 18.11.2013)

“Citizens of Ukraine [...] fight for their European future in a united Europe. [...] They need attention and support of the *European citizens* who already enjoy those *European values*.” (UkrN 24.11.2013)

“Just the President and the Government of Ukraine have decisively turned the political course towards practical implementation of *criteria of European Union membership* [...]. [T]he work on approaching Ukraine to the *European standards* hasn’t stopped a day.” (Prime Minister Mykola Azarov, GovUkr 27.11.2013c)

On the other hand, *EuroMaidan* is attributed to be the incarnation of Ukraine’s sovereignty. In this regard, Kiev’s “Independence Square” does not only serve as a popular physical venue. Rather, it is widely referred to as a virtual symbol of Ukraine’s self-determination and national identity. As it has been presented in the context of the conflict’s temporal dimension (see chapter 5.3), referring to the Ukrainian nation state as the ultimate arena of political events is particularly highlighted by the historical example of the Orange Revolution of 2004, which gets immediately cited in the discourse. In this context, the Orange Revolution is romanticised as a rising up of nationally oriented Ukrainian citizens against post-Soviet (but still Soviet-minded) elites in order to enforce a just implementation of their interests (i.e. the recognition of the

people as sovereign, especially with regard to democratic elections). In this sense, *EuroMaidan* is discursively addressed as a follow-up of the Orange Revolution and thus as part of Ukraine's pursuit of national self-determination and emancipation from geopolitical patronisation:

“Ukrainians gathered on Maidan in Kiev, which became the venue of the Orange Revolution, to fight for justice. On this square, Ukrainians made their history. Today again, they are there to fight for their European future.” (UkrN 24.11.2013)

However, in turn, this interpretation gets contradicted with reference to the political, economic and social turbulences unleashed by revolutions in Ukrainian history, which are presented as rather negative incidences that sustainably harmed the nation's security and independence. Therefore, in this episode, *EuroMaidan* gets picked up in a (at least) double meaning. Between these poles of a capricious discourse, a perception of unpredictability and uncertainty gains ground. In doing so, once again, the Orange Revolution appears as a landmark raised in order to sort what is happening at that moment:

“It is hard to see how long people will stay in the streets for political speeches and concerts. One big difference – and disadvantage – for protesters is that this is different from the 2004 Orange Revolution, when a clear goal was achieved. The rigged election that year was overturned by the Supreme Court. A new election was held. Most people (except Yanukovich and his supporters) accepted the result of the rerun election. This time, however, the goal – an EU-Ukraine association agreement – doesn't have a strict timeline or deadline. So now what?” (KyivPost 29.11.2013: 4)

To sum up, in phase I, the gradual emergence of overlapping contradictions is observed within the discourse. Following these articulated contradictions, the differentiation of the conflict system's dimensions of meaning can be illustrated as follows:

Dimension	Poles of Contradiction		
factual	deepening relations with Russia	versus	explicitly orienting Ukraine towards Europe
	conforming to binary geopolitical condition		national emancipation and independence
temporal	Orange Revolution as historical failure and source of long term instability		EuroMaidan as necessary follow-up of Orange Revolution
social	post-Soviet elites		newly developing civil society

As these contradictions get discursively visible, they simultaneously ground the gradual formation of conflict identities that begin to show up on different interconnected layers (see chapter 4.1 for this study's concept of identity based on Luhmann),

- as different *persons* and (their respective) *roles* (e.g. “anti-government protester”, “pro-European activist”, “civil society campaigner”, “decision makers”, “office holders”, etc.),

- as different *programmes* of action (e.g. demonstrating for EU association; defending civil society; defending the status quo; etc.),
- and as different *norms* (e.g. democratic participation; political and social change; political stability and security).

Contradictions and conflict identities are thus two sides of the same coin. In sum, based on the case study's analysis of the text corpus, the conflict system's development in phase I is characterised by escalating move A. As summarised above, this move consists of a structural coupling of the economic and the political narrative of contradiction.

Moreover, it consists of a normative shift, which takes place when the quasi-fusion of economic communication (e.g. on market opening and visa exemption) and political communication (e.g. on democratic/authoritarian models of society) broadens the conflict discourse and thus leads to the effect that a broader range of persons feel directly included, i.e. addressed as relevant to the conflict (e.g. as consumers *and* voters *and* travellers). Against the background of the emerging politico-economic conflict discourse perceived as a kind of cross-sector arena, non-partisan civil society gets observed as a separate political force able and willing to articulate itself and to shape Ukraine's future. In this context, the discursive processing of this phenomenon shows a world societal horizon of communication on both discursive working levels. When focussing on political frameworks of orientation as point of departure, there are two clusters of statements: For one thing, statements that promote the idea of national independence and self-determination (discursively condensed in “-Maidan”) and underline the essential role of the nation state as the principal category of political (self-) observation. At the same time, there are other statements that show a decidedly “post-national” view of politics (discursively condensed in “Euro-”), which includes the idea of collectively binding decisions based on a canon of supranational modern (European) values and norms (including freedom of expression, individualism, free trade etc.). Ergo, the discourse features competing modes of observation and, thus, competing principles of differentiation that generate new offers of meaning, new potential of contradiction and, as a result, increasing connectivity within a growing conflict system.

5.5.2 Revolution, Legality and the Use of Force (Phase II, Nov 30 – Dec 17)

As stated earlier, the beginning of phase II is marked by the observation (shared all over the discourse) of the first physically violent actions that include a large quantity of persons:

“Video footage shows Berkut officers beating protestors and in some cases pursuing men and women in order to beat them. About 35 people have so far been charged with hooliganism under the Administrative Code and dozens of people are being treated for their injuries. [...] someone decided that enough was enough and the protests had to end.” (AI 30.11.2013)

“On Nov. 30, all the evidence shows that police were the instigators of a deliberate and violent crackdown on 400 or so demonstrators. Eyewitnesses and video showed indiscriminate beatings. [...] As for Dec. 1, [somebody] commandeered a bulldozer and three Molotov cocktails at police.” (KyivPost 6.12.2013: 4)

Overlooking phase II, two escalating moves were identified: The origins of the first one, escalating move B, can already be observed in phase I. However, its true discursive impact comes to light only in the aftermath of the violent incidences of November 30 and December 1. As the analysis of the text corpus suggests, here, a new structural coupling begins to develop: the politico-economic conflict narrative, which has been pre-formative with regard to the formation of fractions and initial conflict identities during phase I (see above), now gets expanded by integration of communication from a legal context. In this sense, it can be stated that incidences are now increasingly observed with “legal glasses”. For example, whereas civil society actors point to the “unlawful, brutal and unsparing use of force” in order to “squash Ukrainian citizens’ right of peaceful assembly and speech” (MMIC 2.12.2013b), government officials apologise for “the actions of law enforcement agencies” by referring to the “illegal actions” of protesters that “violate not only the Constitution of Ukraine but also the Criminal Code” (GovUkr 3.12.2013d).²³² At the same time, media coverage of EuroMaidan highlights that protesters demand the president’s resignation since “impeachment is not an option as the procedure is not even clearly outlined in legislation.” (KyivPost 6.12.2013: 3) In addition, in the middle of phase II, a newly published poll provides an insight into the motivations of protesters (DIF 10.12.2018; see in detail chapter 5.4). Therein, 69.6 percent of the protesters state that the most important motivation to come out protesting on Maidan is again linked to legal considerations: a disproportionate use of force on Nov 30/ Dec 1 and, in relation to that, an unlawful repression of protesters and the Ukrainian people in general since the beginning of the protests. So, based on the analysis of the text corpus, it can be stated that the legal mode of observation becomes very common.

This points towards new contradictions, which, in turn, include world societal references. With regard to the observation of the “unlawful use of force”, this gets particularly clear. Throughout the text corpus in phase II there is evidence that the use of force is not only perceived as breach of national law; even government sources agree that the police’s code of conduct was violated on Nov 30/ Dec 1. However, the incidences are also assessed against the background of a legal system that overlies the national one: the global human rights regime. In this way, the unlawful use of force gets also interpreted as a “human rights violation” (MMIC 2.12.2013b). In this view, the incidences are not seen as covered by the state’s monopoly on the use of force any more but as a violation of globally anchored rights. As a consequence, in this phase, (new) human rights initiatives enter the stage and defend the principles of proportionality, freedom of assembly and expression backed up by global argumentation.²³³ Moreover, a number of references to the “International Human Rights Day” (Dec 10) within the discourse suggest that the international legal framework represents an important reference point.

²³² Furthermore, government officials state that despite all “flaws and mistakes in the work of government” all protest actions have to be performed within “the constitutional legal field”. Therefore, the seizure of administrative and public buildings has to be rated as “a criminal offense”. (GovUkr 3.12.2013g, 4.12.2013d)

²³³ See for example “EuromaidanSOS” mentioned earlier (in chapter 5.2). However, besides new human rights initiatives, already existing organisations, such as the “Ukrainian Helsinki Human Rights Union”, got a fresh impetus during phase II. “The Ukrainian Helsinki Human Rights Union considers that last night Yanukovich’s regime openly positioned itself in confrontation to Ukraine’s civil society. The events of the last weeks have showed that the ruling regime has lost any link with the people, and they can remain in power after this last night only through the use of lies and violence.” (UHHRU 1.12.2013)

The expansion of the conflict discourse by the legal dimension is associated with a normative shift that takes place in parallel. As it became apparent, in phase II, the “project EuroMaidan” is increasingly described in terms of a “real revolution”, i.e. the idea that EuroMaidan lines up with prior important revolutions in Ukraine (and world history) and thus represents a special window of opportunity for realising true change.²³⁴ Against this background, the conflict discourse not only circles around removing the authorities (president, government) or, in other words, around personal changes *within* the political system. It is also about a fundamental change *of* the political system based on a “change of people’s minds and their reality” (UkrN 9.12.2013). Hence, battles on the street about the control over public buildings (e.g. in form of civil disobedience, blocking of streets, occupation of buildings on one side and “robust” police operations on the other side) represent more than just ritualistic cat-and-mouse games between protesters and security forces. Protagonists on all sides are characterised as being convinced about the authentic nature of this battle that is fought in a historic mission in the name of the whole country.

In the course of this, contradictions of the concept of revolution itself come to light. Thereby, the articulated necessity of a revolutionary change of regime and political system or a “civilising breakthrough from Eurasia to Europe” (UkrN 12.12.2013) encounters the idea of revolution interpreted as “illegal seizure of power” that contradicts not only the rule of law and other democratic standards but also, ultimately, the “European way” (GovUkr 3.12.2013f). In sum, in phase II, a first normative shift lies in the fact that the state of conflict is no more collectively understood as a short term phenomenon but as a genuine revolution including the ambition, or, from the opposite point of view, the threat of systemic change.²³⁵

Escalating move C that could also be detected in phase II consists of a structural coupling between a subsystem of political communication that understands power and sovereignty to be primarily based on nation states and an overlapping subsystem of political communication dealing with power as a result of global spheres of influence, or, in other words, power dynamics in world society. While phase I is still marked by communication that attributes collectively binding decisions on existing contradictions to Ukrainian politics, phase II can be characterised by references including the idea that the real power over Ukraine’s future way lies beyond the traditional protagonists of Ukrainian politics, more precisely, in the global political sphere.

In this context, many passages point out that certain protest strategies, especially concerning the blocking of state institutions, cannot be subsumed under democratic measures based on the European model (see e.g. GovUkr 3.12.2013c). Moreover, it is stated that Ukraine, at that time, is exposed to both western (i.e. European and/or American, e.g. concerning

²³⁴ See e.g. the representation of the “march of the millions” on Dec 8, 2013: Claiming the resignation of the president gets discursively linked to the dismantling of the granite statue of Lenin, a symbolic gesture that underlines the refusal of Ukraine’s shared history with Russia and recalls the fall of Saddam Hussein’s statue in Baghdad in 2003 (KyivPost 13.12.2013: 4). Further historical comparisons include the Orange Revolution (2004), Ukraine’s struggle for independence after the Fall of the Wall (1990/1991), the Velvet Revolution in former Czechoslovakia (1989) and even the movement of 1968 (UkrN 9.12.2013, 12.12.2013). At the same time, however, the dangers of a head over heels revolution and “radical democracy” are addressed by referring to the “Bolshevik experience” (GovUkr 11.12.2013a).

²³⁵ At this point, representatives of the political opposition parties, i.e. existing players within the former political system, begin to articulate themselves as “representatives of civil society” (see also chapter 5.2/phase II).

NATO²³⁶) and eastern (i.e. Russian) efforts of political inclusion. Accordingly, a more or less exclusive decision in favour of the one or other alliance is expected to have direct consequences on the global balance of power (see e.g. *The Ukrainian Week* 3.12.2013: 6). Against this background, (after having stopped the AA with the EU) opening negotiations about a new economic partnership between Russia and Ukraine²³⁷ just the day new violence was collectively observed on Maidan (11 Dec) induced a new perception: the power of organising and structuring the process does no longer rest on Maidan, which is believed to be the embodiment of negotiating Ukraine's destiny, but now gets in danger of becoming a great power matter. At the same time, in reference to the increasingly polarising mass protests either pro or anti-government, the situation is discursively framed as a "point of no return", while different sides not only articulate their fear of losing security and stability but also, ultimately, of losing the integrity of Ukraine as such and the ability to pull the strings.²³⁸ To sum up, it can be stated that political communication here, i.e. communication about who is attributed the power of shaping the further course of conflict, refers to two opponent sides that are clearly associated with two opposed external forces.

The structural coupling described above comes along with changing structures of expectation, or, in short, with a normative shift. Against the background of growing contradictions (see overview below), conflict identities in the discourse increasingly show a global benchmark. More precisely, roles are increasingly defined by positioning themselves in relation to a global balance of power that is perceived as getting out of balance. In this sense, conflict identities consolidate: "Russophiles" versus "Europhiles". Both are mutually attributed to represent the majority whereas the respective counterpart only represents a minority.²³⁹ Thereby, straight through the discourse, the question of gaining and maintaining power is primarily interpreted within a winner-takes-it-all scenario.²⁴⁰ Hence, the polarisation between EuroMaidan protesters (perceived as agents of the West) and president/ government supporters (perceived as agents of the East) gets more and more manifest and comprehensive.

Within the scope of already existing societal cleavages, persons and their roles now become even more firmly associated with specific programmes in relation to the ongoing conflict. Following this, based on the linguistic and geographic divide between Russian speaking (eastern) parts of the population and Ukrainian speaking (central and western) parts, the former are

²³⁶ In this context, for example, civil society sources cite statements of NATO's foreign ministers meeting. Therein, Ukraine is attributed an important role in international security and is thus promised to be supported as an ally in difficult times (see e.g. MMIC 5.12.2013a).

²³⁷ According to media reports and respective government reactions, this partnership was prepared days before (and concluded on Dec 17, which marks the end of phase II): "Unfortunately, today in the media, in speeches of opposition politicians, there are distributed openly false information and provocative assessments about the content of the meeting of heads of the States of Russia and Ukraine that took place in Sochi yesterday." (GovUkr 7.12.2013a)

²³⁸ Both in government and in civil society sources, the intention to prevent a state of emergency, which is associated with an economic collapse and some sort of external takeover, is present (see e.g. MMIC 16.12.2013a; GovUkr 18.12.2013a).

²³⁹ To illustrate this point see exemplarily *The Ukrainian Week* (3.12.2013: 11) or GovUkr (13.12.2013b).

²⁴⁰ Picking up the widespread "sink or swim interpretation" of the situation, the *KyivPost* (6.12.2013: 3), for example, states: "The two sides are becoming increasingly entrenched in their positions and in a very high stakes game where the room for compromise is narrowing."

portrayed as supporting a pro-Russian orientation of Ukraine whereas the latter are presented as supporting a western pro-European orientation.²⁴¹ In line with this, the younger generation, by a majority, is supposed to fight for western ideas of democracy whereas the older generations are represented as being defenders of an autocratic system based on reactionary Soviet values. Accordingly, the divide between the power holders and their beneficiaries and those being excluded from the political, economic and cultural elite is portrayed as quasi absolute (see e.g. KyivPost 13.12.2013: 4). Therefore, the normative shift is constituted by the fact that the existing multitude of motivations and interests among protesters on Maidan and even within the pro-government fraction gets more and more transformed into a simplified set of two adversaries, i.e. two discursively formed and closed conflict identities, which correspond to two main global spheres of influence Ukraine is seen to be exposed to.

In sum, in phase II, both escalating moves (B, C) represent manifestations of the observed contradictions in the discourse. With that said, the differentiation of the conflict system's dimensions of meaning advances (see overview below²⁴²):

Dimension	Phase	Poles of Contradiction		
factual	II	commitment to national law and order, national security, law enforcement	versus	obligation to respect international legal frameworks, especially human rights
		revolution as illegal act, source of instability		revolution as positive change of system, social progress
		national political decision-making as consequence of changes in global balance of power		political decision-making as part of exclusively national affairs
	I	deepening relations with Russia		explicitly orienting Ukraine towards Europe
		conforming to (binary) geopolitical condition		national emancipation and independence
temporal	II	Maidan protests as follow-up of historical extremisms		EuroMaidan as world-historical mission of freedom

²⁴¹ See government reports on the provenance and quantity of protesters in Kiev, which were also published by civil society actors and the media: "Today, the number of guests from Ukraine's regions on the streets of the capital was unprecedented. Independence Square was filled with Ukrainian-speaking westerners: people who have travelled to Kyiv from Lviv, Ternopil, Ivano-Frankivsk, and smaller cities in the west of the country to support the Euromaidan. Meanwhile, just outside the barricades, groups of Russian-speaking young men from Donetsk, Dnipropetrovsk, Zaporizhzhia and other eastern cities roamed the streets, often making fun of the Euromaidan slogans." (MMIC 15.12.2013a; see also KyivPost 6.12.2013: 1; MMIC 14.12.2013)

²⁴² Phase I's overview was taken over for the one of phase II; so it is done for the following charts. Newer entries can be found at the top of each dimension's columns in bold (see the respective Roman numeral for the phase).

	I	Orange Revolution as historical failure and source of long term instability		EuroMaidan as necessary follow-up of Orange Revolution
social	II	allocation of political power as winner-takes-it-all scenario		allocation of political power as parallel representation of different ideas and interests
		societal cleavages as source of danger		society as integration of continuing differences
	I	post-Soviet elites		(newly developing) civil society

Within the context of these developing multidimensional contradictions, observations referring to violence become increasingly common in the conflict discourse. Even though violence of security forces against protestors on Nov 30/Dec 1, which has been observed for the first time, is portrayed as deliberate and concerted in some spontaneous commentaries, there is a range of accounts suggesting that all sides, to a certain extent, were taken by surprise by this kind of violence. At the same time, the violent events in question can be seen as structurally formative: the process of conflict identity formation in phase II clearly refers to this “precedential case”. In this way, the programme of one side (persons who are attributed to the roles of office holders, Russophiles, easterners, older generations etc.) consists of defending the status quo, which is perceived as a legal and legitimate distribution of political decision-making power. Moreover, this side gets increasingly convinced that revolutions can be equated with illegal actions leading to long term instability and insecurity. From this point of view, to maintain or produce public order, it is both legally and morally required to enforce law and order by force against those who threaten it.²⁴³

In contrast, the programme of the other side (persons who are attributed to the roles of civil society campaigners, pro-European activists etc.) develops from activating civil society as a political actor of change into something different: Now, political actions of the government and physical measures of security forces are assessed as illegal and illegitimate assaults²⁴⁴, which have to be countered by resistance and defence including physical violence, such as blocking of streets, occupation of buildings, damage to properties and civil disobedience against security forces. Hence, increasingly closed conflict identities go hand in hand with a beginning legitimisation of violence in the discourse, which includes more and more confrontational elements, such as the threat of violence or the characterisation of the situation as a “war” (*italics added*):

“We stretch out our hand. If we find a fist, I say frankly – *we have enough forces.*”
(Prime Minister Mykola Azarov, GovUkr 3.12.2013e)

²⁴³ See exemplarily KyivPost (6.12.2013: 4): In reaction to the accusation of having executed disproportionate use of force against protesters, government officials blame “provocateurs for everything from the disorder that led to the police crackdown on Nov 30 to the violence during the Dec 1 demonstrations to the subsequent takeover of Kyiv City Hall. Azarov [the Prime Minister] throws the word around as if calling something ‘a provocation’ entitles the authorities to do whatever they want.”

²⁴⁴ In this context, the observation of irregularities (e.g. vote buying) during the parliamentary by-elections on December 15 when 4 of 5 seats were won by Yanucovych allies and the suspension of any cooperation talks on the part of the European Commission as well play an important role in the discourse (see exemplarily MMIC 17.12.2013b).

“About the stand-off scenario: This *war of attrition* is one that the regime will loose.” (MMIC 9.12.2013)

Indeed, increasing references to violence in the discourse are intimately linked to the observation of physical violence between protestors and security forces, which comes on the heels, as the incidences of Dec 11 show. As the analysis of the text corpus in phase II suggests, using and facing violent means has become a part of the collective structure of expectation. Thus, from both sides, further violent clashes are estimated as being likely or even inevitable.²⁴⁵ Furthermore, against the background of an ongoing and already mixed-up economic and legal conflict narrative²⁴⁶, the conclusion of a new deal between Russia and Ukraine that seems to create a *fait accompli* regarding Ukraine’s orientation in the global political environment encounters the presence of the more than just hypothetical violence option in the discourse.

5.5.3 From Deals to Laws (Phase III, Dec 17 – Jan 16)

In due consideration of all insights into the communicative expansion of the conflict discourse so far, in phase III, one escalating move (D) was brought to light by the examination of the text corpus. It consists of a structural coupling that develops between two political subsystems of communication that are already linked up to the conflict system: one focuses on the traditional roles in a national political framework. In this context, the guiding distinction is the one between government and political opposition parties, or, in other words, between power holders and those challenging their position as institutional counterparts. As it has been made obvious by the analysis of phase I and II, EuroMaidan, right from the start, has been interpreted as a challenge of the government by political opposition parties who are imputed to initiate and control the protests as a campaign to seize power.²⁴⁷ For this reason, the fact that there was a *non-partisan* civil society articulating its ambitions to participate in shaping Ukraine’s future has been a blind spot in large parts of the government’s and media’s observations.

²⁴⁵ The following passages (coded as pointers of “increasing confrontation” and “use of force”) are exemplary: “We condemn all acts of provocation, which pose a threat to life and health.” (GovUkr 16.12.2013e). “[This is] a sign of extreme danger. On the one hand, there are thousands of political tourists in Ukraine’s capital – some here voluntarily, to make a statement; others bussed in by Ukraine’s political parties. On the other hand, the Ministry of the Interior has mobilized its forces (regular police, crowd control troops, “Berkut” riot-police) throughout the country, and has brought all possible manpower to the capital. The situation is tense [...] the inevitable: a bloody crackdown. [...] A crackdown on the current protests will inevitably only result in more demonstrators descending on Kyiv. Indeed, each time the regime has resorted to violence during the past few weeks, the scale of civil disobedience has expanded.” (MMIC 15.12.2013a)

²⁴⁶ Key points of this ongoing narrative in phase II include: the possible negative impact of a reduction in exports to Russia, particularly on the state budget and on the nation’s political stability in general (GovUkr 4.12.2014a; GovUkr 11.12.2013a); the qualification of Ukraine’s economic system as a deepening “crony capitalism” (see KyivPost 13.12.2013: 4); (il)legal actions of security forces as protectors of law and order and political/ economic stability (GovUkr 7.12.2013c); considerations about constitutional ways of inducing the president’s resignation against the background of breaches both in political and economic affairs (MMIC 9.12.2013; KyivPost 13.12.2013: 4).

²⁴⁷ On this, see an exemplary statement of Prime Minister Azarov (GovUkr 20.12.2013b): “Our largest problem is not that we don’t prepare relevant draft laws, but that we have a peculiar opposition who [sic] prefer most construction of barricades in the center of Kyiv instead of work in the Parliament.”

However, this political subsystem of communication, which assumes a simplified role allocation of office holders versus their direct challengers and processes power as the ability to take collectively binding decisions now gets combined with a different subsystem of political communication. In this regard, as outlined earlier in reference to world societal communicative systems, political power gets further addressed not only as the ability to generate followers by taking formal decisions but, beyond that, the ability to communicate in an enduring and binding manner and with a certain impact on the big picture.²⁴⁸ This can be illustrated with the example of the “national roundtable” that was initiated during phase II and continues in phase III: In the light of intensifying protests, all “political forces”, defined as government, political parties *and* representatives of EuroMaidan were invited to join the roundtable in order to find a way towards dialogue and compromise. Even though there are discursive references highlighting the autonomy of the participants, especially concerning the independence between EuroMaidan representatives and political parties, the roundtable brings the analytical observation that political communication about how to organise Ukraine’s future extends its range and, at this point, obviously includes and values civil society actors as a relevant societal address for the first time. In this sense, the roundtable represents a burning glass of the conflict discourse, where two perspectives of political communication get translatable and understandable or, in other words, structurally coupled: One side orients itself towards an idea of power based on the interplay of, in the narrower sense, political actors and their counterparts within the framework of state institutions; the other side attributes the potential of political impact, in principle, to a broad range of societal roles influencing the political process at times.

Based on that, in phase III, the structural coupling between both subsystems of political communication passes through the next step of development. Although political communication still shows both above-mentioned modes of observation, it gets again more and more marked by a tendency to subsume any communication under the simplified guiding distinction of two roles: pro-government (i.e. the actual power holders) versus all the others (i.e. institutional challengers of the power holders).²⁴⁹ This also mirrors in a normative shift, which is part of a further consolidation of conflict identities. More precisely, phase III’s normative shift is about an increasing elimination of diversity: On the one hand, the multiplicity of objectives, ideas, interests, currents, fractions etc. that came up with the broad diversity of Maidan protesters is understood as an asset or even as the true force of the protest movement: As its high level

²⁴⁸ See particularly Albert and Steinmetz (2007: 20-27) and chapter 3.2 for detailed considerations about “the political” in world society.

²⁴⁹ On both discursive working levels, this dichotomy gets more and more anchored, particularly including the insinuation that opposition parties are directly cooperating with the Maidan protesters in order to subvert predetermined democratic processes. In this context, as Yanucovych personally states, the only legal chance of the opposition parties “to challenge his authority is scheduled for 2015, when the presidential elections take place” (president Yanucovych, cited in KyivPost 20.12.2013: 2). This addressing resonates in the discourse, as statements from within the ranks of Maidan protesters show that the juxtaposition of EuroMaidan *plus* political opposition parties (as union) versus government is picked up. In this sense, for example, the conditions for a transition of power “by the power of the people” are discussed in terms of organisational capacity and fragmentation of both sides (see exemplarily UkrN 26.12.2013). The media, in the same vein, reproduce the two-sides-scenario by referring to the opposition’s key challenges: the mounting of a successful international lobbying campaign (a stated and ongoing objective of EuroMaidan) and, at the same time, the courtship to win political support via elections (an obvious objective of the political opposition parties in the light of the flopped by-elections on December 15 (KyivPost 20.12.2013: 4)).

of communicative connectivity shows, EuroMaidan is indeed seen as a inclusive cross cleavage shelter of oppositional forces.

On the other hand, against the background of a growing dualist polarisation in conflict development, the value of diversity noticeably disappears in favour of an idea of strength through unity, on both sides. Seen from this angle, phase III can also be interpreted as a phase of alliance building.²⁵⁰ At its beginning, the “Russia-Ukraine-deal” – an agreement, which is not only referred to as a compilation of interstate cooperation projects but also as a binding document aiming at establishing irreversible unity in a wide range of long-term political questions concerning economy and security matters.²⁵¹ Later on in phase III, a similar process can be observed on the “other side”: In late December, it not only becomes apparent that political opposition parties and EuroMaidan representatives forge a new alliance, which has been declared unpreferred hitherto. Also, according to the analysed statements, the future of EuroMaidan is discursively linked to the idea of including the political opposition parties and forming a nationwide platform that provides an alternative political structure. Referred to as “All-Ukraine EuroMaidan Forum” (see chapter 5.2./ phase III), communication, at this point, indeed starts to circle around this new hot spot of ideas, interests, strategies and, therefore, to form a new political authority.

The formation of these new alliances in phase III takes place against a discursive background that gradually develops and can be characterised as a collective perception of political, economic and social uncertainty and instability.²⁵² The widely shared feeling of being confronted with an unfair counterpart, both from a government and a Maidan protesters perspective, thus reinforces the impression of closing conflict identities. Thereby, persons get ascribed to increasingly distinct roles while respective programmes get simplified: On the one hand, people from a diversified range of civil society initiatives protesting on Maidan get summarily addressed as a single and coherent political force (i.e. role) pursuing a quite simple plan: seizing power (i.e. programme). On the other hand, persons more or less loosely associated with the government

²⁵⁰ Following the alliances idea, it can be stated (e.g. according to an IR-neorealist interpretation) that the newly established “internal” alliance between political opposition parties and EuroMaidan protesters constitutes a reaction to the “external” alliance in form of the Russia-Ukraine-deal concluded shortly before (see chapter 5.2/Phase III).

²⁵¹ See e.g. The Ukrainian Week (23.12.2013: 4). As it became apparent, in the aftermath of the “Russia-Ukraine-deal”, different ideas, opinions and plans that indeed existed among the government supporters (see exemplarily differentiation between the “hawks” and “doves” roles above) are increasingly hard to find in the text corpus. Instead, a growing number of statements suggest that roles change and persons switch sides respectively. See exemplarily Rinat Akhmetov’s (an “oligarch” loyal to the government up to that point) statement on the Maidan protests (MMIC 17.12.2013c): “The fact that peaceful people went to peaceful protests shows that Ukraine is a free, democratic country. No one will take Ukraine from that path.”

²⁵² In this context, according to government statements, the Russia-Ukraine-deal was indispensable to end “the sell-out of the nation’s interests” and to stop the present economic and political instability “other political forces” are responsible for (GovUkr 18.12.2013a/b). One source of uncertainty on civil society’s side (apart from the government’s unpredictability) forges ahead in reference to the western support showing “many political and cultural shortcomings” and being perceived as vague and insufficient since the EU does not clearly distance itself from Yanucovych and prefers to think about possible “win-win-Situations” (MMIC 18.12.2013b). Uncertainty was also expressed in media statements underlining the observed differences between EuroMaidan and the Orange Revolution: “The confrontation looks much like a re-run of the Orange Revolution of 2004 – only this time there seem to be no credible opposition leaders, no clear strategy by the demonstrators and no easy solution to Ukraine’s long-term problems. [...] The big worry is that whoever takes over, Ukraine will continue to be caught between Russia and the EU, and the country will remain internally divided and without strong leadership.” (The Ukrainian Week 23.12.2013: 18-19)

up to that point (i.e. government members, Party of Regions members and voters, security forces and other civil servants) are seen as unambiguous supporters of Yanucovych and all government actions (i.e. role) pursuing a quite simple plan, too: staying in power at all costs (i.e. programme).²⁵³ As the analysis of the text corpus reveals, the instigation to speak up with one voice and thus to boost the respective group's unity (at the expense of its inner diversity) frequently appears in the discourse. So, picking up the hawks and doves metaphor, for example, governments statements invoke the unity of the country behind a legitimate, strong and caring government (see e.g. GovUkr 31.12.2013a; GovUkr 16.01.2014h). Statements from Maidan, too, place special emphasis on the extraordinary solidarity within the protest movement and the idea that "the collective body dominates over the individual" (MMIC 4.01.2014a).²⁵⁴ With regard to this increasingly oversimplified representation of the conflict as a confrontation of two conflict parties, a self-reinforcing character of communication can be noted.

To sum up, it is stated that the poles of the discourse's contradictions further develop and thus widen the field in which escalating move D emerges. Linked to the conflict system's dimensions of meaning, this can be represented as follows (see following overview; further elucidations below):

Dimension	Phase	Poles of Contradiction		
factual	III	civil society commitment with the objective to re-move power holders	versus	civil society activities as part of a profound and self-determined societal transformation
		civil disobedience and blockings as subversion of state authority and attack against sovereignty		blocking of public institutions and services as legitimate democratic instruments of protest ²⁵⁵
	II	commitment to national law and order, national security, law enforcement		obligation to respect international legal frameworks, especially human rights
		revolution as illegal act, source of instability		revolution as positive change of system, social progress

²⁵³ On this, the following passages are exemplary: Based on government documents in phase III, Maidan is presented as producing one-sided and biased "information noise" while the protests would only represent "a fragment on the map of the country" (GovUkr 25.12.2013a). In contrast, according to the Ukrainian Helsinki Human Rights Union, the government and its supporters are seen as part of a "clannish and oligarchic" system depriving the people of "freedom, national dignity and constitutional rights" (UHHRU 27.12.2013).

²⁵⁴ Though, at this point, the publication of a new poll paints a finer picture of what is supposed to be an indicator of conflict identities (DIF 27.12.2013): 48 percent of Ukrainians would vote for EU association in a referendum; 36 percent would vote against EU association; at the same time, 47 percent are in favour of the Russia-Ukraine-deal and 28 percent are critical of this agreement. In addition, as for example statements from EuroMaidan supporters reveal, protests continue to oscillate between emotionally nationalistic elements (singing of national anthem, nationalistic mottos, domination of the colours of the national flag), "liberal" elements (slogans promoting ideas of human rights and democracy, European flags) and the vanishing of national and social barriers (integration of Crimean Tatars, liberal Jewish and Russian intellectuals as well as business people and "oligarchs") (MMIC 4.01.2014a).

²⁵⁵ For an overview on protests means and methods of different protest groups on Maidan see again chapter 5.4/figure "Overview on Factions/Subgroups on Maidan in mid-February"/column on "Method".

		national political decision-making as consequence of changes in global balance of power		political decision-making as part of exclusively national affairs
	I	deepening relations with Russia		explicitly orienting Ukraine towards Europe
		conforming to (binary) geopolitical condition		national emancipation and independence
temporal	III	“restauration” of good old (and broadly based) partnership with Russia		overcoming the west-east-division of Ukraine; resist Russian domination in “Ukrainian Arab Spring”
		working towards prosperous future alongside Russia		remembering the dark side of the Russian past
	II	Maidan protests as follow-up of historical extremisms		EuroMaidan as world-historical mission of freedom
	I	Orange Revolution as historical failure and source of long term instability		EuroMaidan as necessary follow-up of Orange Revolution
social	III	reinventing the political in an “identity revolution”		working with/ within the existing political structures and culture
	II	allocation of political power as winner-takes-it-all scenario		allocation of political power as parallel representation of different ideas and interests
		societal cleavages as source of danger		society as integration of continuing differences
	I	post-Soviet elites		(newly developing) civil society

Considering the foregoing remarks (on escalating move D, its world societal references, the strengthening of conflict identities against the background of the discourse’s poles of contradiction), the discursive processing of violence can be illustrated on the basis of the following two spots: Firstly, at the beginning of phase III, the analysis conveys an impression of how violence becomes a focal point of discursive contestation. Taking the law on the amnesty of detained Maidan protesters, which was adopted by the government majority in parliament at the beginning of phase III, as an example: As outlined above, this law was not only meant to grant amnesty for detained Maidan protesters from civil society but also for those members of the police and security forces that had been accused of disproportionate use of force against protesters on Nov 30 and Dec 11. Based on the analysis of the text corpus, this was perceived as if all participants, i.e. security forces *and* protesters, had resorted to violence in the same disproportionate way. As a result, the political opposition parties decided to quit the round table

talks. In this way, the equal treatment of police violence and protest actions provokes a range of statements on how the state monopoly on violence should be implemented or limited. Therefore, at this point, the conflict discourse corresponds to an intensifying negotiation process: subversion of state authority vs. protest as a kind of democratic right of resistance.

The spectrum of this negotiation process and its consequences can be illustrated by means of two example threads within the discourse: Tetyana Chornovol, opposition activist and journalist, who was assaulted after having published a critical article (see also chapter 5.2/phase III), becomes a much-cited example case of illegitimate state violence. The Chornovol case thus provides a defining moment that deeply shapes structures of expectation in the discourse on violence: at that point, the protests again pick up pace since more and more people realise that they could easily find themselves in a similar situation. A second example thread deals with the Holodomor, the Ukrainian “genocide by hunger” of 1932/1933 (see also chapter 5.3). References to this crucial historical trauma in Ukraine’s Soviet times now get discursively linked to a refusal of the Russia-Ukraine-deal. According to respective statements, now, under the watchful eyes of global public, the time has come “to define the own, independent space” and “to control the own destiny” (MMIC 23.12.2013c) in order to prevent new dependencies that may bring back a situation in which people are exposed to extreme state-sponsored violence, such as ethnic cleansing or genocide.

Secondly, overlooking the repeated observation and discursive reproduction of physical violence in the conflict system so far, communication further on draws on martial or even war-like vocabulary: At the beginning of phase III already, civil society sources speak of “legions of riot police, dismantling barricades, clashing with protesters and trying to take back the occupied City Hall”, whereas “the centre of Kiev looks like a war camp [...] bracing for the another crackdown.” (MMIC 18.12.2013a). Other statements from international organisation picked up in civil society publications refer to Maidan as the “frontline of liberal democracy” that compels any observer to adopt party, of course without being able to foresee which side will carry off the victory (MMIC 18.12.2013b).²⁵⁶ Voices from the media and INGOs take the same line when characterising the incidences on Nov 30 and Dec 11 as “blood shed” (UHHRU 27.12.2013), declaring an eventual orientation to the east as an “existential threat” or stating that for Russia, having lost the Cold War, “no price is too high to keep Ukraine in Russia’s orbit” (The Ukrainian Week 23.12.2013: 23).

To sum up this overview on phase III, it can be stated that the discourse circles around the interpretation of the conflict’s status and the legitimacy of roles and means of the still evolving conflict identities. In this context, the text corpus exhibits a number of passages that existentialise the situation, for example by qualifying the conflict as a “fight for the very soul of Ukraine” (MMIC 24.12.2013a). Thereby, protagonists from civil society are attributed the mission of “totally legitimising and finalising an identity revolution” (MMIC 1.01.2014) that has already caught a majority of Ukrainians’ hearts and minds.²⁵⁷ In reaction, passages from

²⁵⁶ This once again recalls the maelstrom metaphor according to which, sooner or later, a conflict forces its environment to take some kind of (communicative) stance towards the conflict (see chapter 4.3).

²⁵⁷ In this context, some statements reflect on the very mental nature of the ongoing identity revolution. Therefore, the identity revolution is characterised as being way more than a mere political revolution leading to a removal of the power holders. Rather, it is presented as a fundamental collective transformation of Ukrainians who, by this process, get the chance to become new political citizens (MMIC 1.01.2014) against the background of a European geopolitical reality (MMIC 4.01.2014a). Media statements, too, pick up the idea of an ongoing societal

government sources downplay the severity of the conflict by blaming “opposition actuators for *artificial* tension in society and public incitement to unlawful acts” (GovUkr 13.01.2014d; italics added). Hence, the protest movement which was initiated by civil society actors is not only denied to raise its voice in the political process but also its legitimisation as a relevant societal factor as such (KyivPost 17.01.2014: 5). In this sense, the much-cited words of Prime Minister Azarov,

“There is no social conflict in Ukraine, there is artificial political confrontation.”
(GovUkr 15.01.2014c),

make not only clear that the Maidan protests, lasting for more than six weeks at that time, lack any kind of substance and basis. Also, according to government sources, in view of the violent experiences so far, “illegal and immoral actions” in the context of the protests (civil disobedience, blockings, strikes etc.) have broken the destiny of many people and “can still break the destiny of many others” (GovUkr 15.01.2014a; 16.01.2014h).

While passing over to the last phase, phase IV, references to the system of law get new conciseness within the conflict discourse. In this context, the alliance between civil society actors and the political opposition upholds their longstanding demands: the orderly punishment of those who are responsible for the disproportionate use of violence towards protesters, including the dismissal of the Interior Minister and the resignation of the president (see e.g. KyivPost 17.01.2014: 2). These demands are flanked by the political opposition’s blocking of the parliament by absence, which is presented as a legitimate constitutional right (see chapter 5.2/phase III). In turn, government statements underline a self-understanding that refers to a distinct concept of the state of law: the president and the government embody the authority and sovereignty of the state and thus represent the entirety of the citizens. Against this background, any threat to the very existence of the state – that is how the opposition’s absence in parliament and the Maidan protests in general are repeatedly classified in these sources – has to be fought off by all available means. From this perspective, it is logically consistent to drive forth legal regulations limiting the citizens’ liberties and legalising repressive measures. This marks the beginning of phase IV, when the “anti-protest laws” were adopted.

5.5.4 Breakup Right on the Doorstep (Phase IV, Jan 16 – Feb 22)

At the beginning of phase IV, there is a number of references to the legislative package officially called “Procedural Laws on Additional Measures for Protecting Security of the Citizens”, which gets immediately and pointedly dubbed “anti-protest laws” in civil society and political opposition sources and “anti-extremist laws” in government statements respectively. Exemplarily, with a view to opposition parties boycotting the parliament, there is talk of those who “continue to work against Ukraine” (GovUkr 15.01.2014a). On the other hand, those government officials and supporters who promote the law package are accused of “suspending fundamental constitutional rights” and of installing an “absolute mandate to arbitrarily crack down on justice, the

transformation whereupon EuroMaidan “has captured the attention of the world and returned a feeling of pride to many Ukrainians.” (KyivPost 17.01.2014: 2).

press, NGOs and citizens” which leads Ukraine into a “perfect dictatorial regime” (UkrN 17.01.2014).

Overlooking phase IV, two escalating moves could be identified. First, escalating move E stands for a marked change in view of political and medial communication since both get linked up in a new quality.²⁵⁸ As statements from the text corpus show, mass media communication gets increasingly referred to under political, i.e. power-related auspices. Already in phase III and particularly in the course of phase IV, there is a range of references suggesting that conflict parties’ communication veritably coopts the media. Both in government and civil society sources reciprocal accusations can be found implying that the conflict is fuelled by purposeful disinformation.²⁵⁹ In this context, it is demonstrated that one of the key political modes of observation, i.e. the distinction and indication of power holders and their respective counterparts, not only finds its neutral expression in media communication. Also, through the way of reporting, the analysed media favour a specific reading of the situation and thus affect the perceived distribution of power in conflict. In this context, for example, media coverage not only immediately adopts a colloquial and provoking expression – “anti-protest laws” – but also, on its own terms, suggests to interpret the law package as a “serious attack on human rights in Ukraine” and thus as illegitimate (see KyivPost 17.01.2014: 4). On this, government statements make reference by accusing the media of engaging in demagoguery by fuelling fears and instrumentalising people (see GovUkr 20.02.2014a). Seen from the perspective of mass media, in turn, it can be stated here that political communication increasingly addresses the subsystem of mass media and actors attributed to it. The case of Tetyana Chornovol again is exemplary (see chapter 5.2./phase III): a journalist gets addressed (in this case assaulted) as a political activist at the same time. In the same way, media companies and institutions get hacked, taken over or even closed (see MMIC 31.12.2013b). In other words, the ultimate communication of political power, i.e. repressive violence, is not only observed and articulated by the media but also gets fully “translated” into and understandable as conflict communication within the subsystem of mass media itself when certain persons and their roles, such as journalists and reporters working for media companies, get attributed to a specific side of the conflict (i.e. the anti-government camp) by force.

With this, a normative shift – the second pillar of escalating move E – takes place and further affects the consolidation of conflict identities in phase IV. In view of the above-mentioned identity layers, it can be stated that relevant persons and their roles, particularly those associated with the media change their programme: While, in preceding conflict phases, the analysed mass media communication suggests that media players have been observed and have been observing themselves as a rather neutral ‘third party’ claiming to focus on information of common news value, the perception of the media in phase IV changes. Now, based on (self-)

²⁵⁸ At this point, it is recalled that mass media communication, as it was introduced within the context of the methodological considerations above, already constitutes a part of the conflict discourse and thus of the conflict system, since communication from politics and mass media is naturally and permanently coupled (see particularly chapter 4.2).

²⁵⁹ To give two striking examples: Voices from the government complain about the medial reception of a working visit of the Ukrainian and Russian head of government according to which the conditions of an alleged Moscow-induced accession of Ukraine to the CU were determined (see GovUkr 24.12.2013b); in the same way, accounts from the civil society section complain about allegations from the government’s side including the idea that the EU allegedly insists on introducing same-sex marriages as a precondition for the AA (see MMIC 15.12.2013a).

ascriptions in the conflict discourse, media representatives become ultimately observed as acting entities within the conflict system.²⁶⁰ This ultimately cements a virulent normative claim within the conflict system that can be reduced to the following message that not only addresses mass media but also, in principle, the whole conflict environment: Whoever comments on the conflict finds oneself in a situation in which the expectation to take one conflict party's side is perceived as very strong.

Escalating move F, the last one that could be identified in the investigation period, is composed of a structural coupling that brings political and legal communication to a different level. Thereby, the new connecting link between the two lies in a changing observation of violence. Building on legal communication, it can be stated that there is a newly established national legal basis (either understood as “anti-protest laws” or “anti-extremist laws”, depending on the conflict party), which legalises and legitimises a large-scale use of force, even retroactively, as for example the dispute about the regulations on amnesty for both security forces *and* protesters shows. At the same time, there is an internationalised human rights discourse referred to by insinuating that the violation of human rights in Ukraine justifies a veritable political revolution whereby the use of force cannot be fully excluded.²⁶¹ So, both legal strands from the conflict discourse show that the increasing use of force has become compatible within the inner logic of the legal system of communication itself.²⁶² These considerations, in turn, match with political communication, which also circles around observing and describing a new quality of violence in conflict. Here, shaping laws that legalise and thus normalise the use of force is regarded as means to maintain the political status quo, i.e. the position of the power holders. This entails deeply structuring effects on expectations within the conflict system. Thereby, the intensified use of force, formally backed up by the new law package, evolves into a kind of everybody's means of choice – be it to assert (see government) or challenge (see civil society) political power claims. In other words, the collective observation of the (excessive) use of force serves as a common discursive target corridor, where political and legal communication, once again, get translatable for each other on a new level.

²⁶⁰ As the analysis of media coverage shows, particularly from February 2014 on, reports are increasingly marked by referring to the government in a way that positions the media itself in opposition to an all too Russian-friendly government. In this sense, (negative) *commentaries* more and more supersede *reports* on government action. In KyivPost (7.02.2014: 4), for example, Yanukovych's administration is openly accused of “working in tandem with the Kremlin propaganda”, of spreading rumors (e.g. on armed militants trained on the territory of the US embassy), and of “discrediting and smearing EuroMaidan protestors”. Moreover, the government is characterised as “incompetent and malicious”.

²⁶¹ This becomes particularly apparent within the context of the “All-Ukraine Euromaidan Forum” where the recognition of human rights was declared as “fundamentally important for the further development of the Ukrainian society” (MMIC 21.01.2014a; see chapter 5.2/phase III). Furthermore, statements from civil society make clear that Ukraine is in a “battle for regime/system change”, which, against the background of everyday mass violence, is first and foremost about Ukrainian's dignity and, at this point, radicalises (MMIC 20.01.2014a).

²⁶² In this sense, on the one hand, a number of passages suggest that the alleged injustice committed by the regime (e.g. concerning corruption, abstraction of funds, wilful misrepresentation concerning the AA plans, culminating in plans of a coup d'état by rejoining the Russian Federation) justifies resistance by force (UkrN 20.01.2014c). On the other hand, other sources bring forward that Ukraine's critical situation (public buildings blocked, security forces threatened by protesters using Molotov cocktails etc.) was invoked by the Maidan protests. This is seen as a serious breach of law or even as coup d'état, too, which has to be averted by all available means (GovUkr 22.01.2014a; GovUkr 23.01.2014c).

The structural coupling outlined above comes along with a last and crucial normative shift of the conflict discourse. In essence, this shift is about entrenching conflict identities between which persons, roles and programmes are unambiguously attributed. Based on the text corpus, the relationship between the conflict parties, i.e. between pro- and anti-government activists, is characterised by reciprocal contempt. For both conflict parties, the use of organised collective violence seems to remain the only means to ultimately communicate political power claims. This is the result of a discursive development whereby, in the present and last decisive step of conflict escalation, adversaries become enemies that are determined to fight each other with all means at hand. In this context, there is significant discursive evidence within the discursive characterisations of the other from both sides' perspectives that can be read as legitimisation of imminent and unequivocal actions, including the use of force in a less restricted way:

government source	common normative reference frame (selected key points)			civil society source
protest leaders are “criminal”, “immoral”, “inciting vengeance”, “fuelling hatred”, “losing control”, causing “chain reaction of aggression” (UkrN 20.01.2014b ²⁶³)	→	adversaries as criminals to be held accountable	←	“president is accountable for bloodshed” and a situation “on the brink of civil war”, “violation of constitution” (UkrN 22.01.2014c)
protesters are “ruthless and violent revolutionaries”; “insane and unrestrained supporters attacking security forces”; “extremist actions”; “Euro-maidan-bandits” (UkrN 20.01.2014b)	→	the other: carrying out illegitimate and illegal actions basic principles get violated (by the other)	←	“undeclared war against revolution of the younger generation”, e.g. by “forced disappearance”, “death squads”; “extremist” government responsible for “crimes against humanity” (UkrN 23.01.2014a)
“Extremists are trying to rape all Ukraine, constitutional order and legality.” (GovUkr 22.01.2014a)	→	adversaries as enemies of the people/ of Ukraine itself Ukrainian state, nation and society at stake	←	“keep fighting for freedom” to prevent “dictatorship”; “people have crossed the line of peaceful protests”; “no way back” (MMIC 21.01.2014c)
determined “to fight anarchy, chaos, and the danger of division caused by Maidan protests” (GovUkr 22.01.2014a)				
“cynical and amoral terrorists preparing a coup d’etat” (GovUkr 23.01.2014c)	→	point of no return reached	←	“government only understands a language of violence” (UkrN 25.01.2014c)

²⁶³ Nota bene: Even though UkrN 20.01.2018b refers to a statement attributed to the “Party of Regions”, i.e. the governing party of president Yanucovich, it was (re-) published within the context of civil society oppositions’ volunteer community resources.

“seizure of state institutions by radicals” (GovUkr 27.01.2014a)		danger of civil war		“fruitless protests” entailing “radicalisation” of protesters (UkrN 24.01.2014a)
				“Give me liberty or give me death!” ²⁶⁴

Based on the analysis of the text corpus, the observation of violence in phase IV is embedded in communication that mainly centres around blaming, distancing and degrading. Hence, discursive threads dealing with the *delegitimisation* of violence used by the other side and, respectively, the *legitimisation* of the own side’s use of force draw on the same communicative reservoir that has been opened up between the poles of contradiction in the conflict discourse before (see recapitulating overview below).

Dimension	Phase	Poles of Contradiction		
factual	IV	continuing non-violent protests (including blockings, civil disobedience etc.)	versus	extending protest means and methods/enforcing democracy & liberty with violent strategies
		defending state sovereignty based on a monopoly on the use of force without limits		ongoing transformation of state sovereignty/the people’s sovereignty and society as a whole
	III	civil society commitment with the objective to seize power		civil society activities as part of a profound and self-determined societal transformation
		civil disobedience and blockings as subversion of state authority and attack against sovereignty		blocking of public institutions and services as democratic instruments of protest
	II	commitment to national law and order, national security, law enforcement		obligation to respect international legal frameworks, especially human rights
		revolution as illegal act, source of instability		revolution as positive change of system, social progress
		national political decision-making as consequence of changes in global balance of power		political decision-making as part of exclusively national affairs
	I	deepening relations with Russia		explicitly orienting Ukraine towards Europe

²⁶⁴ This statement became one of the prominent rallying cries among Maidan protesters after the first deaths caused by live ammunition during battles with police forces (see e.g. KyivPost 24.01.2014).

		conforming to (binary) geo-political condition		national emancipation and independence
temporal	IV	invoking unity and patriotism	versus	invoking a common European identity
		relapse into Soviet times: politically, economically, socially		blundering into an uncertain western future: politically, economically, socially
	III	“restauration” of full partnership with Russia		overcoming the west-east-division of Ukraine; resist Russian domination in “Ukrainian Arab Spring”
		working towards prosperous future alongside Russia		remembering the dark side of the Russian past
	II	Maidan protests as follow-up of historical extremisms		EuroMaidan as world-historical mission of freedom
	I	Orange Revolution as historical failure and source of long term instability		EuroMaidan as necessary follow-up of Orange Revolution
social	IV	the other: an enemy threatening the existence of the self to be fought against		holding up values of understanding, rapprochement and cooperation
	III	reinventing the political in an “identity revolution”		working with/ within the existing political structures
	II	allocation of political power as winner-takes-it-all scenario		allocation of political power as parallel representation of different ideas and interests
		societal cleavages as source of danger		society as integration of continuing differences
	I	post-Soviet elites		(newly developing) civil society

In the course of this, it becomes obvious how the discursive framework further developed and extended its range through the successive escalating moves. The following paragraphs highlight selected aspects of phase IV’s very last part, which is shaped by a quick succession of conflict experiences.

*A degrading discourse: “God knows I never hated anyone, but now I do and I do so hard.”*²⁶⁵

²⁶⁵ Statement by Inna Taran, 18 year old protester, interviewed by KyivPost (24.01.2014: 14). Taran was among those beaten on November 30. After being assaulted she had to undergo surgery to remove parts of one of her kidneys, due to severe beating.

In this very last part of phase IV, statements confirming a maximal emotional distance and degrading attitudes towards the other are among the most common.²⁶⁶ Conflict identities, as they have been evolving in the preceding phases, now clearly include images of “the enemy” within which the characterisation of the other as an “alien” beyond the scope of one’s own norms gets possible.²⁶⁷ As mentioned earlier in this chapter, in this way, dissidents become *per se* qualified as enemies unable and unwilling to negotiate compromise and, therefore, as legitimate aims of the own violent actions. In this regard, for example, the representation of Yanukovich as “marauding criminal” and “bandit” is seconded only by his demonisation as “Hitler” and more or less implicit instructions: “Would it not have been better to shot Hitler like a mad dog without waiting to see 1945?” (UkrN 11.02.2014a; see also MMIC 17.02.2014b). Vice versa, Maidan protesters are wholesale discredited as anti-democratic extremists whose only goal is to “gain the ruler’s chairs at the cost of people’s blood.” (GovUkr 18.02.2014b)²⁶⁸ To counter this threat, the government, on its part, confirms to do all that is necessary to gain control of the chaos in Kiev (see also UkrN 19.02.2014a).

In contrast, the conflict identity of the self on both sides is downright presented as positive.²⁶⁹ In this context, it is particularly remarkable that statements, referring to different levels of lawfulness, suggest a necessary differentiation between “formal legitimacy”, for example based on consent and support of the population, which is presented to be similarly high on both sides, and “moral legitimacy”, which is assessed to be certainly greater on the own side (see e.g. UkrN 11.02.2014b). Following this and with reference to the rising death toll on Maidan, talionic statements expressing wishes “to take vengeance for the victims” become more and more common (see e.g. UkrN 13.02.2014):

“May you see in your dreams every night those people who died because of you.
[...] Live in fear – the payback for all that you have done is coming.” (UHHRU
20.02.2014)

Other statements suggest that the spiral of hatred, vengeance and bloodlust gets increasingly inclusive since any trust in the authorities “committing crimes against humanity” and violating international law has been lost and, despite the high death toll, violent change ultimately including the elimination of the enemy becomes more and more acceptable (see e.g. KyivPost 21.02.2014: 4-5).

²⁶⁶ At the same time, based on poll data, it can be stated that the stand-off situation and thus the obvious failure of the strategies has a demoralising effect both on protesters’ side and among police forces (see MMIC 21.01.2014d).

²⁶⁷ See exemplarily UkrN 9.02.2014b (brackets added): “Those guys [i.e. security forces] are aliens. They are not ours.”

²⁶⁸ As already expounded earlier (see chapter 5.2/phase III), demonising rhetoric also becomes obvious in government statements and media accounts that focus on the danger of an imminent “facist revolt” prepared by the “Right Sector” within the protest movement (see e.g. KyivPost 7.02.2014: 2).

²⁶⁹ With regard to anti-government protesters, for example, a number of statements acknowledge the “complete absence of barbarism”, “vandalism” and “sacking”. Also, EuroMaidan protesters are presented as having a “sense of responsibility” and not having lost their “human face” despite all aggression from the other side (see e.g. UkrN 13.02.2014). Voices from the government, in turn, never tire highlighting that the authorities provide assistance during disorders caused by the other side and do everything possible to ensure the proper functioning of the country, which is, according to these accounts, not involved in the conflict for the most part (see e.g. GovUkr 19.02.2014a).

A militarising discourse: “Fighting at the front lines”

Another aspect of phase IV’s final stage, here labelled as increasingly “militarising”, pays attention to a marked discursive trait: Many statements concerning the incidences on Maidan from different sources collectively convey the impression that the protests directly compare with war-related events, e.g. by setting the tone of a “reporting from the front lines”. The KyivPost (31.01.2014: 3), for example, publishes a “visual guide to EuroMaidan” that offers an overview map of Kiev’s city centre with detailed depictions of the protesters’ infrastructure, including “self-defense headquarters”, “medical aid units”, and different rings of barricades. This kind of coverage gives the impression that any report comes about under the spell of a quick succession of events and includes sensational words and images underlining the idea of directly reporting from the firing lines. This impression is even strengthened by drawing the attention to the “occupation” of private and public buildings (e.g. Trade Union Building, Kyiv City State Administration etc.), which takes place under threat and use of violent means and is presented as necessary (see chapter 5.2./ phase IV).

Against the background of a conflict situation perceived as fateful, it can be stated that there is a firm conviction on all sides that “the protests will *not* continue in a peaceful way” (UkrN 30.01.2014b; italics added). In this context, there is talk of “12.000 armed combatants” being “deployed” on Maidan: On the one hand, these combatants consider themselves as “peacemakers”, like the UN blue helmets, who just react to illegitimate assaults of the security forces. On the other hand, one can find many hot-heads in the ranks of the combatants who plan to “revenge the victims’ blood” (UkrN 13.02.2014; KyivPost 14.02.2014: 12). The idea of a final battle without compromise further develops: conflict parties set mutual deadlines (e.g. concerning the release of prisoners or the unblocking of buildings); plans of a nationwide expansion of self-defense units become known²⁷⁰; rumours about an imminent declaration of martial law as well as government statements proclaiming that security forces are sufficiently equipped to “liquidate” the criminal and illegal protests on Maidan (GovUkr 18.02.2014a/b). Taken together, the situation is perceived as “tensed to the utmost” and “likely leading to a new and even more powerful explosion of public anger with unforeseeable consequences.” (UkrN 18.02.2014)²⁷¹

An all-encompassing discourse: Of investment climates, human rights and hegemons

A brief retrospect: Escalating move A in phase I represents the starting point of an ever growing conflict discourse. Here, political and economic communication of contradictions get translatable and understandable, or, in short, structurally coupled. In the further sequence of escalating moves in the following conflict phases, there are two variants of structural couplings: Either the formation of new structural couplings, for example when legal communication links up to the existing politico-economic conflict narrative (escalating move B). Or, the transition of latently existing ones, for example when political communication gets widened by an explicit global

²⁷⁰ On this, the formation of “all-female self-defense units” is particularly highlighted by KyivPost (14.02.2014: 13).

²⁷¹ Against the background of a situation that “felt like real war” (AI 21.02.2014) and a spectacular descent into violence with 75 deaths in the following two days (February 19 and 20), only a day later the conflict situation is characterised as the result of a huge “miscalculation from both sides” (MMIC 20.02.2014b) that can lead into a “full-blown breakdown of society” (KyivPost 21.02.2014).

dimension (escalating move C). In this course of this, the conflict discourse's communicative reservoir steadily grows. At the end of the escalation process, as observed within the present study and the respective investigation period, conflict communication still feeds on this broad reservoir, which is made obvious in the following.

Even in the latest phase of conflict escalation, which is characterised by the fast pace of violent events, there are parallel discursive threads in which the pros and cons of an economic opening to the east (CU/Russia) or to the west (AA/EU) are still pointedly contrasted. On the one hand, statements on economic key figures and factors take up communication from a world economic framework (and thus from a facet of world society): currency stability, economic growth, investment climate, travelling without visa. On the other hand, economic decisions are observed under power political auspices, as for example attaching conditions to bail-out packages in favour of decisions on region-specific trade liberalisation or imposing economic sanctions show.²⁷² In the same way, the contradiction between the principles of a functionally differentiated world economy (e.g. division of labour) and a political system of world society gradually leaving behind a purely segmentary differentiation (e.g. attributing power strictly and solely to nation states which are by the way all alike in their organisation of government and opposition) particularly shows up within the debate on the role of oligarchs. References from the conflict discourse dealing with oligarchs do not only blur the lines between political and economic aspects but also reveal hierarchical descriptions of a social order that imply communicative patterns of stratificatory differentiation in world society.²⁷³ As represented in the conflict discourse, the “oligarchic system” is constituted by a certain class of people concentrating economic power (i.e. a small group of Ukrainian business leaders chairing international consortia) and influencing policy decisions (i.e. either by holding an office themselves or acting as a string-puller on the sidelines²⁷⁴) in order to be successful under the conditions of an increasingly liberalising world market (e.g. by pressing for a consolidation of Ukraine's credit status in the globalised financial system).²⁷⁵

As it has been demonstrated, the expansion of the politico-economic discourse by the legal dimension (escalating move B), too, has a lasting discursive impact. Apart from the above-mentioned statements on degrading and militarising, in the last part of phase IV, notably two clusters of statements step forward: First, those statements that again take up the issue of human rights and their violation from both sides. Exemplarily, it is stated that protecting “basic human justice and dignity” (KyivPost 7.02.2014: 3) and “transforming Ukraine into a democratic nation that respects the rule of law and human rights” (KyivPost 14.02.2014: 1) is not only necessary

²⁷² On “Russian trade sanctions” and “market opening” see KyivPost (31.01.2014) and UkrN (7.02.2014a). Another example relates to currency stability, the role of savers and the National Bank (see KyivPost 7.02.2014, 14.02.2014: 4; GovUkr 12.02.2014a, 14.02.2014a, 19.02.2014a).

²⁷³ As mentioned earlier, forms of stratificatory differentiation, e.g. becoming manifest in hierarchical social structures or hegemonic power orders, compete with forms of functional differentiation, e.g. in subsystems of politics, economy etc., and segmentary differentiation, e.g. in form of nation states as like-units (for details see chapter 3.1).

²⁷⁴ President Yanukovich himself is also labelled as an oligarch. However, the most cited are Rinat Akhmetov, Dmytro Firtash and Viktor Pinchuk mentioned earlier (see chapter 5.4/phase III; for the “changeover” of those three to the EuroMaidan side see also UkrN 10.02.2014).

²⁷⁵ To put in back in systems theoretical terms: These features attributed to the “oligarchic system” illustrate contradictions between a functionally differentiated world society, an idea of power imagined as nationally bound, and a hierarchical orientation of world economy and thus world society.

but can be implemented, in case of need, by force. Otherwise, in case of a failure of the Maidan protests, a defeat of a “Europe of human rights” is expected (UkrN 17.02.2014a). A second cluster of statements also refers to a kind of worldwide communication, more precisely to geopolitical constellations of power. This becomes evident when voices from civil society claim that Ukraine needs to finally emancipate itself from “Russia, the traditional hegemon” (MMIC 17.02.2014); when the government announces (just after having concluded the Russia-Ukraine-deal) its plans to work towards a “constructive partnership of Ukraine with NATO” (GovUkr 12.02.2014g); and when Maidan protesters, with reference to the Holodomor in 1932/1933, reject any politics of non-intervention from the EU or the USA and call for solidarity “against the danger from the east” (UkrN 18.02.2014; see also 19.02.2014a).

Finally, both of the above mentioned clusters of communication – the manifold references to human rights as a facet of legal communication in world society as well as the much-cited self-determination ideal vs. global power constellations recalling a changing self-observation of power in political communication – may serve to once again highlight a basic principle of this analysis: Since there are different modes of differentiation at work, world society’s subsystems of communication provide reservoirs of contradictions; developing conflict systems draw on these reservoirs as they span a communicative field in which contradictions become articulated, understandable, processable and connectable.

5.6 Summary

The analytical narrative on the Maidan protests in Ukraine 2013/2014 presented here offers a reconstruction of a process of conflict escalation which builds on three dimensions of meaning in the discourse (factual, temporal, social) and identifies major moments of conflict development (escalating moves). The case study does *not* claim to offer an absolute timeline and a causal explanation of events on Maidan but gives an insight into the collective creation and experiencing of a conflict based on documented text-based communication that had been published within the period of investigation.

Following the multi-step analysis introduced in the work plan (chapter 4.4), the process of conflict escalation was observed along four phases. The golden thread of the conflict discourse is represented by a succession of six escalating moves (A-F). Recapitulating the salient key words, the following table offers an overview on the results of the case study on the Maidan protests in terms of phases, escalating moves, the world societal background of communication and observations of violence appearing in the respective context.

		escalating move		

turning point event	phase		structural coupling	normative shift	'world societal communication' spelled out in terms of...	key observations of (il)legitimate violence
Nov 21: suspension of AA	I	A	economic considerations (market integration) connect to competing political power claims (east vs. west; integration vs. emancipation)	emergence of civil society as an alternative political force	economic communication referring to a (world) market logic; communication referring to changing (self-) observations as to political power	
Nov 30: 'cleaning' of Maidan by force	II	B	legal considerations on the use of force get articulated and connected to politico-economic communication	ambivalent meaning of revolution accentuated: systemic change as an existential threat	different frames of reference in legal communication: national state law vs. human rights	legal use of force to enforce law vs. disproportionate use of force surprising over-reaction
		C	two ideas of political power get outspoken: Ukraine as architect of its fortune vs. Ukraine at the mercy of global powers	increasing simplification/ focus on two adversarial positions: pro-government/ Russia vs. pro-civil society opposition/EU	political communication oscillating between inviolability of sovereign nation states and attribution of political power within global spheres of influence	precedential case blocking and occupation of buildings, civil disobedience threats and skirmishes
Dec 17: Russia-Ukraine-deal	III	D	political communication in traditional national roles models (government vs. opposition) complemented by civil society sector	increasing elimination of diversity; dualist polarisation of conflict identities at the expense of nuanced positions	political communication processing the attribution of political power besides traditional roles and entities	limits of the use of force as means of political power rhetorics creating an existential and war-like atmosphere
Jan 16: adoption of anti-protest-laws (to Feb 22: breakup of	IV	E	new quality of connection between medial and political communication	mass media communication observed as political communication in conflict	seen in tightening connection to political communication	adversaries as enemies degrading, demonisation of the other

govern- ment)		F	new overlap between legal and political communication as to legitimacy of intensified use of force	entrenching conflict identities: determination to fight against 'the enemy' with all means at hand	densification of communication: human rights violations, right to (violent) resistance, (violent) influence of global power constellations and/or economic liberalisation	rhetoric militarisation violent incidences reached point of no return danger of civil war use of force as general means of choice

Now, recalling the basic research question of this study – How do conflicts escalate? – this analytical narrative can be understood as a possible answer to the question of how the Maidan protests escalated. Based on the results of the present case study, it escalated as a succession of escalating moves identified while observing the discourse as representation of an evolving conflict system. As demonstrated, the analysed conflict system continuously irritates its environment, incorporates communication and draws on a communicative reservoir that is filled with contradictions ensuing from competing modes of differentiation between and within world society's subsystems. Thereby, new communication gets not only simply added to an existing spectre of the conflict discourse but, by importing further contradictions, opens up avenues for new ramifications of the discourse. Each conflict phase shows specific observations of (il)legitimate violence (see extreme right column in table above) which can be seen as embedded interim results of the discourse and, at the same time, as constitutive elements of its further progression.

In an overall view, the present analytical narrative (including all tables, e.g. on poles of contradiction) consists of a multitude of analytical observations derived from the text corpus or, in other words, of iteratively gained hypotheses on the process of conflict escalation in the context of the Maidan protests from November 21 to February 22 in 2013/2014. The following sections present a most condensed answer to the research question on the basis of this study; they are drastically reduced in case study details and represent the essence of the second-order observation perspective adopted here; and, they are to be understood as a kind of reading aid to go through the table above.

The Maidan protests in Ukraine 2013/2014 escalate in a discursive environment where new forms of attributing political power, especially supranational integration within the context of the EU, encounter strong ideas of national emancipation and self-determination. In phase I (Nov 21-30), the first and significant discursive effects of this are made explicit within a cluster of communication referred to as escalating move A: Therein, economic considerations about being integrated into a larger European market and thus about increasing revenue prospects as a stakeholder meet competing forms of (self-) observation in political communication that observe legitimate political power in Ukraine as caught between a binary geopolitical condition and the idea of national self-determination (see in detail chapter 5.5.1). As these observations get articulated, understandable and thus able to be contradicted (i.e. structurally coupled), the conflict discourse begins to span along the axes of overlapping political alternatives: east versus west and (supranational) integration versus (national) emancipation. In this phase of intensified debate about how political power is attributed within new frames of reference, the rather

traditional division between the Ukrainian government and opposition shifts in favour of an alternative holder of political authority referred to as civil society. With this, the discourse carries out a normative shift that will be continued in phase III later on.

Building on this, in phase II (Nov 30 – Dec 17), two clusters of communication could be identified that pointedly show the further development of the conflict discourse: With escalating move B, the politico-economic conflict tale unfolded in phase I now connects (i.e. structurally couples) to legal considerations on the use of force; this is observed as being triggered by the “cleaning of Maidan by force” on Nov 30/Dec 1 which is characterised as the first violent event since the begin of the protests and thus as a “precedential case” of an “overreaction”. The analysis of communication does not only show alternative frames of reference within legal communication (national state law vs. human rights); it does also highlight (self-)observations pointing to the (il)legality of political forms of action (street protests, civil disobedience etc.) and the reactions to them from security forces; also, the occurrences presented are located within a historically charged and ambivalent context of “revolution” between freedom/democracy and chaos/human losses (see details in chapter 5.5.2). In addition, with reference to escalating move C, two ideas of how to understand Ukraine’s political capabilities get articulated, understandable and thus able to be further on contradicted (i.e. structurally coupled): on the one hand, political decision-making is presented as an autonomous national process based on sovereign domestic preferences; on the other hand, national political decision-making is observed as being restricted by a certain global balance of power or spheres of influence respectively. Within this cluster of contradicting communication along the axes illustrated earlier relating to escalating move A (east vs. west; integration vs. emancipation), the formation of mutually exclusive conflict identities (“Russophiles” vs. “Europhiles”) gets a further boost (normative shift). Observations referring to violence in phase II are particularly focused on the (dis-) proportionate use of force either applied to maintain law and order or to protest against a certain policy. In the course of this, positions articulated on this issue increasingly see themselves as adversarial; violence against things and people, be it in terms of protest means or reactions to the same, are more and more qualified as acceptable or even necessary.

In phase III (Dec 17-Jan 16), the conflict discourse can largely be characterised by communication on what is to be considered as a legitimate political force that holds power and authority and should be recognised in the political process. Hence, within the context of escalating move D, (self-) observations including the idea of political power holders reflecting the exclusive result of a ‘traditional’ allocation of power between government and opposition (within state institutions, especially the parliament) encounter other ones that wish to open up the political process for a, in principle, broad range of societal actors able to communicate in an enduring and binding manner. At the same time, the articulation of these positions and the processing of their inherent contradiction in communication (i.e. structural coupling) is accompanied by an increasing elimination of diversity (see chapter 5.5.3). In this phase, the normative shift of the discourse does not only consist in a gradual disappearance of the broad diversity of objectives, ideas, interests, currents etc. of protests on Maidan under the label of “anti-government”; there are also observations referring to “alliance-building” that are perceived as a dualist polarisation: the declaration of Ukrainian political parties and Maidan protesters to work together; the new initiative of the Ukrainian and Russian government to closely cooperate within the context of the “Russia-Ukraine-deal”. Observations of violence in phase III essentially refer

to the limits of the use of force as a legitimate means of political communication; they circle around experiences of individual victims of violence (e.g. Tetyana Chornovol, opposition activist and journalist) but also covers barricades, blockings, clashings and the use of force against security forces. The common underlying issue is represented in the question of the extent to which those endowed with political power, be it an authority fearing the subversion of the state or civil society activists claiming their right to resistance, see themselves entitled to use force as an ultimate form of political communication. Thereby, presented as ultimate limits to the use of force, references to historical experiences (e.g. Holodomor) mix up with war-like rhetorics (e.g. “blood shed”, “war camps”) and martial future scenarios (e.g. “existential threat”, “fight for the very soul”).

Finally, in phase IV (Jan 16-Feb 22), two escalating moves can be identified. First, referred to as escalating move E, one cluster of communication deals with a new quality of connection between political and medial communication. More precisely, as pieces of mass media coverage get explicitly addressed as communication of power claims supporting either one side or the other and as they are, on their own terms, understood and articulated as such (e.g. as to “anti-protest laws” or “purposeful disinformation instrumentalizing people”), political and medial communication reach a new level of structural coupling (for details see the first sections of chapter 5.5.4). While, in preceding conflict phases, mass media did not observe themselves and had not been observed as relevant addresses within the conflict system, now, media companies get observed as acting entities in conflict; this constitutes a further normative shift of the discourse. Beyond that, escalating move F refers to a second cluster of communication in phase IV in which the structural coupling of legal and political communication is brought to a different level. In this sense, the “anti-protest laws” represent the basic point of reference for legal communication on the legitimate use of force and organised violence in armed conflict (as e.g. concerning a state of emergency/threat to state order or concerning a certain right to resistance against dictatorship); this matches with political communication in which observations of an increasingly excessive use of force (by all sides) look at violence as a normalising means of political power claims. Against this background, the conflict discourse carries out a last and crucial normative shift; based on sequences of blaming, distancing, degrading, demonisation and militarisation, it is about entrenching conflict identities (pro- vs. anti-government) that perceive each other as enemies determined to fight with all means at hand. Therefore, observations of (il)legitimate violence in this very last phase clearly show a generalisation of violence as standard means of communication (see details in last part of 5.5.4).

CHAPTER 6. Sliding into Armed Conflict: Observing Mali's Crisis 2010-2012

“Only a few gunshots on a morning in March 2012 and a system that Westerners observed as a stable democracy yet the day before collapsed. This story has often been told: Out of a clear blue sky, Mali, a model democracy, becomes an easy victim of bandits, a revolting military, and cruel Islamists.” (Wiedemann 2014: 69; translation R.B.)

In mid-January 2012, an armed conflict between the Malian central government on the one hand and a newly founded alliance of different ethnic groups based in northern Mali including the Tuareg as a driving force on the other hand broke out.²⁷⁶ By the end of 2010, nobody expected such a quick development into large-scale violence, since the Republic of Mali, despite the fact that it ranks among the poorest countries and struggled with some internal political frictions in recent history, was indeed considered to pursue a democratic development with strengths and weaknesses but, overall, in a largely peaceful way (see e.g. Heyl and Leininger 2013: 73-83).

According to historical literature dealing with the formation of the Malian nation state (i.e. since its formal independence in 1960) and, before that, with the colonial era in Northwest Africa, there have always been voices from northern Mali, especially from the Tuareg community, expressing a desire to have a sovereign state on their own.²⁷⁷ Nevertheless, even though there were secessionist ideas and ambitions within the Tuareg community, particularly in Mali and Niger, claiming an absolute national independence has never been an official topic on a political agenda since Malian independence (see Klute and Lecocq 2013: 123). However, in the beginning of November 2010, mainly Tuareg in northern Mali founded the “Mouvement

²⁷⁶ For a short glance at what happened during the armed conflict (i.e. from February 2012 on) see chapter 1/introduction.

²⁷⁷ As an ethnic group the Tuareg are divided into classes, confederations and tribes which are the building blocks of a hierarchical system. The present study does not show the totality of these categories and respective terms but refers to those that clearly appear in the text corpus, such as particular tribes like Imghad, Ifoghas or Chamanaman. By a majority, the Tuareg had traditionally led a life of nomadic pastoralists, at least until the second half of the 20th century. Therefore, irrespective of boundaries drawn by colonial powers (i.e. France and Italy), the distribution of the Tuareg includes five postcolonial states: Algeria, Burkina Faso, Libya, Mali and Niger. However, since the Sahelian droughts in the 1970s and 1980s, the Tuareg have more and more changed their way of life by practising agriculture or working as employees in villages and towns. From November 2010 to January 2012, i.e. the investigation period of this study, the Malian population was about 16 million people. The Tuareg part of the Malian population, at that time, was estimated at 500.000 to 1 million. In other words, within Mali, the Tuareg represent a rather small minority whereas members of the Mandé family of ethnic groups, especially the Bambara, constitute the majority (for an overview on Mali's ethnic diversity, including percentages of each ethnic group see Thurston and Lebovich 2013: 9-10; see also Shoup 2011: 295-300; Klute and Lecocq 2013: 123-124; for a map of the spatial distribution of ethnic groups in Mali see Appendix A.3.2).

National de l'Azawad" (MNA).²⁷⁸ By exhibiting this kind of nationally apostrophised ambition, at least rhetorically, the MNA founders blantly express a discontent concerning the stagnant political reform process and continuing discrimination of ethnic groups as well as growing insecurity in northern Mali (due to, in their view, drugs trafficking and the presence of foreign islamist groups in the Sahelian zone). At the same time, as the founding statement makes clear,

"The MNA declares that it adopts the way of political and legal action to invoke the entirety of laws and rights; it rejects violence in all its forms and condemns all forms of terrorism, be it by the state or by individuals; with all certainty, it wants to point towards the necessity to distinguish terrorism from legitimate resistance of the pacifist people of Azawad." (MNA 1.11.2010)²⁷⁹

the MNA presents itself as a non-violent movement engaging in political activities which aim at negotiating a form of autonomy for the population of Azawad *within* the Malian state (see MNA 2.11.2010; see also Klute and Lecocq 2013: 132).

A little more than a year later, media reports paint the following picture of the situation in Mali: "Tuareg rebels have launched attacks against three towns in the northeast part of Mali." (AFP/Maliweb 19.01.2012c). Firefights between the MNLA ("Mouvement National de Libération de l'Azawad") and the Malian military around the towns of Ménaka, Aguelhok and Tessalit caused casualties on both sides and among civilians.²⁸⁰ Voices from the Malian military are presented as leaving no doubt about the necessary reaction to these attacks: "The Malian military will not allow anyone to touch on Mali's sovereignty. Our instructions are clear-cut: Protecting civilians and hunting the criminals with might and main." (AFP/Maliweb 19.01.2012c). Other media accounts go one step further and characterise the incidences as "terror in Northern Mali" that has already induced the government to opt for a military offensive (see Le Matinal/Maliweb 24.01.2012b) in order to prevent an eventual independence of the northern regions, to preserve national unity and "to defend the Malian homeland" (L'Indicateur du Renouveau/Maliweb 24.01.2012a). In sum, coverage in mid-January 2012 leaves no doubt that the situation is perceived as being the beginning of a civil war.

Similar to the case of the Maidan protests in Ukraine, from a present-day perspective, the Malian crisis in 2010-2012 represents the (re-) beginning of a protracted social conflict, including confrontational frictions and fractionalisation between and within ethnic groups in northern Mali, a coup d'état and, ultimately, an armed conflict. As outlined in the case study below, the process of conflict escalation goes hand in hand with a deepening of already existing societal cleavages between major parts of the Malian population. In this context, MINUSMA's mission, which began by taking over responsibility from the ECOWAS-led AFISMA in 2013,

²⁷⁸ Nota bene: Etymologically and geographically, "Azawad" (from Tamasheq, i.e. the Tuareg's Berber language) literally refers to a pasture region extending from vast territories in Mali to the *Air Mountains* in Niger and interveined by a system of wadis (i.e. temporarily dried-out riverbeds).

²⁷⁹ As for the case study on Mali, the text corpus is predominantly composed of French texts. All direct quotations from the text corpus that appear in the presentation of the case study results in the following sections were translated into English by Richard Bösch.

²⁸⁰ On January 20, media reports count 47 deads (45 among the MNLA and two among the Malian military; see AFP/Maliweb 20.01.2012b). Only two days later, MNLA statements refer to 50 deads on the Malian military's side and, moreover, 25 prisoners of war, 26 military vehicles conquered and 40 vehicles destroyed in the fights around Aguelhok as well as two dead and 13 wounded Malian soldiers and a number of deserted soldiers who joined the MNLA during the fights for Ménaka (see MNLA 22.01.2012b).

does not only include to ensure security and to protect civilians but also to “support national political dialogue and reconciliation”.²⁸¹ However, MINUSMA’s impact is evaluated as rather ambivalent. Down to the present day, apart from the casualties among the ranks of the mission personnel, there is a high number of wounded and deaths among civilians, not to mention the number of internally displaced persons and refugees the ongoing conflict situation has brought about.²⁸²

In recent Malian history before 2011, there were indeed some critical periods where the territorial and political integrity of the country was challenged due to tensions between Tuareg groups in the north and other groups.²⁸³ Yet, never before the conflict drifted into a comparable situation (i.e. including a coup d’état, a de facto division of the country and an international military intervention). Against this background, however, the present case study on the “Malian crisis in 2010-2012” obviously concentrates on observing a process of conflict development within a period of investigation of a little more than a year. This may also lead to a better understanding of subsequent (i.e. post-January 2012) developments in Malian conflict history.

In brief, within a relatively short period of time (November 2010 to January 2012), the Malian political landscape changed in a drastic way. A latent conflict about the representation of the Tuareg and other ethnic groups in northern Mali in the political and economic system and the Malian society as a whole that, for a long time, has been observed as more or less treated and limited within political institutions turned into a situation that is either qualified as “rebellion”, “armed struggle” or “armed conflict” (see UCDP 2020c). How exactly could the process of conflict escalation gather momentum? And how did, step by step, the violence option appear in the discourse? Based on the analysis of the text corpus, the following sections present the pooled results of the case study on the Malian crisis and thus make a contribution to answer the questions raised.

²⁸¹ By May 2021, MINUSMA’s personnel involves 18.343 persons, mainly including military personnel (12.485) but also police forces, experts, UN volunteers and other civilian staff members (see UN 2021).

²⁸² Since the beginning of MINUSMA in 2013, the mission personnel records 253 deaths (see UN 2021). With regard to civilians, it has to be stated that the death toll stays continuously high: From January to May 2021 alone, a total of 307 attacks against civilians had been reported, in which 158 civilians were killed, 85 were injured and 125 were abducted (see UN Security Council 2021). In 2012, more than 400.000 Malians fled from the armed conflict in Northern Mali – about half of them stayed within the Malian borders, the other half moved to neighbouring countries. According to the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, in the beginning of 2021, 358.212 Malians are internally displaced, and about 5.9 millions of Malians are dependent on humanitarian assistance due to the ongoing armed conflict. And, as a recent challenge since 2020 on top, the Covid-19 pandemic acts as a catalyst of existing conflicts (see UNOCHA 2021; Dickow 2021). In August 2020, after public demonstrations, a military junta overthrew the president and its government. In May 2021 again, the military removed the transitional government. The situation remains unclear (see DW 2021). Against this background, there is no need to say that the 2015 peace agreement was implemented in a more than dissatisfying way (see UCDP 2020c).

²⁸³ This refers to the 2006-2009 rebellion and, before that, to the repeatedly emerging armed conflicts from 1990-1995, although already in 1992, the National Pact, which aimed at adequately integrating the Tuareg into the Malian institutions and society, was signed (see UCDP 2020c).

6.1 The Malian Crisis 2010-2012: Getting Hold of an Approaching Conflict

“United we stand. One people, one goal,
one faith.” (National Anthem, Republic
of Mali)

In line with this study’s work plan and the case study on the Maidan protests, “Mali’s crisis 2010-2012”, too, is understood as a conflict system in its own right. To reconstruct the process of conflict escalation within the given time frame, Mali’s crisis was observed as an evolving discursive space. And indeed, based on a close look at communication, the efforts of a fine-grained case study research permitted to identify a few marks defining the conflict’s development, here understood as a conflict cascade. However, there is a multitude of accounts on how observers perceive the Malian crisis at any given moment within the period of investigation. The conflict system thus turned out to be a dynamic one where the attribution of issues, parties and actions is in motion. Based on the starting point that the “Malian crisis 2010-2012”, too, represents a potentially endless field of relational references (see chapter 4.3), the present case study is seen as an approximation procedure which, of course, relies on an empirical basis consisting of a selected text data corpus.

In this case study, the analysed corpus of texts involves 689 documents that were collected according to the methodological approach.²⁸⁴ First, there are official government documents. These mainly include speeches, statements, announcements, and press releases of the president’s office that were released by the official web portal of the presidency of *Amadou Toumani Touré* (in short: “ATT”), who was president from 2002 to 2012.²⁸⁵ Second, in order to capture the political contradiction to the central government that had been articulated by self-proclaimed representatives of the population in Northern Mali, this analysis drew on communication (i.e. statements, press releases etc.) of the newly founded *Mouvement National de l’Azawad* (MNA).²⁸⁶ Third, according to the procedure introduced earlier, on working level II, Mali-based mass media, i.e. Malian newspaper coverage of the crisis, was also an essential part of the analysis. For this purpose, the compilation of the text corpus, again, drew on a pragmatic auxiliary

²⁸⁴ For an explanation of the empirical working levels of this study see chapter 4.3.; for details concerning sources of the text corpus see Appendix A and figure below.

²⁸⁵ The official communication of the president’s office is published in French, being the only official language in Mali. Due to the observation that Malian institutions are perceived as president-centred (based on the model of France, the former colonial power) and for pragmatic reasons, the selection of official government documents was concentrated on documents published by the president’s office in the narrower sense (i.e. without considering publications of other government agencies). Even though the mandate of ATT ended in 2012, the official website of his presidency is still available online, albeit with temporary interruptions (see website at www.maliatt2002-2012.net; Appendix A.1.2.).

²⁸⁶ At that time, the Tuareg were observed as the most apparent opposition group within the Malian political system (due to its past as backers of earlier rebellions). Even though the MNA claimed to represent the totality of the population in the Northern parts (i.e. *all* ethnically defined groups), the organisation was perceived as a *Tuareg* political organisation (see e.g. UCDP 2018c). The MNA (and, from October 2011 on, the MNLA) issued statements, press releases, speeches etc. via its own website, which is still available with occasional interruptions, even though the website’s address has been changed a few times (see website at www.mnlamov.net). As an additional source to grasp voices from the opposition in the North, the text corpus also includes publications from “Toumast Press – Agence Touareg pour l’Info”, a news agency acting as a mouthpiece for the MNA/MNLA (see <http://www.toumastpress.com>).

means: In the Malian media environment, which can be considered as diverse, dynamic and free, webportals, or, more precisely, news portals play an important role as an easily accessible and aggregated source of information.²⁸⁷ Hence, for various Malian daily or weekly newspapers and magazines being published in print (often in rather small numbers and with a circulation concentrated on urban areas), online news portals serve as an important additional publication platform.²⁸⁸ For this case study's text corpus, a number of contributions from different Malian newspapers collected by "Maliweb" were taken into consideration (see figure below). Finally, the text corpus includes statements from different international non-governmental organisations that reported on the Malian crisis on a more or less regular basis, particularly from *Amnesty International* (AI), *Friedrich Ebert Foundation* (FES), *Human Rights Watch* (HRW) and *International Crisis Group* (ICG) and the *West Africa Network for Peacebuilding* (WANEP).

Source Type	Document Type	Number of Documents	Sample Period
Malian Government (presidency of ATT)*	"Actualités" and "Communiqués" of the presidency; speeches, messages of the president	221 documents (each between 400 and 1.500 words)	November 2010 – January 2012
Opposition in Northern Mali (MNA/MNLA)**	"Communiqués", press releases and other statements	107 documents (each between 150 and 1.500 words)	
Malian mass media, i.e. daily newspapers and selected international news coverage and news agency communication published by "Maliweb"***	daily contributions, i.e. articles, posts, etc.	332 documents (each between 400 and 1.500 words)	
International Non-Governmental Organisations (AI, FES, HRW, ICG, WANEP)****	articles, alerts, briefings, reports, chronicles, commentaries	29 documents (each between 50 words and 30 pages)	

*Available at <http://www.maliatt2002-2012.net>

**Available at <http://www.mnlamov.net> and at <http://www.toumastpress.com>

***Available at <https://www.maliweb.net>; Malian newspapers: *Le 22 Septembre*, *L'Indicateur du Renouveau*, *Le Républicain*, *Lafia Révélateur*, *Le Zénith Balé*, *L'Indépendant*, *Le Combat*, *Le Potentiel*, *Le Matin*, *L'Aube*, *26 Mars*, *Mali Demain*, *Nouvelle Libération*, *Le National*, *Le Matinal*, *Le Challenger*, *L'Essor*, *Le Pouce*, *Le Prétoire*, *Le Malien*, *Le Katois*, *Le Progrès*, *Le Canard Déchainé*, *Waati*, *Le Coq*, *Le Scorpion*, *Mali Demain*, *Maliba Info*, *Journal du Mali*, *Civara*

²⁸⁷ During the period of investigation (2010-2012), according to *Freedom House*, for example, the freedom of the press in Mali was rated as "free", i.e. that the right to free speech is unconditionally protected. Moreover, Malian print media are ranked among the freest in Africa. At the end of 2011, there were some 300 FM radio stations and more than 50 privately run newspapers and magazines (see *Freedom House* 2011).

²⁸⁸ There are a few news portals operating similarly, i.e. selecting and (re-) publishing articles from daily newspapers and weekly magazines in different thematic sections or publishing reports and commentaries from their own journalist staff. According to this author's inquiries based on key word search requests on "crise malienne actualités" (Malian crisis news) via *google* and *duckduckgo*, "Maliweb", "Maliactu" and "Malijet", at that time (i.e. 2015/2016), were among the most viewed (see these news portals at www.maliweb.net, www.maliactu.net, and www.malijet.com).

Info, L'Inter de Bamako, Le Guido, L'Express; international media: *Le Monde, Libération, The New York Times, Ouest-France, Jeune Afrique, Slate, El Watan, El Moudjabid, TF1 News, Radio France International (RFI)* and international news agencies: *Agence de Presse Africaine (APA), Agence France-Presse (AFP), Reuters, The Canadian Press, Xinhua*
 ***Available at www.fes-mali.org and <https://www.hrw.org/Africa/mali> and <http://staging.crisis-group.org/africa/sahel/mali> and <http://www.wanep.org>

Nota bene: All text data from websites were collected by this author in a period between 2015-2016. See also Appendix A.1.2.

Figure: Overview of the Text Data Corpus (Mali)

On the one hand, all documents collected from one of these four groups of sources express very own observations that are specific products of respective modes of observation behind. On the other hand, although each source represents a separate perspective, they all have a stake in the (re-) production of the “Malian crisis” as a discursive field or, in other words, they all participate in the joint construction of the conflict systems plot.

To provide assistance in order to navigate in the course of conflict and its presentation here²⁸⁹, one of the main results of the sequential analysis of text data is highlighted at the very beginning: Based on a month-by-month analysis, there are a few observation spots that are strikingly often referred to as turning point events across the whole text corpus.²⁹⁰ Sequencing these turning point dates reveals phases of conflict development that serve as guidance for the following sections:

Phase I	November 1, 2010	foundation of the MNA
Phase II	(to) August 26, 2011	death by accident of former Tuareg rebel leader Ibrahim Ag Bahanga
Phase III	(to) October 16, 2011	foundation of the MNLA
	(to) January 17, 2012	first fightings in northern Mali (Ménaka)

The following sections expose how the Malian crisis comes into being, or, theoretically speaking, how this conflict system absorbs more and more attention and resources from its communicative environment. In order to give an understanding of this development, the sequential mapping of the text corpus was translated into an iteratively generated analytical narrative. Its main threads are outlined as three paths of reading the conflict with different but overlapping foci, all of which based on the analysis of the text corpus. As it has been introduced in the case study

²⁸⁹ Even though not being part of the text corpus, this study offers two maps intended to support its readers’ navigation through the geographical vocabulary which appears in the text sources. One map shows the international and administrative boundaries of the Malian nation state, the other one shows a “simplified spatial distribution” of ethnic groups in Mali (see Appendix 2.1).

²⁹⁰ According to the work plan introduced in chapter 4, the sequential analysis was implemented via summarising monthly folders. Within the framework of MaxQDA, the texts in these folders were coded both in chronological order and in due consideration of their origin/source group. After the first step of the coding procedure (i.e. open coding of topics and subtopics) had been completed, the code system comprised 3.476 codings (i.e. passages in the text corpus that were attributed one or more codes; see Appendix A.2.3 for a MAXQDA extract displaying the management of documents in monthly folders/example: September 2011; see Appendix A.2.4 for a screenshot of codings referring to the factual dimension of communication).

on the Maidan protests earlier (see chapter 5.1), first, in the factual dimension, the key themes are portrayed (6.2). In this context, this section offers more than a simple register of discursive topics, it illustrates how themes show up, follow each other and link together chronologically. In a second step, the analytical focus lies on the temporality of the Malian crisis (6.3). Not to be confused with a chronology of events, the temporal dimension elaborates on how certain aspects of the past are actualised at a given moment of the conflict's present and, accordingly, how plans and ideas about the future are condensed in the here and now of the conflict. The temporal limits of pre- and post-conflict are thus variable, depending on those past events or future ideas being referred to as relevant to the conflict in the experienced present. In case study section three, the focus lies on the social dimension (6.4). In this context, the dynamics of emerging conflict identities and their relationship are illustrated. This chapter thus deals with the perceptions of each other and corresponding expectations in the course of conflict. In the synopsis section (6.5), the three paths of reading the conflict are combined, changing and/or dominant modes of observation behind are highlighted and critical moments of conflict development (i.e. escalating moves) are represented in detail.

6.2 “Azawad” – Both a Dream and a Nightmare is Coming True

Phase I (Nov 2010 – Aug 2011)

November 2010

The outset of the investigation period starts with a certain moment of surprise.²⁹¹ As per declaration published on November 1, 2010, the MNA presents its own act of foundation as an organisation unexpectedly arriving on the scene and claiming to represent northern Mali's population:

“Today, we are declaring the birth of the National Movement of Azawad (MNA) which is a political organisation of Azawad that defends and approves a peaceful policy in order to achieve legitimate goals.” (MNA 1.11.2010)

This declaration²⁹² does not only express a massive discontent in reference to 50 years of “anti-Azawad politics”, denied development and discrimination of the population in Northern Mali, which is all attributed to successive Malian central governments over the years. It also directly addresses an international audience by bringing up the right to self-determination of indigenous people within the context of human rights and international law and by calling the international

²⁹¹ Please note: Chapter 6.2 is organised according to the following ordering principle. In order to enable readers to track the chronology in the presentation of the factual dimension of communication, the respective month is indicated at the beginning. Within each month-based subsection, the focal thematic points, as they have been derived from the analysis of the text corpus (via theme codes), are presented along source groups. Cross-references between topics and thematic codes from different source groups, which give an insight into the common fabric of discursive threads, are thereby made explicit.

²⁹² The founding declaration of the MNA can be understood as the outcome of the “Congrès International de la Jeunesse du Sahara” (i.e. the International Congress of the Saharian Youth), which took place from October 31 to November 1 in Timbuktu and addressed the younger generation of different ethnic groups in Northern Mali and beyond (see MNA 2.11.2010; 11.11.2010a). The organisers of this congress, qualified as “constitutive” for the foundation of the MNA, *Moussa Ag Acharatoumane* and *Aboubacrine Ag Fadil*, were arrested later on but then, after forceful public protests supported by large parts of the population in the North, released a few weeks later (see Le Républicain/Maliweb 16.11.2010a).

community for support. Also, it questions the lawfulness of contracts between companies from all over the world and the Malian government, especially concerning the extraction of natural resources in Northern Mali, since those contracts were concluded “[...] without prior consent of indigenous populations affected, as international law stipulates.”

At the same time, however, this first document in the text corpus makes clear that the MNA, at the very moment of its formal appearance, choses “[...] the way of political and legal action to invoke the entirety of laws and rights” (MNA 1.11.2010) and, therefore, rejects violence in all its forms and tries to improve the situation of ethnic groups in northern Mali by politically fighting *within* and not against the Malian state. This becomes even more obvious when, in reaction to the arbitrary detention of two young Tuareg activists who organised the “International Congress of the Saharian Youth”, MNA statements claim the adherence to universal human values, articulated in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948 and the African Charter of Human Rights and People’s Rights of 1981 (see MNA 7.11.2010).

Government statements at the beginning of the investigation period, in contrast, without mentioning the MNA at all, mainly deal with the topic of development. In this context, the government issues information on successful projects and achievements made in different fields of infrastructural development, such as consolidating relations to important international financial institutions²⁹³ or launching EU-supported road construction projects intended to link the region of Timbuktu to the national transportation network.²⁹⁴ According to government sources, these measures “[...] promise to develop all the potential of the Niger Delta and to boost competitiveness and societal integration of the regions affected.” (GovMali 24.11.2010) Overall, the government’s activities are outlined as part of long-term development efforts which had already been determined within an integrated development programme, the “Programme Spécial pour la Paix, la Sécurité et le Développement du Nord Mali (PSPSDN)”.²⁹⁵ Also, as the sources show, the government highlights that PSPSDN is in line with what was considered indispensable and collectively agreed, for the last time, within the context of the last peace agreement, the Algiers Accord of 2006.²⁹⁶

²⁹³ In this context, meetings and agreements as to the “Banque Internationale pour le Commerce et l’Industrie au Mali” (BICIM; regional branch of BNP Paribas Group), the “Union Economique et Monétaire Ouest Africaine” (UEMOA; economic and monetary union of French-speaking West African countries) and the “Banque Centrale des Etats de l’Afrique de l’Ouest” (BCEAO; central bank for the common “CFA-Franc” currency) (see GovMali 6.11.2010; 8.11.2010).

²⁹⁴ The road construction project “Niono-Goma Coura-Timbuktu” includes 484 kilometres of bituminised roads with a financial volume of 80 billions CFA-franc (\$160 millions; exchange rate from November 2010) realised by the European Development Fund (EDF). The first construction phase (Goma-Coura-Léré, 165 kilometres) was, at the time, planned for a period of 25 months.

²⁹⁵ The “Special Programme for Peace, Security and Development in Northern Mali” (PSPSDN) is a government programme which includes measures of 32 billions CFA-franc (€48.6 million), co-funded by the Malian state and the EU. It started in mid-2010 and was conceived as a two year programme.

²⁹⁶ The “Accords d’Alger pour la restauration de la Paix, de la Sécurité et du Développement dans la Région de Kidal” (for short in English: Algiers Accord) were concluded between the Malian government and the “May 23 2006 Democratic Alliance for Change”, a Mali-based Tuareg rebel group, mainly composed of ex-combatants of the Tuareg insurgency from 1990 to 1992, including the later spin-off “Bahanga faction” (GovMali 24.11.2010; see also chapter 6.3 on temporal references). In short, the Algiers Accord includes clauses on a better participation of Northern populations in decision-making processes, an economic, social and cultural development of Northern Mali and on decentralised responsibilities for immediate security concerns (see also Thurston and Lebovich 2013: 43-49).

Some media reports immediately describe the founding of the MNA within well-known patterns of coverage by indicating an imminent threat to Mali's integrity (see also chapter 6.4 on the social dimension):

"Birth of the MNA in Timbuktu: A new rebellion or sabre rattling?" (Le 22 Septembre/Maliweb 4.11.2010a)

"The National Movement of Azawad: Conspiracy against the Republic" (L'Aube/Maliweb 11.11.2010b)

In essence, however, the analysed media reports take up the discursive thread of development. In this context, PSPSDN is not only presented as a development programme with different parts but as a kind of universal remedy to cure fragile statehood, especially in Northern Mali. Thus, the stated expectations on PSPSDN are

"[...] ensuring presence and deployability of public administration on all levels. [...] PSPSDN activities have to conduce to an intelligent organisation of space by state administration." (Le 22 Septembre/Maliweb 1.11.2010a)

Even though PSPSDN, for the most part, is about basic infrastructure and developmental measures, coverage is dominated by references to PSPSDN as a matter of security. In this context, on the one hand, articles deal with incidences such as transnational drug trafficking and small arms trade, which had been observed in the Sahelian zone for a long time. On the other hand, they highlight a recently growing threat by AQMI terrorism penetrating from outside Mali. However, both incidences are attributed to the topic of "criminal phenomena" in Northern Mali, including, for example, an increasing number of kidnappings, which have a devastating impact on Malian tourism.²⁹⁷ At the same time, taking up the fragile statehood remarks mentioned earlier, media reports also show a belief that challenges in northern Mali can be effectively handled with military means, for example by a closer military cooperation with allied countries in West Africa (here especially with neighbouring Mauretania):

"Mauritanian troupes arrived 80 kilometres north of Timbuktu [and joined] hundreds of Malian armed soldiers in military vehicles: Their defined goal is to fight for the security of the populations by all means and to prevent terrorists from making advances and preparing attacks." (Le Républicain/Maliweb 8.11.2010b)

Furthermore, a number of reports consolidate the predominance of a media view on the situation which is in great part characterised by military considerations. In this view, president ATT's past career in the military is adduced as a certain proof of toughness in dealing with serious crises. On this, INGO reports, too, mention the president's military and diplomatic activities to cope with terrorism by forming international alliances (see e.g. ICG 1.12.2010).

December 2010

²⁹⁷ As Le 22 Septembre/ Maliweb (11.11.2010a) states, for example, tourism in the town of Mopti (Dogon region) had usually been between 200 and 400 visitors per week. After the region was classified as a "zone red" by the French ministry of foreign affairs due to a growing number of kidnappings and attacks against French companies in Mali, the number of visitors declined to 65 visitors per week. In the years before, the Northern regions hosted several hundreds of thousands of visitors every year (see also AFP/ Maliweb 15.11.2010b).

In December, the approaching turn of the year gives the occasion for a number of government speeches and announcements.²⁹⁸ Most of them show references to 2010 as the year of the 50th anniversary of an independent Malian state and place emphasis on three main points. First, the statements appeal to appreciate the history of independent Mali as a success story, which led to a multi-ethnic and multireligious democratic and peaceful society:

“For 50 years, our independent nation has been existing in peace, conviviality, and social cohesion.” (ATT/GovMali 25.12.2010b)

“We need to be proud of having built a unified and dignified nation, which is resolutely engaged in peace, democracy, and the rule of law, a nation respected and admired in Africa and the world.” (GovMali 25.12.2010f)

In addition, government statements suggest that Malian authorities, despite all political, economic and social challenges not yet tackled, have done and still do a lot to preserve the unique multicultural heritage and the prosperous Malian way of living together in diversity. Based on these documents, this could be seen, for example, in the importance attached to the encouraging of Mali’s civil society (see GovMali 28.12.2010d), in measures taken to promote decentralised administrative structures in the fields of culture and education (see GovMali 20.12.2010; 25.12.2010k; 30.12.2010) or in view of a continuously growing communication network and a vibrant pluralism in Mali’s media landscape (see GovMali 28.12.2010a; 31.12.2010b). Second, these backward and forward looking statements use religious language and exhibit references that are linked to the president personally:

“Holy God, we pray for our president. Please keep him healthy and safe. May your divine protection be with him inside and outside the country. Give him all he needs to accept and fully accomplish the mission you trusted him with. [...] Whatever the development of a nation may be, the fear of God, the reverence for life, the fear of shedding blood of your neighbour, compassion and love of your neighbour are the major values which are at the basis of a nation’s stability and happiness. [Therefore] the development of the heart is at the heart of development.” (Head of Protestant Churches/GovMali 25.12.2010b)

Third, as the analysed government documents also indicate, addressing development is intimately linked to the topics of security and peace. In this connection, development, security and peace are presented as interconnected or even interdependent dimensions. Thereby, again, PSPSDN is portrayed as the key government measure that brings down challenges in these three dimensions to a common denominator:

“The only and true battle that deserves to be waged is the one of development in an environment of peace and regained cohesion.” (Chief of General Staff/GovMali 25.12.2010a)

“[PSPSDN] includes an emergency component intended to link actual security risks to the resumption of local development processes in the Northern regions of Mali. [...] It will be complementary to ongoing and planned activities in the

²⁹⁸ Every year, the office of the president publishes Christmas and New Year’s greetings of the heads of public institutions, political parties, media companies, civil society organisations, religious communities etc. to the address of the president as well as the president’s greetings in response.

field of security, thus supporting governance and economic and social development.” (ATT/GovMali 26.12.2010)

Finally, government documents in the early part of this phase leave no doubt on whom is to be considered the most important backer of peace, security and development in Mali, especially in the North: the military. Therefore, the military is not only presented as the institution that invested the most resources “to preserve national unity and social cohesion” in the past but also as a guarantor being able to implement PSPSDN measures in the future (see GovMali 25.12.2010a; 26.12.2010).

With regards to the MNA, statements in this period mainly deal with the ongoing detention of the two young MNA leaders, a measure that entailed public protest in Timbuktu and other places in the North and, immediately afterwards, the dispersal of the protests by the police by force. Based on that, MNA statements again bring up the dimension of universal values by claiming the freedom of assembly, the right to a fair trial, and, more general, the right to self-determination as a people on its own (see MNA 15.12.2010; 23.12.2010). Moreover, in this segment of the text corpus, the quest for international support gets underpinned by referring to a long history and rich culture that is presented to be more relevant and real than modern states and their borders (here with reference to the historical relationship between Moroccan tribes and the Tuareg):

“Time, obliviousness, and the arbitrary drawing of borders are not powerful enough to sweep aside the reality and relevance of kinship, cultural identity and spiritual values, which are shared among our people and the people of Morocco.” (MNA 20.12.2010)

At the turn of the year, the analysed media reports do not react to MNA statements but are strongly influenced by the whistle-blowing website Wikileaks which published cables of US diplomats on Mali’s performance in fighting terrorism. According to the media reception of these documents, the Malian government is not only presented as inefficient in its fight against terrorism but also substantially incapable as to its military.²⁹⁹ In the same way, French cables suggest that Mali falls down on the job of establishing security in the North. Following this, on the one hand, a number of reports address this image of Mali’s situation based on leaked information as being unjust and illegitimately promoted by western powers (especially the US and France), not least because it undermines any effort of economic development, as the example of tourism makes clear (see L’Aube/Maliweb 6.12.2010; Le Potentiel/Maliweb 21.12.2010a). At the same time, however, western criticism is accepted, too. According to respective comments, ATT is accused of not doing enough to achieve effective regional cooperation between states

²⁹⁹ In this context, media reports refer to deficient weapons training and experience of Malian soldiers, and thus, to the inadequate outcome of US military support (see e.g. Le Matin/ Maliweb 9.12.2010; Le Matinal/ Maliweb 24.12.2010a). As a number of reports point out, however, ATT responds to these statements as follows: “Those who think that we have an army of amateurs only have to visit us. We wait for them and they will see.” (La République/ Maliweb 17.12.2010)

(i.e. at the level of West Africa) to fight terrorism in the Sahelian zone.³⁰⁰ Likewise, ATT's often repeated strategy of development is presented as mantra-like and downplaying:

“ ‘Only development can block the way for criminals making trouble in the Sahel.’ President ATT [does not] miss an opportunity *to again spread his truth* about the security situation in the Sahelian zone. [...] Mali was not only a victim of what's going on in the Sahel but also a hostage. [...]” (La République/Maliweb 17.12.2010; italics added)

Taken together, this phase of media coverage is characterised by collectively shared observations of a deteriorating security and threat situation in Northern Mali which is fuelled by three sources, whose potential interconnections remain unclear. This becomes particularly clear by looking at the reactions to an incidence on December 10 by which four soldiers had been killed and others seriously injured due to the explosion of a military vehicle hitting a mine. Thus, shortly after the incidence, the analysed media reports deal with expert opinions and a newly published study³⁰¹ according to which the number of AQMI islamists can be estimated at as many as 300 individuals (born in Mali, Algeria and Mauritania) who are about to establish a logistical command and training camps in the region (see L'Expression/Maliweb 26.12.2010a). This, together with the continuing problem of kidnappings (see Le Potentiel/Maliweb 21.12.2010a) and the ongoing fight against a transnational network of narco-trafficking³⁰² become the most repeated issues to illustrate an altogether deteriorating security situation. However, while these accounts remain vague on how these sources of insecurity might be linked to one another, there are, for the first time, statements suggesting a connection between AQMI and the Tuareg:

“Kidal region [one of the three Northern regions], subverted by Tuareg irredentism, is also known as criminogenic and accidentogenic. [...] Today, it can be assumed that young Tuareg are trained by AQMI.” (L'Indicateur du Renouveau/Maliweb 24.12.2010b; information in square brackets added)

Even though this assessment is countered by other discursive hints to a long history of Tuareg loyalty to the Malian state, especially among the ranks of the military³⁰³, there is an increasing number of references showing unambiguous expectations about how to improve security,

³⁰⁰ In the respective report, the international coalition against terrorism which had been established in the aftermath of 9/11 and the subsequent war in Afghanistan is presented as a positive example of international cooperation worthy of imitation (see Le Matin/Maliweb 9.12.2010).

³⁰¹ Here, a former Malian secretary of defence, *Soumeylou Boubèye Maïga*, and at the time president of a Malian-based regional think tank “Observatoire Sahélo-Saharien de Géopolitique et de Stratégie (OSGS)”, which published the respective study, is cited in detail.

³⁰² In this context, media reports directly tie narco-trafficking in the Sahelian zone to the “Popular Front for the Liberation of Saguia el-Hamra and Rio de Oro” or, according to its Spanish abbreviation, “Polisario”, a movement seeking an independent state in Western Sahara, also claimed and de facto occupied by Morocco. According to L'Indicateur du Renouveau (Maliweb 24.12.2010b), for example, “the most important network of drug dealers [...] is composed of Polisario members by more than 90 percent”. However, in this respect, security forces appear in a good light, as they successfully “smashed” Polisario by “getting hold of several drug barons”.

³⁰³ As *Le Temps d'Algérie* and *Le Potentiel* (Maliweb 27.12.2010, 28.12.2010a) note, Tuareg Malian ex-rebels, like colonel *El Hadj Ag Gamou*, had not only been integrated into the Malian military (since the National Pact was signed in 1992) but also “dedicated themselves, body and soul, for their country whom they serve loyally”. Furthermore, this becomes obvious, according to these sources, by the fact that Tuareg Malian soldiers are just as involved in the armed conflicts with salafist groups fighting against secular states in the Sahelian zone since the 1990s.

namely by military means. Against the background of these slogans, ATT's calm and development-oriented statements so far now gather a sharp tone, too:

"The armed forces have to watch over the population and their property without scruples. [They] have to be on the alert permanently in order to hunt this new category of bandits who want to break the peace process in the northern regions." (Lafia Révélateur/Maliweb 31.12.2010).

"We want peace. I am a military officer and I know what war is about. I don't like to wage war but when I am forced to do so I will." (ATT as cited in La République/Maliweb 17.12.2010)

INGO reports, too, focus on an "increasing islamist activity" in the Sahelian zone, particularly concerning the Mali-Mauretania border. In this context, the case of seven French nationals, kidnapped in Niger in September by AQMI and most probably held in Mali, is mentioned. Thereby, the strategy of the French government is accentuated: Not accepting any of the terrorists' claims, such as the release of the hostages in reverse to a French withdrawal from Afghanistan (see ICG 1.12.2010). By and large, the analysed INGO statements share the view that "terrorist groups continue to organise themselves in the North of the country". On this, the FES Media Barometer, for example, holds that terrorist and criminal groups are using the internet to an unprecedented extent. In this context, it is critically stated that there is still no appropriate legislation regulating this kind of new media in sight (see FES 2010: 21).

January 2011

In reaction to the increasing international reception of Mali having a pressing problem of terrorism, government statements again try to patch Mali's image in the world (see the government's positive announcements referring to the 50th anniversary of an independent Malian state earlier in December 2010). In this regard, the president's address to the diplomatic corps deals with Mali having always been a reliable partner in international affairs. However, as ATT further explains, since the precarious security situation within the region cannot be attributed to a single national policy, Mali aims at cooperating more closely to counter global threats and insecurity in the Sahelian Zone.³⁰⁴

In the same context, for the first time in the investigation period, "smugglers of illegal migrants heading to Europe" are referred to as a security risk (see GovMali 3.01.2011). Despite political crises and conflicts in Westafrica, Mali, however, is said to contribute its share to improve the difficult situation since it upholds democracy, the rule of law and is in great demand as an experienced mediator. Moreover, Malian politics of decentralisation are portrayed as an African role model (see GovMali 10.01.2011). Still, Malian authorities emphasise the crucial role of development, particularly on a local level, for example concerning the development of cultural centres in rural areas.³⁰⁵ In this regard, the military is attributed, already since the

³⁰⁴ In this context, the already existing security cooperation between Niger and Mali is mentioned as a positive example (see GovMali 12.01.2011). Also, Mali is presented as being one of the moving forces of integration and cooperation within the UEMOA (see GovMali 22.01.2011).

³⁰⁵ In this context, ATT participates at the opening of one of the 13 "Centre de Lecture et d'Animation Culturel" (CLAC) established throughout the country (more precisely in Kati, Ségou, Yélimané, Yanfolila, Djenné, Banamba, Kidal, Koro, Ménaka, Niéna, Yorosso et Bafoulabé). He thereby points out the high potential of the CLACs

independence, an important role as an agent of development, for example relating to agricultural development or the construction and protection of transport infrastructure. Also, the Malian experience in the long history of peacekeeping in West Africa and beyond is mentioned.³⁰⁶ However, according to ATT, in the light of unprecedented security challenges, new tasks need to be added to the traditional functions of the military:

“In the course of the last half century, our armed forces and security forces have courageously and resolutely accomplished their mission of defending the integrity of the national territory. [...] Once again, I insist on the rationale that fighting terrorism is not only about security. It is also about calling on the engagement and the implication of elected representatives, municipalities and populations on the spot.” (GovMali 19.01.2011b)

In this sense, the analysed text pieces in this section underline that it is equally important to invest both in civil and military presence of state institutions all over the country. Therefore, ATT announces an immediate action programme (in addition to PSPSDN) to expand administrative, educational and cultural infrastructure that is intended to be built up in the shadow of new military posts and internationally coordinated measures of air surveillance (GovMali 31.01.2011b). Finally, these measures are adopted in order to defend the Malian culture of living together against terrorism penetrating from outside Mali:

“Islamists have an ideology which is not compatible with a solidary, open and human Islam that we know.” (GovMali 31.01.2011b)

Referring to this and in reaction to media reports suggesting a liaison between AQMI and the Tuareg (see above; L’Indicateur du Renouveau/ Maliweb 24.12.2010b), MNA statements point out that a suchlike cooperation would be absurd, as, for example, the annual “Festival au Désert” in Timbuktu with its multigenerational and multicultural character shows.³⁰⁷ Despite a continuously worsening security situation due to infiltrating terrorists, the festival had its 11th anniversary and, as in the years before, attracted a huge international audience (see MNA 5.01.2011). Furthermore, reactions from within the ranks of the MNA underline that the victims of AQMI’s threats and violence are not only tourists and foreign employees of multinational companies but also the population in the North. Therefore, according to these sources, ordinary people definitely have no sympathy for terrorists or any interest to harbour them. Beyond that, MNA statements accuse the Malian government to support the international “war on terror” in the region at the expense of the Northern population since there are more and more civilian casualties due to actions of the Malian military (see MNA 20.01.2011).

network which is massively supported by the “Organisation Internationale de la Francophonie” not only for the cultural but also for the social and economic development of the country (see GovMali 27.01.2011).

³⁰⁶ According to these government accounts, already in the early days of independence, the Malian military was engaged in international peacekeeping operations. Moreover, the formation of peacekeeping capacities in cooperation with international institutions (such as the *Kofi Annan International Peacekeeping Training Centre*, KAIPTC) has always played an important role in the formation of generations of Malian military personnel (GovMali 19.01.2011b).

³⁰⁷ According to its organisers, the “Festival in the Desert” gives a forum for both traditional and modern West African music and arts, particularly emanating from the Tuareg culture, which has its sources in several West African states (see MNA 5.01.2011). Hence, as the text passages outline, Tuareg could definitely not have any cooperation with islamists, since AQMI rejects suchlike arts and culture by definition.

Taken together, MNA comments reject all accusations insinuating a cooperation with AQMI as a “deliberate disinformation”. On the contrary, according to the MNA, the Malian government should be accused of a far too lax fight against terrorism or even a kind of tacit laissez-faire (see MNA 20.01.2011). Again, the authors of these texts emphasise to speak on behalf of the population of Azawad and present the following key claim in the direction of the international community:

“[...] it is crucial and indispensable that the entire international community recognises the people of Azawad’s right to self-determination.” (MNA 20.01.2011)

However, based on the sources in January 2011, the Malian government had not reacted to any kind of offer for talks from the MNA’s side up to that point.

The analysed media reports take up the topic of an increasing military presence in the North, which was a focal point both in government and MNA documents. In addition, reports centre around the issue of improving cross-border military cooperation as an adequate measure to fight terrorism and transnational organised crime.³⁰⁸ Again, media attention mainly lies on the ongoing problem of kidnappings, especially concerning employees of foreign companies in Mali (see case of uranium mines; AFP/ Maliweb 23.01.2011).

February 2011

Government statements at this stage are characterised by an effort to spell out its peace and security concept for Northern Mali both in terms of military measures and as infrastructural, economic and social plans. Apart from the example of upgrading the Malian National Civil Aviation Agency by a military component (see GovMali 7.02.2011a), the president takes the opportunity on the occasion of a number of inaugurations (of infrastructure projects) and meetings with various stakeholders to point out his double-track strategy of security and development based on concrete examples.³⁰⁹ When meeting the experts of the *Kofi Annan International Peacekeeping Training Centre* (based in Accra, Ghana), for example, where Malian security forces, too, were trained in conflict management concepts and methods, ATT again highlights the nexus of security and development (see GovMali 7.02.2011c). However, public speeches in the context of the 50th anniversary in Kidal, capital of the region with the same name in the north-east and hotspot of earlier rebellions³¹⁰, once again emphasize the question of security as a rather military one: On the one hand, in the presence of tribal leaders and ex-rebels, the president explains that Northern Mali has an enormous economic potential and that PSPSDN is about bringing international partners, different parts of the population and state institutions together in order to boost local development, to fight poverty and, therefore, to eliminate breeding

³⁰⁸ See e.g. the media coverage of the upcoming opening of a liaison office for military affairs maintained by Libya and Mali. Already in October 2010, to tighten the good cooperation, Libya made Mali a present of two surveillance aircrafts in order to support security in Northern Mali (see APA/ Maliweb 21.01.2011).

³⁰⁹ See e.g. ATT’s meetings with representatives of the union of the economic chambers and the assembly of agricultural chambers (GovMali 7.02.2011b). As to inaugurations, see e.g. the one concerning the hydroelectric plant in Ouélessébougou (GovMali 14.02.2011a) or the one concerning the hospital in Yanfolia (GovMali 2011b).

³¹⁰ Nota bene: In 1963, the first post-colonial Tuareg rebellion broke out in Kidal.

grounds of organised crime and extremism.³¹¹ With an eye to former and actual efforts to achieve autonomy in the north, ATT adds (without naming the MNA) that it is essential to

“[...] dedicate all our energy to local development. Let us move on and not be distracted by other projects, whatever their advocates’ rhetoric and arguments may be.” (GovMali 7.02.2011d)

At the same time, ATT’s speech in Kidal, given within the framework of a “Flamme de la Paix” (i.e. Flame of Peace) ceremony, particularly appeals to values of the “Tuareg warrior” – honour, dignity, bravery and courage – in order to achieve a surrender of all arms.³¹² Though, in case that this appeal would not be met, ATT points to the fact that the Malian military is capable and operational. This is even more stressed by the subsequent announcement of having commissioned new military vehicles to improve communication and deployment of Malian troops in the extensive northern regions (see GovMali 16.02.2011a).

By and large, government documents at that time portray Mali as a progressive multi-ethnic and multi-religious country, which respects human rights and is internationally recognised as a partner (especially by the EU). As such, according to the analysed statements, Mali would be preserved and defended in its integrity by the use of force in case of need (see GovMali 7.02.2011; 16.02.2011; 25.02.2011).

In this section, especially statements released by Tuareg groups are given foreground on MNA media platforms. These statements plainly contradict the rather positive presentation of the situation in Mali by the government. They hold that actual challenges can all be reduced to a single and longstanding cause: overcoming the colonial heritage, for example by doing away with borders inherited from colonial times, and thus taking into account of the Tuareg as people, on the one hand, spread over several West African but, on the other hand, feeling as a cultural if not national unity.

In this context, *Ibrahim Ag Bahanga*, a former Tuareg rebel leader, even though not yet formally adhering to MNA, appears as a prominent voice in publications close to the MNA.³¹³ Thus, Bahanga is cited with accusations against Malian authorities who would continuously nurture the northern population’s mistrust and of have enabled terrorists from outside to get a foothold in Mali due to an overly soft security policy. Moreover, Bahanga alleges that negotiations with the Malian government have never brought off a political, economic or social success for the north. In this vein, Azawad, since the independence of the Malian state, experienced 50

³¹¹ In this context, government documents promote the slogan that peace pays off economically and point to examples of those who got involved into the peace process, gave up their weapons and earn their living with newly established jobs (see e.g. GovMali 9.02.2011).

³¹² In the aforementioned ceremony, a large amount of small arms were handed over to the Malian president in public and then burned, which is portrayed as the “strong moment” of the event (GovMali 9.02.2011). Several times in Malian history, e.g. in the context of the 1996 peace agreement in Mali, Flame of Peace ceremonies were used to symbolically underline the parties’ commitment to the peace process.

³¹³ Nota bene: Bahanga, member of the Ifoghas Tuareg community, received military training in Libya in the 1980s and became a rebel commander of the 2006 uprising, which led to the Algiers Accord (see above, subsection on November 2010). However, as the implementation of the peace agreement (especially concerning the creation of local security units in the north) was put on hold, the “Bahanga faction” defected and continued to attack Malian bases. In 2008, the Bahanga faction changed its name to “Alliance Touareg Nord Mali pour le Changement” (ATNMC). Fightings continued on a limited scale during the following years until January 2009 when the Malian military destroyed Bahanga’s base near Tessalit and Bahanga fled to Libya (see Thurston and Lebovich 2013: 24-26, 39; UCDP 2018c).

years of occupation, inter alia enabled by France and bearing a huge number of victims among the population. Lastly, the more general suggestion that is regarded as imperative “to get rid of illegitimate and corrupt states” is followed by a unambiguous warning of the former rebel commander: “The situation in the regions of Gao, Timbuktu and Kidal could worsen very quickly” if the Malian government would definitely not respond to the offer of a true dialogue heading to the autonomy of Northern Mali, which was already presented in November 2010.³¹⁴ Accordingly, measures to “reorganise the military structure” of his former rebel unit – the ATNMC still not being part of MNA – would be adopted in case of need (see MNA 6.02.2011a).

Other MNA statements refer to the Flame of Peace ceremony on February 7-8 as a deliberate provocation of the people in Northern Mali. As a matter of fact, the Tuareg had believed in the peace process for decades; many surrendered their arms and tried to play a part in the political process. At this point, according to the sources, they learn that

“the Malian government profited by the disarming of a large part of Tuareg and then granted its partner – AQMI – all chances to occupy and to entrench themselves in Tuareg regions.” (MNA 6.02.2011a)

On top of that, Tuareg communities in different countries of the Sahelian zone increasingly find themselves under pressure since respective central governments stir up or, at least, tolerate hatred against them.³¹⁵ When it comes to Mali again, according to MNA statements, the time had come to unmask the “politico-folkloric spectacle” of Flame of Peace ceremonies and to confront the “true problem [the population of Azawad has] since 50 years: occupation” (MNA 19.02.2011a):

“The people of Azawad has already offered thousands of martyrs for its liberty. [...] Are we satisfied with what has been achieved after all these sacrifices? [...] In reality, unification with Mali means 50 years of deliberate elimination of everything what distinguishes the people of Azawad in cultural, religious, social, political, economic and geographical terms by calling existential right to its land into question.” (MNA 19.02.2011b)

Furthermore, it is added that the time has come to tackle a national project for the culturally separate people of Azawad, to claim rights of sovereignty and self-determination as an indigenous people and to call for reparation of violated rights with reference to international law and the international community.³¹⁶ Hence, the case of Azawad is to be considered as an internationally relevant armed conflict, which needs to be treated within appropriate international institutions (see MNA 19.02.2011b). In all analysed MNA documents, the MNA is repeatedly

³¹⁴ From November 5 to 13, 2010, a few days after the MNA declared its foundation, the ATNMC (i.e. the former Bahanga faction, see above) had an undisclosed meeting with Malian government officials in Tripoli, Libya. On this occasion, the ATNMC (not yet part of the MNA) delivered a “political document” outlining its propositions to solve the crisis in Northern Mali by dialogue which the government promised to continue but did not comply with (see MNA 27.01.2011).

³¹⁵ According to the analysed MNA documents, this is particularly true for the situation of the Tuareg in Libya (see MNA 9.02.2011).

³¹⁶ In this context, as the documents show, the MNA considers those international actors to be decisive who enable the ongoing “illegal military presence” in Azawad, which means, for example, those states who concluded contracts on the exploitation of natural resources or those international organisations providing funds for development projects, which do not reach out for the people’s needs but directly go to government and stay there (MNA 19.02.2011b).

described as legitimate representation of all parts of the population in Northern Mali. And, to reach its goals, the MNA more than once confirms to be first and foremost committed to a peaceful political struggle.

As the analysis of media coverage shows, MNA statements are picked up with great scepticism, especially concerning its commitment to non-violence (see above Bahanga's remarks on an eventual reorganisation of ATNMC's military structures). In reference to the Flame of peace ceremony on February 8, preliminary reports express a high degree of distrust, particularly since ATT invited ambiguous ex-rebels, like Bahanga:

“[In Kidal, the president] will definitely talk about peace with those brothers who used to raise arms against their country. [...] Ibrahim Ag Bahanga who is just returning from his golden exile in Libya. [The president] gives peace lessons to those who still prefer a dialogue of violence. [...] Bahanga, a multi-re-cidivist.” (L'Indicateur du Renouveau/Maliweb 3.02.2011a).

On the one hand, media accounts in this section often refer to ATT's key message of development as being the most promising strategy to promote peace and security. Moreover, the president's strategy is more and more presented as a strategy intended to promote local development (see e.g. L'Indicateur du Renouveau/ Maliweb 3.02.2011a; Maliweb 10.02.2011c). On the other hand, however, in the light of terrorist attacks against state representatives in neighbouring Mauretania³¹⁷, other media reports also place special emphasis on a military strategy in fighting terrorism. In this context, ATT's role as commander in chief of the Malian military is once again called to mind. As L'Indépendent/ Maliweb (10.02.2011b) states in round terms, for example, ATT needs to urge “security forces and the military to be even more watchful and relentless”.

March 2011

In March 2011, text analysis shows that government documents, at first, deal with international diplomatic activities of the president and his government. For example, statements address the meeting with the president of Guinea (among meetings with other heads of state in the subregion), which focused on how to strengthen cooperation in security affairs in order to stop drugs and arms trafficking and terrorism.³¹⁸ Beyond that, statements point out the government's and ATT's efforts within the context of conflict resolution in Côte d'Ivoire, where loyalists of the outgoing president and supporters of the opponent, an ex-rebel, confront each other in the aftermath of contested presidential elections are in danger to tumble into a armed and bloody

³¹⁷ Media reports refer to AQMI terrorists who carried out a bomb attack on the Mauritanian president with the help of vehicles of Malian origin; the attack, however, was prevented in the end (see *Le Républicain/Maliweb* 3.02.2011b). Other reports speculate that the bomb attack has a relation to previous actions of the Mauritanian military (supported by French elite units) against suspected terrorists, which led to several victims (French hostages and Malian nationals) (see *Le Combat/Maliweb* 8.02.2011b; 15.02.2011).

³¹⁸ As government documents further explain, the capability to chase and seize terrorists across borders is key: a Tunisian was said to be responsible for the attempted attack on the French embassy at the end of February. After having fled from police custody in Bamako, he was seized again one day later in Gao on his way to leave the country towards the northern border (see *GovMali* 2.03.2011).

conflict.³¹⁹ Similarly, the increasingly critical situation in Libya becomes a regular topic in government statements. Here, too, ATT is involved as a member of the negotiation group of heads of states and declares:

“The situation in Libya is at a crucial moment, which is marked by ongoing combat having severe humanitarian consequences. [...] this situation is an imminent threat and a huge burden for peace, security and stability in the region as a whole.” (GovMali 21.03.2011)

On Libya, Malian government declarations refer to the findings of the AU-led mediation group and suggest that enforcing a no-fly zone by Western powers definitely contributes to an increasingly hostile situation. The same documents continue to say that it would be necessary to find peaceful solutions, which take legitimate concerns of the people in Libya into account. On the precarious humanitarian situation, two aspects are particularly addressed. On the one hand, the government issues a special communiqué on other reports dealing with alleged Malian mercenaries in Libya:

“The Government of the Republic of Mali hereby clearly confirms that there is neither a direct nor an indirect link to mercenaries being recruited and sent to fight in Libya.” (GovMali 5.03.2011b)

On the other hand, and linked to aforesaid, other government statements clearly state that everything necessary would be done to ensure a safe return of Malian nationals from Libya (see GovMali 21.03.2011).

A second focus of official statements in March 2011 is represented by announcements relating to the topics of modernisation and development: As ATT states on the national day of municipalities on March 17, a number of development projects within the context of decentralisation has proved to be successful.³²⁰ Thereby, ATT repeatedly refers to the vital role of “development poles” which contribute to the expansion of infrastructure, for example concerning health care (see GovMali 14.03.2011b), as well as in arts and culture in general, even in sports.³²¹ In this context, appreciating the role of development partners, such as France (on the occasion of the new ambassador’s first visit), China or within the framework of ECOWAS, takes up much space in this section (see e.g. GovMali 25.03.2011). For instance, as the chief executive officer of the French Development Agency appreciates Malian domestic development policy, especially PSPSDN with its focus on peace and security in Northern Mali, the government highlights the following as the key statement of the event:

³¹⁹ As a member of the AU’s Peace and Security Council (PSC), ATT was part of the international negotiator and mediator team meeting in Addis Abeba to find a way to politically deal with the conflict between loyalists of outgoing president Laurent Gbagbo and supporters of contender Alassane Ouattara (see GovMali 11.03.2011).

³²⁰ In this address, the president brings together three causes under the umbrella of decentralisation as a development issue: the 50th anniversary of an independent Malian state, the 10th anniversary of a Malian decentralisation programme and the annual national day of municipalities.

³²¹ In sum, as government accounts state, beginning in the year 2001, a total volume of 150 billion FCFA (at the time equivalent to €229 million) has been invested in 17.812 projects in municipalities including, for example, the construction of sports grounds for football and basketball as well as centres for arts and culture (see GovMali 17.03.2011b).

“[My] organisation will accompany the Malian development efforts, which have top priority within the overall policy of good governance and an optimal management of the resources provided.” (GovMali 17.03.2011a)

Similar to government statements, MNA accounts in this section, too, describe Libya as an escalating conflict. However, the Libyan situation serves as an inducement to send a message to the Tuareg communities both in Libya and in West African states in general:

“The time has not yet come to liberate the land of the Tuareg, however, it is essential not to participate in the assassination of its people and not to betray it, and to stand on the side of the masses. [...] not to be drawn into the decline of a despot.” (MNA 5.03.2011a)

In addition, MNA representatives explicitly declare their solidarity with those “children, women and men” in Libya and the whole region who “scream out under great pain and stand up against oppression” (MNA 5.03.2011b). Moreover, the MNA particularly endorses the UN General Assembly’s decision to suspend Libya from the Human Rights Council by citing the UN Secretary-General who speaks, at least in MNA’s view, on behalf of oppressed Tuareg communities throughout the region, too:

“We expect an immediate stop of violence against civilians and the full respect of rights and fundamental liberties, including freedom of assembly and freedom of expression.” (Ban Ki-moon, as cited in MNA 8.03.2011).

Media coverage, as well, deals with the situation in neighbouring Libya. Here, the question of how close the relation between Tuareg in Libya and Mali really is gets addressed by the example of the Libyan consul general in Mali, *Musa al-Koni*, who left Mali early in March toward Paris: Al-Koni, who, according to discrediting media accounts, presents himself as an advocate of the Tuareg cause used to be in charge of recruiting Malian mercenaries to serve within the ranks of Gaddafi. Other media pieces place the weakness of Malian security forces which gets criticised increasingly open into the centre of attention. In this context, the increasing number of drug addicts, especially among youths, is not only blamed on a lack of perspective due to the miserable economic situation but also on the authorities’ poor performance in securing borders against drug inflow and their eventual collaboration with drug dealers, respectively (see e.g. Le Flambeau/ Maliweb 3.03.2011a). So, too, the unlawful chase of suspected Malian terrorists by Mauretanian security forces on Malian territory (see Lafia Révélateur/ Maliweb 3.03.2011b) as well as the uncertain fate of a number of foreign and Malian hostages in the hands of AQMI (see Le Combat/ Maliweb 8.02.2011) serve to name and shame the Malian government’s inaction and inability in the light of a worsening situation in Libya.

INGO reports in this phase particularly highlight the situation in Côte d’Ivoire where post-election violence had continued for several months and the situation is qualified as being “at the brink of civil war” (WANEP 31.03.2011; see also government section above). According to eyewitness reports and investigations, property damages, assaults and even massacres are turning on migrants, including Malian nationals, too. Based on these sources, the mass exodus of both foreigners and Ivorians becoming refugees is expected to pose a cross-border problem in the West African regional context, including Mali (see HRW 31.03.2011).

April 2011

Taking up the issue of inaction, government statements in April try to oppose these accusation by documenting regular government business in the midst of a troubled regional environment (namely the crises and conflicts in Libya and Cote d'Ivoire), for example by reporting on the president's successful consultation with Malian political parties in order to appoint a new female prime minister from Timbuktu, *Cissé Mariam Kaïdama Sidibé* (see GovMali 3.04.2011a); by emphasising the stability of Chinese-Malian relations within the context of the inauguration of the new Chinese ambassador (see GovMali 8.04.2011); by reporting on the state visits to Liberia and after that to Sierra Leone (in celebration of the 50th anniversary of Sierra Leonean independence), which were used by its participants to mutually recognise their stable and democratic development in a world region that is rather marked by conflict³²²; finally, by favourably addressing new projects of decentralisation and regional development in Mali.³²³ Beyond that, government statements bring up three issues in greater detail: First, the awarding of the "Kéba Mbaye Price for Ethics" to ATT who is honoured for

"[...] the re-establishment of the rule of law, [...] his support for the unfolding of a free press, numerous humanitarian actions and mediation services in Africa and the world" (GovMali 18.04.2011)

and his abundants merits in view of Mali's development as a "model democracy with a respected constitution on all sides".³²⁴ Second, government releases particularly point out the good state in which US-Malian relations are, concerning, for example, the many years of cooperation with the Peace Corps³²⁵, the joint US-Malian activities in combating HIV/AIDS³²⁶ as well as a close military cooperation, especially in fighting terrorism, as the commander of the US Africa Command confirms (see GovMali 26.04.2011). Finally, the president's speeches to the address of Malian Christians on the occasion of Easter and to the workers' movement on May Day make clear that ATT expects all Malians to defend unity in diversity as "superior interest of the nation" (GovMali 30.04.2011).

What can't be found in the analysed government statements is any reaction to the first national MNA congress (since its founding in November 2011) which was held on April 15-17

³²² The government statements in question explicitly refer to the interconnected civil wars in Liberia and Sierra Leone (from 1991-2002) which destabilised the whole region for a long time (see GovMali 29.04.2011a; 29.04.2011b).

³²³ On this, government statements mention institutional reforms concerning the division of administration units (see GovMali 12.04.2011) and measures to improve cross-border cooperation on using water resources of the Senegal River within the framework of the Senegal River Basin Development Authority (see GovMali 17.03.2011b).

³²⁴ As outlined within the statements, the Kéba Mbaye Price is awarded by a Senegalese foundation in memory of the Senegalese judge Kéba Mbaye (1924-2007), who was a member of the International Olympic Committee and president of the Court of Arbitration for Sport. The price honours extraordinary efforts to strengthen human rights, especially concerning the right to development (see e.g. GovMali 16.04.2011; 18.04.2011).

³²⁵ Nota bene: The Peace Corps is a volunteer programme run by the US government that started in 1962. Since then, it has places volunteer in 141 countries, including Mali. In April 2011, the government announces the arrival of 61 new volunteers who plan to work in different places of action, including Northern Mali (see GovMali 14.04.2011).

³²⁶ In this context, the government statements highlights that, on behalf of US president Obama, the director of the Global Health Initiative gives thanks to ATT personally for his campaign against infectious diseases, especially HIV/AIDS (see GovMali 21.04.2011). In this context, see also the governments massage on hosting a HIV/AIDS congress of young leaders Bamako (see GovMali 15.04.2011).

in Kidal. In the light of this event, however, a MNA release states that the alarming situation of Northern Mali represents a consequence of “Malian occupation”. In addition, as a broad hint to the Arab Spring, the document refers to “the wind of revolution blowing through the world” and bringing many people to determine their future on their own (see MNA 17.04.2011). Furthermore, it contains the following points (original citations, partly condensed): The MNA...

- 1) adheres to the people of Azawad’s right to self-determination;
- 2) calls for the people of Azawad’s support for the political project of the MNA;
- 3) confirms the priority of peaceful political combat (however including all legitimate methods for revolution and resistance);
- 4) calls for a serious dialogue with the Malian government about the principle of self-determination;
- 5) calls on the international community to fulfil its responsibility concerning the violation of rights;
- 6) supports those popular initiatives sustained by love and peace and thus against any destructive project of occupation;
- 7) condemns all forms of terrorism, refusing any presence (of terrorists) on Azawadien land;
- 8) calls on all companies or signatories of contracts dealing with Azawad’s natural resources to review these illegal contracts;
- 9) calls on the International Red Cross and other humanitarian organisations to help Azawadien families fleeing from hostilities in Libya;
- 10) supports any popular revolution in the world, especially in North Africa, for freedom, democracy and human rights.

A second substantial MNA statement in this month pays attention to ATT’s meeting with Arab tribal leaders from all Northern regions (i.e. Gao, Timbuktu and Kidal) on April 28. Thus, the intensification of development efforts in all regions, especially in the North, is recognised. At the same time, the document highlights criticism against the president who called for a meeting in this special constellation for the first time and who had never reacted to any communication from MNA’ side up to that point (see MNA 29.04.2011).

In contrast, media coverage picks up the first national MNA congress in great detail, for example by extensively citing the original text on the MNA’s claims (see above) or within the context of a contribution entitled “Northern Mali: An independence movement is born” (see MNA 17.04.2011). Although MNA publications do not mention “independence” but “autonomy” as a major goal, media commentaries continue to say that MNA claims are about independence efforts not only in reference to the territory of Azawad but also to parts of Niger, Algeria, Libya, Chad and even Sudan. However, these documents bring forward that there is a lot of scepticism concerning the true power of the “movement” (i.e. the MNA) and its commitment to non-violence (see Lafia Révélateur/ Maliweb 27.04.2011f).

The agenda of media coverage in April 2011 is basically determined by two further topics: First, articles revolve around the effectiveness of development efforts in the North. On the one hand, it is stated that there is a myriad of projects initiated, such as water retentions or solar-powered well water pumps. On the other hand, however, those projects got stuck because of insufficient funding (see 26 Mars/ Maliweb 12.04.2011). Nevertheless, according to these accounts, PSPSDN could give an answer to the “many forms of insecurity”, denominated as “rebellions, hostage-taking by AQMI, illicit trafficking (drugs, weapons), intra and interethnic

conflicts” (Lafia Révélateur/ Maliweb 13.04.2011).³²⁷ Yet, according to insiders quoted in some of these media reports, there are actors who have no interest in improving the security situation because they are parts of the “insecurity business” that had established over the years, including actors from drug dealers to mediation experts to members of international aid organisations (see Nouvelle Libération/ Maliweb 15.04.2011).

Second, media coverage addresses the perception of an increasing activity of AQMI in the north. Thereby, a pamphlet that had been distributed over night in Timbuktu served as central reference:

“It’s about you! You, the Arabs who know very well the terrain, the sand, and the desert and you who accepted to work for intelligence services. You who follow our movements in order to straightaway inform the Western powers so that they can better fight against us... This message is directly addressed to you: If you don’t want your wives and children to become widows and orphans, withdraw from the intelligence service. If not, woe is you!” (Lafia Révélateur/Maliweb 20.04.2011)

Further articles show that this unprecedented kind of intimidation of the population has an impact, as, for example, the media statement of the mayor of Bèr (a small village near Timbuktu) reveals:

“[...] elements of AQMI are increasingly present in the towns of Northern Mali [...]. AQMI is an important factor in the region. These people have funding. They invest in the population, in projects like well construction and caring about nomads in the region.” (Le Combat/Maliweb 27.04.2011d)

In this context, some media accounts also assume that Malians returning from Libya with an enormous arsenal of weapons would most likely join AQMI and thus make terrorists even stronger (see e.g. Lafia Révélateur/ Maliweb 6.04.2011). So, against this background of a Malian state which indeed tries hard but still continues to be too weak in terms of counteroffers to its citizens in the North, the younger generation, according to the assessment of the media, is increasingly exposed to both recruiting efforts by Islamists and temptations of the drug trafficking business. Moreover, reports mention a clear tendency of the Malian and other governments in the region³²⁸ to downplay or at least underestimate the growing anchoring of AQMI (see L’Indicateur du Renouveau/ Maliweb 29.04.2011a). Taking up the issue of a growing AQMI presence, the monthly update of the ICG, too, deals with an increasing terrorist threat. As France mentions a “very elevated risk of hostage-taking” in its official travel information, the ICG confirms these warning and has indications of an increasing number of AQMI bases in Northern Mali (see ICG 1.05.2011).

³²⁷ As other media reports in April 2011 make clear, interethnic conflicts, for example between Peuls and Tuareg disputing about land and livestock (see e.g. L’Indicateur du Renouveau/Maliweb 4.04.2011) or between Arabs and Tuareg competing on water resources (see e.g. Le 22 Septembre/Maliweb 18.04.2011a) are perceived as age-old conflicts which, at this time, get actuality (see also chapter 6.3 on the temporal dimension).

³²⁸ According to L’Indépendant/ Maliweb (29.04.2011c), the Algerian government refuses any cooperation with Western countries to combat terrorism with reference to its own sufficient capabilities and strategies. However, only in a regional context, together with Mali, Mauritania and Niger, Algerian authorities plan to establish a close military cooperation (for the first activities within the framework of this cooperation see following section on June 2011).

May 2011

To begin with, the number of government statements relating to Northern Mali further decreases, from 20 documents in April to 12 documents in May. The main topics of these statements are strengthening military cooperation with neighbouring countries, Algeria, Mauritania and Niger, agreed upon within the framework of a meeting between high-level politician and militaries with ATT, in order to fight the common threat by terrorism, banditism, drug trafficking and kidnapping (see GovMali 2.05.2011); the installation of the new female prime minister Sidibé (see above) by the president while setting out her most important task: advancing ongoing development projects, particularly PSPSDN, with the utmost energy and treating food production as a security issue (see e.g. GovMali 9.05.2011a; 10.05.2011); May Day, the annual Muslim pilgrimage “Ziyara” (Arabic for “visit”)³²⁹ on May 7-8 as well as the commemoration of Mali’s first independent president, *Modibo Keita*, on May 16 – all these events are linked, in one form or another, to appeals to national unity in government announcements (see GovMali 9.05.2011b; 17.05.2011). However, there are no references to those topics increasingly raised in MNA statements or media accounts, such as the return of heavily armed ex-soldiers from Libya or MNA’s claims concerning autonomy.

In reference to the declaration of the national MNA congress (see above), MNA statements particularly deal with the historical background of its claims: Accordingly, they highlight the fact that the long history of Tuareg culture indeed, according to international law, justified the right to self-determination and to a state on their own at the time when Mali’s independence came up to the horizon. Unfortunately, this circumstance had been ignored both by the French colonial and post-colonial governments as well as by the Malian government.³³⁰ Since the population of Northern Mali is tired of long-term rights violations and grieving about the many victims of previous rebellions, the MNA offers a peaceful way of open dialogue in order to approach a right of self-determination for the people of Azawad. More precisely, the MNA intends to offer

“[...] the organisation of a referendum in consultation with all structures of Azawad’s civil society and foreign partners.” (MNA 25.05.2011)

With regards to the violation of rights by the government, however, the MNA also provides concrete accusations. Therefore, the case of four persons arbitrarily arrested by the Malian secret service was followed by public protest. Among the arrested, for example, a radio journalist who planned an interview with the governor of the Gao region dealing with MNA’s claims (see MNA 16.05.2011).

The analysis of media reports in May 2011 shows a kind of aha moment: First, there are reports pointing out that, after a certain span of non-reaction, the government finally acknowledges a potentially growing source of insecurity brought in by refugees and armed ex-soldiers from Libya (see e.g. AFP/ Maliweb 3.05.2011a; Reuters/ Maliweb 11.05.2011). Some

³²⁹ In general, Ziyara can be understood as a Muslim pilgrimage *not* heading for Mecca but other spiritual Islamic sites. In Mali, Ziyara is usually associated with an annual meeting of Muslims in Hamdallaye (Mopti region, bordering region to Northern Mali).

³³⁰ As a proof of these early Tuareg activities, statements refer to lettres addressed to French president *Charles de Gaulle*; see MNA 15.07.2011; see also chapter 6.3 on the temporal dimension).

announcements even put returnees on a level with potential rebels who would, as insinuated, immediately join Malian-based rebels in order to revive their old project of a “light-skinned” or Arab insurgency against the Malian state dominated by dark-skinned Africans (see *Le Prétoire/ Maliweb* 11.05.2011).³³¹ In this context, the concept of “self-determination for Azawad” used in MNA statements is often interpreted as “independence” (see e.g. *Lafia Révélateur/ Maliweb* 4.05.2011b). Second, while trivialising the tense security situation, other media accounts refer to little support and low understanding of MNA’s claims among Northern Mali’s population, as ATT’s public meetings with tribal leaders and politicians (see e.g. *Le Combat/ Maliweb* 4.05.2011a; *Nouvelle Libération/ Maliweb* 16.05.2011b) or surveys on the streets of Timbuktu (populated by Tuaregs, Arabs, Songhay) would show:

“We have never been associated with an independent movement of any kind whatsoever. If that had been the case, we would have brought those sympathisers back to reason, since, for us, it is beyond dispute to question the integrity of the Malian territory. Mali is our common heritage. We received it like this from our ancestors.” (*Lafia Révélateur/ Maliweb* 4.05.2011b)

Finally, some reports bring up the subject of *Osama bin Laden*’s death in connection with a US military operation on May 2, 2011 (in Pakistan) and possible repercussions in Mali. According to these authors, it must be feared that AQMI radicalises even more, having negative consequences on Mali’s security situation, particularly concerning hostages still being in AQMI’s grip (see *AFP/ Maliweb* 3.05.2011b). In this context, it is also stated that AQMI grows in terms of numbers: Referring to French security service, there are at least 400 AQMI fighters who unimpededly establish further military bases and know how to gain the people’s trust by aligning themselves with supporters of the Arab Spring (see *El Watan/ Maliweb* 20.05.2011; *Lafia Révélateur/ Maliweb* 26.05.2011).

In reaction to the description of AQMI as increasingly gaining strength, some reports level criticism against the government, be it in terms of non-effective development efforts in the North (see *Le Combat/ Maliweb* 4.05.2011a), concerning the fight against AQMI perceived as timid (see *El Moudjahid/ Maliweb* 7.05.2011; *Lafia Révélateur/ Maliweb* 26.05.2011) or as to the late insight on the interconnectedness of different threats, such as terrorism and drugs trafficking (see *Le 22 Septembre/ Maliweb* 21.05.2011). Others, in marked contrast, endorse the government’s activities related to strengthening military cooperation with neighbouring countries in order to increase military and police forces available to fight against terrorism from 25.000 up to 75.000 (see *L’Indicateur du Renouveau/ Maliweb* 18.05.2011; 23.05.2011c). Also, reports explicitly approve the announced reinforcement of PSPSDN in support of the EU (see *Le Matinal/ Maliweb* 31.05.2011).

June 2011

In June 2011, there are no MNA statements and only a few government statements regarding the situation in Northern Mali. The latter point to a appreciable success of Malian development programmes. Therefore, letting security issues gain centre stage, PSPSDN is not only presented as being in line with UN’s Millenium Development Goals but also as a Malian contribution to

³³¹ In contrast, it bears mentioning that there are reports pointing out that returnees from Libya, up to that point, had preponderantly been workers from different economic sectors (see *Reuters/ Maliweb* 11.05.2011).

international “collective security” (see GovMali 14.06.2011; GovMali 24.06.2011). While a special emissary of French president Sarkozy stays in Mali, further government messages deal with the “excellent cooperation” between France and Mali as related to the common efforts to free hostages from the hand of AQMI and to fight terrorism, arms and drugs trafficking (see GovMali 27.06.2011). Moreover, the Malian government announces to have used its voice in the AU high-level ad hoc committee on Libya to condemn the ongoing NATO aerial attack regarding its catastrophic consequences for civilian population.³³² Since some of Libya’s neighbouring countries reject Libyan refugees at their border, they are subject to Malian criticism, too (see GovMali 28.06.2011).

As NATO intervention in Libya has obvious and long term consequences for the situation in Mali (see above in terms of refugees and), there is marked criticism in media coverage, too: Some articles hold that this intervention, albeit legitimised by UN security council, should be understood as a “terrorist project” since it worsens the humanitarian situation and has ultimately only one goal: inducing a regime change in order to satisfy Western oil and gas interests (see *Le Potentiel/ Maliweb* 21.06.2011). In contrast, other voices clarify that is up to the Libyan people and countries in the region to tackle their problems on their own, for example by establishing a true concerted military action against AQMI:

“Right now, our troops and Mauretanian troops are on the ground together for a couple of weeks. They conduct a common military operation against organised crime and against AQMI along the border between the two countries.” (AFP/Maliweb 23.06.2011)

Already in early June, special forces of the four neighbouring countries – Algeria, Mauretania, Mali and Niger – conducted concerted campaigns against AQMI bases in Mali and different border areas. However, the analysed media pieces make clear that military operations alone would not be enough. It would particularly be necessary to improve the situation by common development efforts across borders – compared to earlier media statements dealing with the nexus of development, security and peace this a new hint. With that, the kidnapping business³³³ as well as the booming drugs and arms trafficking would be deprived of its breeding ground (see *El Moudjahid/ Maliweb* 1.06.2011).

INGO reports, too, point to the border areas of the mentioned neighbouring countries around Mali which had developed into a

“[...] zone of lawlessness without any order, which made the Sahara attractive for terrorists.” (FES 2011: 5)

Against this background, the international community, at that moment, indeed focuses on the increasing terrorist danger in Mali, especially as the Malian government seems to practice a standstill towards the threat emanating from AQMI. Rather, the Malian situation would require

³³² Nota bene: On the basis of UN Security Council resolution 1973, a NATO-led military intervention started in March 2011 and ended in October 2011; its main measures: imposing a no-fly zone by a series of air strikes.

³³³ Against the background of experience with Al Qaeda kidnapping around the world, US intelligence services long way before informed European partners, especially France, about ransom money being an important financial factor for the AQMI network (see *El Moudjahid/Maliweb* 1.06.2011).

an “inclusive approach” not only taking the situation of the Tuareg and ethnic groups into account but also addressing, for example, “endemic corruption” in Mali (FES June 2011: 5).

July 2011

As it has been outlined in previous sections, government documents regularly refer to PSPSDN as the most important measure to improve the security situation in Northern Mali. Now, at the end of its first stage (July 2010 to July 2011), the government publishes its assessment of PSPSDN. In sum, a number of sub-projects are successfully evaluated, for example (see GovMali 27.07.2011):

1. equipment and buildup of infrastructure for armed forces operating in respective zones;
2. reinforcement of the armed forces’ capacities, especially concerning training and mobility;
3. buildup of infrastructures in favour of the administration (rehabilitation of remand prisons, courts, prefectures);
4. construction of basic infrastructures for a direct benefit of the population such as systems of water supply;
5. support of private sector, e.g. to establish trading venues, cattle markets, and microfinance for young people;
6. setting up good governance standards on the administrative level and in territorial authorities.

However, as the government concedes, out of the three Northern regions (i.e. Kidal, Gao, Timbuktu), Kidal region had been the clear geographic focus of many PSPSDN projects. Taking up the issue of development efforts, further contributions complain about the French travel warning putting Mali in the international pillory and contributing to a further decline of important economic factors, especially tourism and artisan craftwork (see GovMali 14.07.2011; 29.07.2011). Beyond that, government statements point to issues intended to convey the impression of an active and prudent government: In July, 895 new police officers and 300 new gendarmes are brought into service (see GovMali 8.07.2011; 22.07.2011); international partners highly appreciate ATT’s contribution within the framework of AU-led mediation group for Libya advocating for a political process that would be able to take “legitimate concerns of the Libyan people into account”, for the rule of law and for human rights (see GovMali 7.07.2011); and finally, ATT on the occasion of a state visit to France citing former French president *Jacques Chirac* within the context of a vernissage at *Musée du Quai Branly* in Paris:

“[The museum] proclaims that no people, no nation, no civilisation exhausts or grasps the human genius. Each culture enriches it with beauty and truth. Only in their continuously renewed expressions, the universal which brings us all together can be found.” (GovMali 14.07.2011)

MNA statements in July 2011, too, refer to fundamental beliefs and values: According to these considerations, fighting for Azawad is about a “intellectual revolution” in which “universal democratic values” are defended (see MNA 15.07.2011). In this sense, MNA continues to declare itself to be the legitimate representation of the people of Azawad and says

“[...] the people of Azawad decided to wage a peaceful and merciless combat against the occupation.” (MNA 16.07.2011)

Following these sources, this combat includes charging the violation of human rights that had happened during “Malian occupation” according to international law. Moreover, there is an explicit expectation that Western democracies should support the MNA in pursuing this goal which is a consequence of a common normative basis (see MNA 15.07.2011).

In July 2011, the very few media pieces dealing with the situation in Northern Mali do not pick up MNA communication. Instead, they focus on actions against AQMI, for example, concerning a successful military operation against a recently established AQMI basis near the Malian-Mauretanian border titled “Benkan” (Bambara for “unity”), carefully prepared by both countries in the preceeding months. Yet, some Malian militaries are quoted as warningly saying that AQMI terrorists do indeed have a “veritable military strategy” and a huge amount of arms to which the Malian security forces would not have enough to counter (see AFP/ Maliweb 19.07.2011).

Phase II (Aug 2011 – Oct 2011)

August 2011

In August, the keynote of government statements clearly changes: Now, the government voices declare that authorities are thoroughly willing and have the ability to react to a growing terrorist threat. To underline the government’s firm intention, these sources invoke a push of regional and international cooperation initiated by Malian leadership and the adoption of a national policy of “fighting insecurity and terror, particularly in the North” including tougher measures which once again take the growing danger of illegal migration into account (see GovMali 14.08.2011).

Further governments announcement state that these measures comprise, in addition to PSPSDN, the re-establishment of former military bases, the installation of new outposts, the deployment of additional brigades of police forces to the north as well as the establishment of health centres, schools, modern wells, new accommodations and offices for administration staff (see GovMali 11.08.2011). And finally, ATT once again uses a religious framework, at the end of fasting month Ramadan, to counter Islamist messages by publicly praying for “concord and community” both of Muslims and Malians (see GovMali 29.08.2011).

According to MNA documents in August 2011, the MNA is about to consolidate its organisation which, in line with the resolutions of the national MNA congress (see above April 15-17, 2011, Kidal), corresponds to state-like structure: In this view, MNA’s “executive council”, on its meeting on July 26-27, 2011, in Gao, decides to continue its “revolutionary work” by developing more effective structures, such as a network of regional offices, a revolutionary council, and, according to the often highlighted values of democracy, an independent judiciary (see MNA 6.08.2011).

As the news of Bahanga’s death on August 26 (which, at first, plays no role in government communication) goes around, it is frequently picked up in MNA sources. Hence, Bahanga is depicted as “a cornerstone of the Tuareg community” and as “one of the bravest sons of Azawad” who had always fought for the Tuareg’s good (see MNA 28.08.2011) and whose death is seen as an incentive to continue his way:

“This death is a big loss which does not at all depress us but gives us a new breath, a new life, one reason more to sustain in our struggle to get respect for our violated rights and justice for all.” (MNA 29.08.2011)

Media reports, too, deal with Bahanga's death by accident. However, Bahanga is presented in a rather bad light, as, for example, AFP (Maliweb 27.08.2011b) notes:

“The most radical of all Tuareg rebel leaders, Ibrahim Ag Bahanga, who never fully accepted to surrender arms died in an accident in the north-east of the country.”

With this, media accounts do not only repeat and confirm that Bahanga, repeatedly named “the warrior”, represents the most prominent Tuareg leader, particularly because he defected the 2006 Algiers Accord and sabotaged the peace process continuously in the aftermath. Already since the 1980s, Bahanga is also considered to be a pioneer in recruiting Tuareg rebels as mercenaries to serve the Gaddafi regime. Thus, at a time when Tripoli gets seized by anti-government forces and the Libyan regime stands on the brink of collapse, Bahanga gets focused as the person responsible for increasing insecurity caused by heavily armed mercenaries returning from Libya (see RFI/ Maliweb 27.08.2011a). Finally, under the pretext of an alleged rebellion in the name of the Tuareg, Bahanga is accused of both making common cause with Islamists in the Maghreb and profiting from drugs and arms trafficking in the Sahelian zone (see *L'Indépendent*/ Maliweb 29.08.2011). Some media commentaries, in a religiously charged and blunt style, conclude that Bahanga had been served right by a deadly mine presumably posed by himself or, in other words, “battered to death by God's hand”. Further media reports in August deal with PSPSDN stating that, against the background of worsening conflict in Libya, development components are more and more pushed to the background as opposed to security components (see *Le Républicain*/ Maliweb 10.08.2011).

In INGO accounts, too, the self-accelerating breakup of the Libyan state serves as a background to go into the issue of refugees many of whom are supposed to be heavily armed combatants who would particularly join AQMI (see ICG 1.09.2011). As it has been mentioned in diverse media pieces dealing with Bahanga's activities (see e.g. *L'Indépendent*/ Maliweb 29.08.2011), INGOs documentations also outline “increasingly blurring lines between organised crime and terrorism”. Still, the Malian governments strategy to promote security and development via PSPSDN is highlighted as a promising positive example (see FES August 2011).

September 2011

At the beginning of September, in the light of the precarious situation in Libya, ATT takes the opportunity to link two issues in government announcements: First, the president expresses solidarity with the Libyan people fighting for democracy, justice and the rule of law while, at the same time, attaching great importance to unity and integrity of the Libyan state whose breakup would have severe consequences for the whole region and, therefore, has to be stopped by international support (see GovMali 2.09.2011; 5.09.2011). Second, with a view to the Malian committee on constitutional reform³³⁴, ATT clarifies:

“There are articles which we consider as cardinal – these articles won't be changed at all. This particularly refers to those articles concerning Mali's independence and sovereignty, its territorial integrity, the multi-party system, its

³³⁴ According to ATT's own remarks, the members of this committee had not been appointed on the basis of expert knowledge but primarily due to their patriotism (see GovMali 6.09.2011).

national unity, and the two-term principle for the presidency.” (GovMali 6.09.2011)

On September 22, on the occasion of the 51st anniversary of the independent Malian state, government statements once again focus attention on a “Mali’s considerable process of modernisation and development”. Based on these sources, three important projects had been realised with support from partners all over the world, especially China: a hydroelectric plant combined with a water reservoir for agricultural use in Djenné; the modernisation of the central international airport in Bamako; and the “China-Mali Friendship Bridge” across Niger in Bamako (see e.g. 12.09.2011; 19.09.2011). Again, the second stage of PSPSDN (July 2011 – July 2012) which is intended to be an accelerated one is mentioned as key building block of modernisation and development (see GovMali 22.09.2011a).

The latter is immediately picked up by MNA statements who consider PSPSDN to be “a programme of militarising Azawad” since it mainly includes the establishment or upgrading of military facilities designed to intimidate the population of Azawad instead of pushing forward genuine development measures. Moreover, MNA sources state that AQMI bases in close proximity to Malian military are not really fought against (see MNA 2.09.2011). Against this background, the MNA finds itself constrained to call upon the international community and Mali’s development partner to draw back support, especially concerning PSPSDN. The MNA even releases two concrete requests for help to the address of international organisations: first, a request is directed to the International Red Cross and other aid agencies in reference to “Azawadian families” forced to flee Libya for security reasons but rejected at the Malian borders (see MNA 12.09.2011); second, MNA makes transparent to have approached the UN Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.³³⁵ On this, the MNA draws attention to the fact that

“the Tuareg in Azawad have experienced oppression and marginalization – under the silence of the international community, whereas the objective of the Tuareg community actually is to gain greater autonomy and to improve our conditions of life in the Sahara, notably in Azawad.” (MNA 13.09.2011)

Finally, MNA documents in September 2011 (just as government statements) include expression of solidarity in the direction of “revolutions of the people” in North Africa and all other corners of the world where people fight for “freedom, democracy and human rights”.

After media coverage had rather been positive about PSPSDN up to that point, in September 2011 reports begin to be spilt in two factions: On the one hand, there are still those appreciating the government’s development efforts in the North (be it via PSPSDN or other Malian programmes) as promising or already successful.³³⁶ On the other hand, quite a few media accounts are straightforwardly critical: Some assume that PSPSDN is either ragged or rogue

³³⁵ Nota bene: The Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples was established by the Human Rights Council, the UN’s main human rights body, in 2007, as a subsidiary body of the Human Rights Council.

³³⁶ In this context, sources refer inter alia to the example of an economic reintegration programme for young people which had already reached 2.306 individuals (based on a total of 10.000 individuals targeted). This, as an implicit reaction to MNA voices, is presented to be a contribution to satisfy the concrete needs of municipalities in the North and thus has nothing to do with building military bases and prisons (see e.g. Lafia Révélateur/Maliweb 14.09.2011b; Le Prétoire/Maliweb 29.09.2011).

since it prefers one region (Kidal) over others (Gao, Timbuktu) and, beyond that, organises the appointment of leading positions based on ethnic affiliations. This practice would lead to institutional blockades or even to new inter-ethnic confrontation, for example between Arabs, Tamasheq and Songhay communities (see *Lafia Révélateur/Maliweb* 2.09.2011). In addition, PSPSDN projects are criticised for being implemented, in general, with very limited participation of affected locals.³³⁷

Other critical media reviews of the government are further on based on Wikileaks publications concerning new US and Algerian cables again suggesting that Malian authorities are not only incapable but also unwilling to effectively fight AQMI (see *Le Combat/Maliweb* 14.09.2011a). In addition, the Sahelian zone, with Mali at its centre, is increasingly portrayed as a zone of limited statehood and deliberate nonintervention and, as a consequence, as one of the most important hubs for international drug trafficking³³⁸ and an arena of armed conflict between rival and heavily armed drug cartels (especially *Saharian* branch/Polisario against *Sahelian* branch; see *AFP/Maliweb* 15.09.2011).

The second focus of media reports in September 2011 is targeted at recent MNA communiqués. These are characterised as manifestations of “separatism”, as “start of a new rebellion” or as “secession” and denigrated as incoherent, anti-democratic, anti-development and Gaddafi-financed (see *Lafia Révélateur/Maliweb* 14.09.2011b; 14.09.2011c; *Le 22 Septembre/Maliweb* 16.09.2011). At the same time, according to the same reports³³⁹, the MNA gains more and more support among the population:

“We did conduct a poll among community leaders and notables in Timbuktu. After a few months, the follow-up says that there is obviously much more support.” (*Lafia Révélateur/Maliweb* 14.09.2011b)

Further accounts in this section can be described as being rather questioning or puzzled about who is really behind the foundation and funding of the MNA (see *Lafia Révélateur/Maliweb* 14.09.2011b); about MNA supporters raising Azawad flags on Malian administration buildings and, at the same time, declaring to be proponents of non-violence (see *Le Combat/Maliweb* 19.09.2011); about 600 Tuareg soldiers returning from Libya with their families and their future field of activity in Mali (see *Le Republicain/Maliweb* 16.09.2011c); about the Malian government actively inviting “homecomers” and encouraging municipalities to take adequate measures in order to generously reintegrate returnees from Libya (see *Le Combat/Maliweb* 19.09.2011; *Le 22 Septembre/Maliweb* 26.09.2011).

On this, from an INGO perspective, an HRW report published in early September gives further insights: According to the report, the situation for people of Malian origin in Libya becomes increasingly precarious. Under the new authorities, people are persecuted, arbitrarily

³³⁷ As *Le 22 Septembre* (26.09.2011) notes, for example, the permission to use a new water well had been given to members of different ethnic communities from different regions – a regulation that necessarily provokes confrontation given the fact that different ethnic communities had been using different wells for centuries.

³³⁸ Again, reports suggest that the growing convergence between terrorism and organised crime or, more concretely, the massive financing of terror by drug trade could nowhere be better observed than in this region (see *Le 22 Septembre/Maliweb* 16.09.2011b).

³³⁹ Already in the beginning of May 2011, the newspaper *Lafia Révélateur* performed a survey dealing with the MNA which had shown that the MNA, up to that point, is widely unknown by the general population in Northern regions (see above *Lafia Révélateur/Maliweb* 4.05.2011b).

arrested and ill-treated as “Tuareg mercenaries” only because of their skin colour. Alike, thousands of longterm migrant workers are suspected of having worked for Gaddafi and are at that point exposed to hostilities both from the new rulers and the Libyan population (see HRW 4.09.2011).

Phase III (Oct 2011 – Jan 17, 2012)

October 2011

At the beginning of October³⁴⁰, government statement once again use the fit occasion of an inauguration of a development project (in this case, an irrigation project in Atlona, Ségou region, Southern Mali, realised as part of a US-Malian cooperation) to document a positive perception of Malian development efforts by external players, such as US envoy Daniel Yohannes³⁴¹ and thus to counter growing criticism:

“In the course of the audience, Mr. Yohannes was full of admiration for the [Malian] head of state because of the great progress that had been achieved in Mali in many domains in the last years.” (GovMali 15.10.2011a)

Moreover, government statements highlight two important international meetings: a conference of riparian states of the Niger river on water management (see GovMali 17.10.2011) and a meeting of ATT with the Algerian president Bouteflika on strengthening cooperation in fighting terrorism as well as the purchase of military transportation vehicles made in Algeria for the Malian military (see GovMali 26.10.2011). According to the announcements, as participants of these meetings had characterised the situation of their countries in the region as “interdependence” (GovMali 18.10.2011), the awareness of being dependent on each other and thus of being forced to cooperate on the basis of international agreements grows (see GovMali 28.10.2011). Finally, with a view to returnees from Libya, the government explains its helping hand policy:

First and foremost, this is about giving a helping hand to all daughters and sons of the country without any exclusion by approaching all groups of Libyan militaries of Malian origin, in order to assist in a situation of personal distress.” (GovMali 24.10.2011)

Based on this slogan, a high-level government delegation sets out for Kidal region to meet ex-combatants returning from Libya. These, in turn, immediately go on record as saying that they had come in peace and would conformingly integrate (see GovMali 24.10.2011).

According to the analysed MNA statements, after repeated offers for talks had been ignored by the Malian government, the MNA issues “a last and final appeal” and gives the government a month-long ultimatum to react. Therein, the authors renew MNA’s principal claim “to have serious and peaceful negotiations on the self-determination of Azawad”. They also argue that the recent multiplication of military presence in northern Mali would be

³⁴⁰ Strictly speaking, as introduced earlier, phase III begins with the turning point event, i.e. the MNLA’s founding statement on October 16, 2011. By maintaining a month-by-month systematics, the preceding mode of representation of results is continued.

³⁴¹ Daniel Yohannes was, at that time, president of the Millenium Challenge Corporation (MCC), a US foreign aid agency, i.a. supporting the irrigation project in Atalona (see GovMali 15.10.2011a).

perceived as intimidation and terrorisation of the population and thus would lead to a militarisation of Azawad, even with the help of international development assistance. Based on the analysed MNA documents, for the first time, the MNA accuses the government of encouraging sections of the population in southern Mali to settle in the north in the shadow of a clandestine militarisation. Against this background, the international community is again invited to meet its responsibility to protect peace and security in the region (see MNA 4.10.2011).

However, this last and final appeal, too, remained unanswered which urged the MNA to finally change its strategy – on October 16, the National Movement for the Liberation of Azawad (MNLA) was founded. In its first communiqué, the MNLA declares to be a new kind of coalition movement, emerging from the MNA which had already existed for one year and the ATNMC³⁴² of the deceased legendary leader Bahanga:

“This new organisation has the objective to lead the people of Azawad out of the illegal occupation of Azawad’s territory by the Malian state. Since decades, Mali fuels insecurity in the region.” (MNLA 16.10.2011)

Even though the newly founded MNLA declares to be still prepared for a peaceful dialogue with Malian authorities, military facts are set at the same time: As *Hama Ag Sid-Ahmed*, spokesman of the political bureau, makes clear, the MNLA declares war on the AQMI:

“The terrorist leaders will quickly become aware of the Tuaregs’ return. Once chased from their corners, the terrorists will finally leave. First military operations will take place in the near future.” (MNLA 30.10.2011)

In this context, the MNLA also admits to have been reinforced by parts of the returning ex-combatants from Libya who joined the MNLA with a considerable number of weapons. Moreover, the MNLA says to calculate on a confrontation with both AQMI and the Malian military since, according to MNLA sources it is obvious that there is “a secret agreement” between AQMI and the Malian government or, in other words, “a double game” of the Malian authorities (see MNLA 30.10.2011).

In media reports, too, the government is increasingly blamed for “doublespeak” or, at least, “closing eyes”. Still, Wikileaks publications on US doubts about Malian credibility in fighting terrorism produce enough material for critical coverage (see also September 2011 and November 2010 earlier in this chapter). In addition, confirmations and promises, made by the president personally, too, are simply not followed by actions and any measurable implementation (see *Le Républicain/Maliweb* 31.10.2011d). In contrast, there are also contributions exposing the good state of US-Malian relations and dealing with the large US military support in terms of arms exports to fight terrorism which is handed over during a public ceremony by the end of October.³⁴³

³⁴² Even though the authors of MNLA’s founding statement use “Mouvement Touareg du Nord Mali” to designate the Bahanga faction, “North Mali Alliance for Change” (French abbreviation: ATNMC) established as a more common name. Nota bene: Already in November 2010, the ATNMC had passed on a political document to the Malian government offering to solve the stand-off by dialogue (see MNA 27.01.2011). However, as this offer had remained unanswered against all confirmations, in February 2011, Bahanga threatened the government with reorganising the military structure of the ATNMC in case of need (see MNA 6.02.2011a; see also above chapter 6.2/ phase I/ February 2011).

³⁴³ According to Xinhua/ Maliweb (29.10.2011), US arms deliveries to Mali at that time reach a total of 9 million US-\$, including 44 pickups, 18 trucks, 6 ambulances, radio unites, and charging units.

However, the main topics of media coverage in October 2011, especially after the definite fall of the Gaddafi regime³⁴⁴, are the emergence of the MNLA and the massive return of ex-soldiers from Libya. As to the latter, various reports hold that there are at least 400 ex-Libyan soldiers of Malian origin accompanied by additional hundreds of people³⁴⁵ reaching northern Mali at that time (see e.g. RFI/Maliweb 16.10.2011; Le Malien/Maliweb 19.10.2011c). Furthermore, it is stated that these ex-soldiers are “armed to their teeth” with modern weapons from the Libyan military (see Le Combat/Maliweb 26.10.2011) and are thus well-equipped “for a guerrilla war against regular armys” à la Al Qaeda. In other words, it is feared that weapons and soldiers fall into AQMI’s hands (see L’Indicateur du Renouveau/ Maliweb 22.10.2011b).

In the aftermath of MNLA’s founding declaration reports follow in quick succession: Referring to northern Mali’s immense geography (about 800.000 km²), some media voices try to appease the situation by saying that this movement (i.e. the MNLA), even if reinforced by a few hundred fighters, would not be able to lead northern Mali to independence due to its sheer size (see L’Indépendent/Maliweb 20.10.2011d); besides, the security situation is described as “satisfactory” since the Malian military is increasingly present and even provides humanitarian aid (see L’afia Révélateur/Maliweb 5.10.2011). Other accounts observe an immediate rebellion looming (L’Express/Maliweb 21.10.2011) or speak of a “proliferation of liberation movements” causing nothing but instability in northern Mali which is already considered as a “no man’s land” where, in the absence of a legitimate public order, Islamists as well as drug and human traffickers assert their interests according to the law of the strongest.³⁴⁶

Another recurring element in some media contributions is the danger of reerupting old conflicts between ethnic groups in the north, triggered by the combination of the newly founded MNLA and returning ex-combatants from Libya. In this connection, the question of how the way towards independence led by the MNLA would be organised is raised, especially without taking the largest section of the population in the north into account: the Songhay (see L’Indépendent/Maliweb 20.10.2011d). Moreover, even within the Tuareg community, there are competing tribes (e.g. Ifoghas, Imghad, Chamanaman) with different commitment to the peace process (i.e. based on the Algiers Accord) and varying understandings of how involved members of the northern communities should be in Malian state institutions, such as the military (see L’Express/Maliweb 21.10.2011c). And finally, the ex-soldiers in the Libyan military of northern Malian origin are not depicted as a homogenous group. According to respective sources, there are different subgroups going back to different units under partly competing commanders in the Libyan military – their mere presence in one and the same region alone poses an enormous conflict potential (see Le Combat/Maliweb 22.10.2011a).

In sum, media coverage increasingly portrays the situation as a simmering conflict situation full of tensions. *El Hadj Ag Gamou*, Imghad Tuareg leader and colonel of the Malian

³⁴⁴ Nota bene: The occupation of Gaddafi’s native town Sirte by Libyan rebel forces on October 20, 2011, is commonly mentioned as the fall of the regime as such.

³⁴⁵ Some newspapers refer to approximately 700 Malian civilians from Libya arriving in the region of Timbuktu in the beginning of October alone. However, according to the reports, there were not enough capacities to care for them (see AFP/Maliweb 12.10.2011; see also Le Combat/Maliweb 10.10.2011a).

³⁴⁶ In this context, two other newly founded “independence movements” in Azawad that have not appeared in the analysed media accounts or other sources are mentioned: the “Front Démocratique pour l’Autonomie Politique de l’Azawad” and the “Front Patriotique Arabe de l’Azawad” (see Maliweb 25.10.2011b).

army³⁴⁷, in reaction to rumours about the imminent foundation of the MNLA, puts it straight in a newspaper interview:

“We have to pay attention in order not to create a climate of insecurity or tensions between the different communities who want to develop themselves and live in peace. [...] We are children of this country and we have our families living here. We want to protect them and we want everybody to know that the colours of our flag are green, yellow and red [i.e. the official Malian flag colours]. No other flag will be raised over Mali. Those who want to add a different flag will have to walk over the dead bodies of Imghad leaders and soldiers.” (Le 22 Septembre/Maliweb 10.10.2011b; brackets added R.B.)

In the course of this, the background conditions are steadily repeated: With the fall of the Gaddafi regime heavily armed soldiers, partly having served in the Libyan military for decades, mainly Tuareg including their families, seek refuge in northern Mali. Three groups of actors court the favour, i.e. the manpower, arms and loyalty, of these ex-soldiers: First, an increasingly influential AQMI (see L’Indicateur du Renouveau/Maliweb 22.10.2011b); second, the newly founded MNLA which continues to attract further ex-Libyan army units, besides the Bahanga faction (see L’Express/Maliweb 21.10.2011c)³⁴⁸; finally, the Malian government which makes preparations (see above “helping hand policy”, making use of PSPSDN, too) in order to receive and integrate Libyan refugees, e.g. by arranging meetings of mayors and tribal leaders or by organising additional humanitarian aid, and to gain control of the situation (see Le Républicain/Maliweb 18.10.2011; Le Combat/Maliweb 26.10.2011). As a consequence, public expressions of loyalty to the government are reported, particularly on the part of Imghad Tuareg being integrated in Malian political and social institutions (see above; Mali Demain/Maliweb 28.10.2011c) and on the part of refugees from Libya who explicitly repudiate AQMI (see e.g. AFP/Maliweb 12.10.2011; Le Prétoire/Maliweb 13.10.2011a; see also GovMali 24.10.2011). At the same time, stories of Tuareg deserters from the Malian military get published (see L’Express/Maliweb 21.10.2011). Also, some contributions express concerns about the proper conduct of Malian presidential and parliamentary elections planned for 2012 and, for the first time within the analysed text corpus, about the beginning of oil extraction in northern Mali planned for 2012, too (see Le Pouce/Maliweb 31.10.2011e).

In INGO accounts, too, the events following in quick succession in October are taken up, i.a. by the short and crisp ICG analysis below:

“Concern over possible Tuareg rebellion stoked by reported return of over 400 fighters from Libya, coinciding with series of attacks in the North.” (ICG 1.11.2011)

Therefore, both the number of incoming ex-soldiers from Libya mentioned in different media reports and the increasing danger of a “Tuareg rebellion” get confirmed. At the same time, the

³⁴⁷ From 2007 to 2009, *El Hadj Ag Gamou* was one of the Malian commanders successfully fighting against the rebel group led by Bahanga (an Ifoghas) that had turned away from the peace process (see above section on February 2011).

³⁴⁸ On this, a commentary from Maliweb (25.10.2011b) points out that, at that point, a window of opportunity had opened up for autonomy movements which lack representation in population since these groups sniff a chance to get oneself a military wing to enforce the change they want.

MNLA remains unmentioned while the “series of attacks in the North” is associated with an imminent rebellion (instead of considering AQMI). Indirectly referring to the consequences of a rebellion, AI (11.10.2011) deals with the decision of the Malian government to postpone a draft law on the abolition of death penalty (which would be applied in cases of high treason, e.g. desertion). And finally, FES discusses the problems of arms influx to northern Mali and its disastrous effects on society:

“Carrying arms got deeply anchored in communities, not as an occasional or event-related implement but as an indispensable companion to secure oneself in realising commercial, agricultural, breeding and fishing activities.” (FES October 2011a: 38)

According to these sources, the general availability of illegal weapons in the region causes a climate of mistrust, insecurity, fear and, ultimately, fragile states. Against the background of this analysis, beyond the already existing quadripartite cooperation between Algeria, Mauritania, Niger and Mali and the bilateral cooperations with the US and France to fight illegal arms and drugs trafficking and terrorism, INGO voices firmly propose to involve ECOWAS to approach a regional solution (see FES October 2011a: 35-39).

November 2011

For November 1, the MNLA had called on all ethnic groups in the regions of Kidal, Gao and Timbuktu to come out for peaceful public protests in order to claim self-determination and, for the first time in a rather explicit wording, “the liberation of Azawad” or, in other words, Azawad’s independence. Seemingly unimpressed by fears and threats expressed in government statements and media reports to the address of the MNLA before, the movement declares that Azawad has to be liberated from occupants (i.e. Malian authorities) who had left the north to AQMI, drug dealers and bandits. According to the analysed sources, the demonstrations on November 1 indeed had a relatively huge attendance of several hundred mainly young people in different places. Hence, they resulted in arbitrary arrests for some protesters, e.g. in the region of Kidal (see MNLA 3.11.2011f). This reaction, marked as a violation of freedom of expression and other democratic rights, prompts MNLA leaders to send an appeal to the international community asking to finally consider “the question of Azawad”. Moreover, in an “open letter to the Malian people”, the MNLA once again justifies its commitment to the self-determination of Azawad with cultural³⁴⁹ and historical reasons: As far back as the 19th century, the people of Azawad, had revolted against the French colonial power to defend its right to exist.³⁵⁰ Given the fact that Azawad, after 50 years of independence from France, has to be considered as an unfree and dependent entity, fighting for self-determination is still necessary, the more so as the UN Charter and respective AU documents clearly confirm these rights (see MNLA 14.11.2011). Against this background, MNLA voices, at that point, believe the time had come “reanimate

³⁴⁹ At various points in the text corpus, Azawad gets represented as a coherent cultural entity. Here, once again, Azawad is characterised as a “socio-cultural, historic and economic continuum”, basically including the Malian desert and, beyond that, ranging from the *Aïr Mountains* in Niger to Tanezrouft in Algeria (see MNLA 6.11.2011).

³⁵⁰ Nota bene: In the “Bataille de l’Épée” near Timbuktu in 1893, the French colonial army had been temporarily defeated by Azawad fighters (see also chapter 6.3 on the temporal dimension).

relations between the two people [i.e. Azawad and Mali] with warm-heartedness” (see MNLA 3.11.2011g; brackets added R.B.).

MNLA statements, too, deal with the consequences of the Libyan civil war. Sources in this section suggest that Tuareg and others returning from Libya to northern Mali should first and foremost be regarded as victims:

“In Libya, the Tamasheq [i.e. Tuareg] people has become a scapegoat. It is blamed by all belligerents. The National Transitional Council views it as a supporter of the former Gadaffi regime. The pro-Gadaffi faction accuses it of supporting the popular revolution in the country.” (MNLA 14.11.2011; brackets added R.B.)

On this, the MNLA documents add that the Tuareg, in general, had never been mercenaries but official members of the Libyan military. The mercenaries story, in turn, is rejected as a deliberate campaign of disinformation aimed at discrediting the Tuareg and their cause (see MNLA 14.11.2011). Similarly, since there had been massive false information on the issue in the national and global public, the MNLA puts the record straight on behalf of ex-soldiers returning from Libya saying that they “have absolutely no intention to play along the game of AQMI” (see MNLA 28.11.2011).

MNLA announcements in November, despite all strong and clear words concerning self-determination, offer a bit of a non-confrontational or even conciliatory tone. Nevertheless, government statements do not show a direct reaction, neither to the demonstrations on November 1 nor to the open letter to all Malians. Instead, the president in person answers back to media reports addressing the fear of a postponement of presidential and parliamentary elections in 2012 due to deteriorating security situation (see above October 2011):

“Get this straight to everybody’s mind: we need to continue preparing the 2012 elections actively in order to have a successful change within the framework of transparent and impartial presidential and parliamentary elections and in accordance with the constitutional time frame. Whatever the situation may be, a new president of the Republic of Mali will definitely be elected.” (GovMali 24.11.2011)

To the address of the media, ATT gives an additional piece of advice in return: Media work may be guided by “honesty, impartiality, moderateness, prudence, a sense of responsibility in collecting, processing and distribution of information” (GovMali 24.11.2011). According to other statements, the government underlines its firm intention to fight terrorism and improve the situation in northern Mali by way of strengthening cooperation with the four neighbouring countries and boosting PSPSDN, i.e. improving concrete living conditions in terms of security (especially presence of military and police) and economic development (particularly infrastructure and microfinance) for people on a local level (see GovMali 21.11.2011; 30.11.2011b).

However, in contrast, a few days later, the government reports that there had been a “terrorist attack” near Timbuktu on November 25 ending up with five European tourists kidnapped and one directly shot dead (see GovMali 26.11.2011). From the president’s perspective, this has to be seen as an “attack on national security and stability”. In an urgent appeal, without mentioning MNLA or AQMI at all, ATT thus makes clear:

“We need to decisively engage to stay united in this challenge and to silence our spiteful and useless political quarrels. More than ever, we have to close our ranks on the basis of our fundamental objectives namely defending territorial integrity, national unity, social cohesion, and protection of property and persons. No Malian, whatever the origine, region or conviction may be, will ever accept to abandon these principles.” (GovMali 27.11.2011)

In contrast to AT’T’s gentle breeze of threat towards those calling Mali’s unity into question (see quote above, last sentence) most of the media reports in this section, after the MNLA-initiated protests on November 1, describe Mali as standing on the brink of a new armed conflict in the north, as the following evidence in various reports suggests:

Indication	Source
a Libyan military unit, the “Bani Walid Division” (including heavy armament) joins the MNLA	El Watan/Maliweb 1.11.2011a
another movement, founded at about the same time as MNLA, the “Front Patriotique Arabe de l’Azawad” joins the MNLA	El Watan/Maliweb 1.11.2011a; see also Maliweb 25.10.2011b
in the aftermath of the demonstrations (Nov 1) further units of the Malian army are deployed to the north	El Watan/Maliweb 1.11.2011a
intimidated and threatened parts of the population in the north flee to the south; rising nationalism both in Mali and Azawad	Le Combat/Maliweb 4.11.2011a
virtually not one day without attacks on strategic aims of Malian infrastructure, especially military bases, and lootings	Le Combat/Maliweb 4.11.2011a; see also Le Combat/Maliweb 3.11.2011b
attack on the brigade in Aguel Hoc (Kidal region) with one death, Nov 1)	Le Prétoire/Maliweb 14.11.2011a
attack on the Malian army engineer camp in Aneffiss (Gao region), Nov 26	Le Malien/Maliweb 30.11.2011c
kidnapping of three European employees of a humanitarian organisation near the Algerian-Malian border	L’Aube/Maliweb 8.11.2011
kidnapping of two French geologists in Hombori (Mopti region, part of southern Mali), Nov 24	L’Indépendent/ Maliweb 25.11.2011a
kidnapping of five European tourists near Timbuktu, one shot dead during the confrontation, Nov 5	AFP/Maliweb 27.11.2011b
thousands of ex-soldiers, including special forces, of the Libyan military already having entered (northern) Mali and perturbing the sensitive balance of security	Mali Demain/ Maliweb 9.11.2011a; Lafia Révélateur/Maliweb 16.11.2011a

separatists no longer exclude an armed confrontation	Le Prétoire/Maliweb 10.11.2011
further Libyan army units joining the former Bahanga-faction and thus the MNLA	Le Combat/Maliweb 14.11.2011b
France deploys further troops, including attack helicopter units, to northern Mali to fight terror	TF1 News/ Maliweb 25.11.2011a
Cooperation between riparian states to fight terrorism in view of increasing number of kidnappings perceived as failed	AFP/Maliweb 27.11.2011b
incidences altogether (kidnappings, combat-related deaths etc.) can already be seen as state of war	Le Républicain/ Maliweb 28.11.2011b
ex-rebels, e.g. <i>Iyad Ag Ghaly</i> , declaredly turn away from the peace process	Le 22 Septembre/ Maliweb 28.11.2011f
further high level soldiers desert from the Malian military, e.g. colonel <i>M'Bab Ag Moussa</i> ; not clear if deserters join MNLA or Islamist groups	L'Essor/ Maliweb 29.11.2011f

In sum, media accounts picture a highly precarious situation in which, “in the manner of a bad remake of 2007, [...] the hatchet gets dugged up again” (Le Combat/Maliweb 4.11.2011a) and northern Mali gets rapidly “afghanised” (El Watan/Maliweb 1.11.2011a). On the one hand, this situation is presented as a consequence of state absence or even “a veritable state failure in the north” (Le Républicain/Maliweb 3.11.2011). For example, according to the mayor of Bèr (Timbuktu region), PSPSDN resources reaching municipalities are “ridiculously little” in view of the challenges ahead (see Le Prétoire/Maliweb 17.11.2011d). As Le 22 Septembre (Maliweb 21.11.2011) notes, the settlement of Libyan ex-soldiers in different places in northern Mali would be “a serious mistake in terms of security policy” since the Malian state does de facto not exist outside the big towns in the north (see Le Potentiel/Maliweb 22.11.2011a; L'Inter de Bamako/Maliweb 22.11.2011b).

On the other hand, media comments qualify oil discoveries in the north (and the planned beginning of extractions in 2012) as an additional external factor fuelling not only domestic conflict about the exploitation of natural resources but also provoking Western desires and interests being at work in the region. It is assumed that Western states pursue a strategy of destabilisation in Libya and Mali in order to present themselves as a stabilising force later on and to ensure access to oil, gas and rare earths (see Le Combat/Maliweb 3.11.2011b; 4.11.2011a). From this perspective, kidnappings, transnational drug trafficking, the civil war in Libya, the rise of AQMI and, not least, the onset of a new (Tuareg) rebellion are developments tolerated, enabled or even promoted by Western, especially European countries³⁵¹ (see Le Potentiel/Maliweb 29.11.2011e).

³⁵¹ As Nouvelle Libération (Maliweb 28.11.2011d) reports, the EU confirms its financial support for Malian development programmes, especially those adopting measures to improve the security situation and to promote civil society engagement in the north, in other words, PSPSDN measures.

Alike, INGO reports reflect observations of a deteriorating security situation. For ICG, continuing incidences of kidnapping give enough proof to set the highest warning level red for Mali (see ICG 1.12.2011). Concerning the conflict situation in Libya and its severe consequences for the Malian situation, HRW puts into play that *Saif Al Islam Gaddafi* had maybe entered Mali accompanied by Libyan ex-soldiers. Against this background, the Malian government is called upon by the UN to do everything to extradite Gaddafi's son, accused of war crimes, to the International Criminal Court (see HRW 1.11.2011).

December 2011

Again without mentioning the MNLA, government announcements pick up both the alignment of several units of ex-soldiers from Libya with rebel groups and the increasing number of desertions from the Malian military. From the authorities' perspective, its "policy of the helping hand", too, proves to be successful, as more and more expressions of loyalty by Tuareg commanders and soldiers (Imghad *and* Ifoghas³⁵²) from within the ranks of the former Libyan military towards the government would show (see GovMali 3.12.2011). One of these occasions is held in the presence of UN and AU representatives who had been sent to Libya and Mali as special envoys and negotiators (see GovMali 11.12.2011a; 30.12.2011b) and fulsomely presented in the following announcement:

"The spokesman of the former Libyan army's soldiers descendant from the Ifoghas community confirmed the engagement of his brothers in arms for peace, security, and development of Northern Mali. The president welcomed the courageous initiative of the representatives of the Ifoghas community to support the process of peace and stability." (GovMali 22.12.2011)

Just as if in reaction to media reports in November 2011 focusing attention on the poor security situation and criticism of the government for it, government statements in December give priority to the presentation of successful actions: In this context, the security cabinet adopts measures to intensify police and military measures, for example to protect transportation axes and tourist hotspots. As a consequence, according to the government, the kidnappers of the two French geologists on (see above on November 24) could have been arrested on December 8 (see GovMali 12.12.2011). In addition, the president's messages by the end of the year foreground positive results achieved, for example expressed by European and international development partners characterising Mali as a "model democracy"³⁵³ or concerning the successful implementation of development projects (transportation infrastructure, telecommunications, employment programme, both within and beyond the context of PSPSDN) or, finally, concerning the proactive measures to counter an increasingly critical food supply due to a situation of prolonged draught in many parts of the country (see GovMali 30.12.2011b; 31.12.2011).

According to its announcements in December, MNLA's backing in Azawad continuously grows. It's not just that the MNLA refers to increasing support among the population and

³⁵² In this context, it bears mentioning that expressions of loyalty by Ifoghas members (see also GovMali 22.12.2011) could not have been expected to a greater extent since the Ifoghas, at that point, are still regarded as supporters of the Bahanga faction sabotaging the peace process.

³⁵³ These are the words of the German parliamentary president, *Norbert Lammert*, on the occasion of a state visit to Mali (see GovMali 8.12.2011).

further deserters from the Malian army. Besides, a former secretary of the Malian government and Knight of the Malian Legion of Honour, *Hama Ag Mahmoud*, publicly declares his adherence to the MNLA:

“Hama Ag Mahmoud declares that he offers all his experience to the MNLA in the interest of the people of Azawad, to achieve self-determination and the restoration of its disregarded rights.” (MNLA 20.12.2011b)

Furthermore, according to Mahmoud cited in MNLA documents, it is crucial to put the cards on the table: In his view, the MNLA and the Malian state should organise self-determination of Azawad in order “to prevent a civil war”. In this context, further statements emphasise that the MNLA has both a basic political structure of local civil cells already working and a full grown military structure including a high command. Now, all these forces are called upon to organise a “strong mobilisation of all Azawadians to take part in the liberation of Azawad” (MNLA 9.12.2011).

In other MNLA publications in December, particular reasons are given as to why the population of Azawad should support self-determination and thus the MNLA at this specific time: First, the MNLA has evidence that the Malian government tolerates the resurgence of ethnic self-defense militias, as, for example, the “Ganda Koy”³⁵⁴, which, together with special forces of the Malian army (e.g. the “Kokadie legion”), would already plan and implement ethnic expulsion of Tuareg in the north (see MNLA 28.12.2011). However, compared to the time of the rebellion in the 1990s, when Tuareg and Arabs had become victims of massacres still going unpunished, the situation is presented to be completely different: In 2011, the Tuareg would dispose of the means to fight back in a comprehensive way, both in terms of military capabilities³⁵⁵ and political and legal knowledge concerning international (humanitarian) law (see MNLA 22.12.2011). Second, as the last 20 years of world history would show, many people successfully achieved independence, with East Timor being the latest example. Also, against the background of the Arab Spring³⁵⁶, the international situation could be seen as favourable for those revolutions aiming at freedom and democracy (see MNLA 23.12.2011). Finally, according to the statements, support for the “Azawad project” had never been broader than at this point in time due to the obvious fact that mismanagement and corruption had finally destroyed Malian state institutions. Now, a campaign of disinformation and intimidation is to be expected, for the following purpose:

³⁵⁴ Nota bene: “Ganda Koy” means “masters of the land” in Songhay. It refers to a Songhay self-defense militia founded in the beginning of the 1990s in reaction to a worsening security situation within the framework of the Tuareg rebellion at that time. According to Thurston and Lebovich (2013: 23-24), Ganda Koy “reflected a strong racial animus toward Tuareg and the presence of ‘white’ populations along the Niger Bend. The Ganda Koy, operating with the complicity or possibly assistance of the Malian army, conducted mass killings of Tuareg and Arab civilians.” As part of the peace process in the 1990s, Ganda Koy was dissolved in 1996 but reorganised itself formally in July 2012.

³⁵⁵ At this point, MNLA documents mention concrete weapon systems at the movement’s disposal, e.g. short-range, surface-to-surface and surface-to-air missiles. In addition to earlier statements on weapons and equipment substantially enhanced by incoming ex-soldiers from Libya, MNLA voices also refer to captured weapons from Malian military bases (see MNLA 23.12.2011).

³⁵⁶ On this, there is a direct reference to an ATT statement in early December: “The Arab Spring could turn into very rough winter in our country.” (GovMali 2.12.2011a)

“Since this apocalyptic policy had already been tested from 1991 to 1996, the Malian regime and its reactionary strategists firmly believe that they can reconcile the Malian people with its government by brandishing a flag of racial and ethnical war and thus deferring the date of the fateful next elections for a long time.” (MNLA 28.12.2011)

The analysed media accounts in December can be divided in two main groups: On the one hand, there are contributions hanging on to a rather neutral and analytic reporting standard. On the other hand, there are those accounts directly reacting to MNLA announcements or actions, adopting political positions, offering clear interpretations in an unclear state of facts, and issuing recommendations of action.

The first group includes reports about local initiatives, for example in Gao, who try to ease rising tensions between ethnic communities, especially between dark-skinned sedentary groups (e.g. Songhay, Peuls) and light-skinned nomads (e.g. Tuareg, Arabs) (see *Le 22 Septembre/Maliweb* 1.12.2011a). Other accounts question MNLA's asserted power by elaborating on its internal heterogeneity and thus doubting the “hypothesis of a new rebellion” (see *L'Indicateur du Renouveau/Maliweb* 7.12.2011b). Moreover, in contrast to many presentations, the group of ex-soldiers from Libya would be much less numerous and dangerous than commonly thought (see *Le Prétoire/Maliweb* 22.12.2011a). Still other contributions deal with the precarious security situation and retrospectively explain it by referring to the Algiers Accord of 2006 which had not been fully implemented, for example concerning the installation of composite security forces in northern Mali which had never been realised.³⁵⁷ And finally there are media pieces about how civil society expresses itself with differentiated views on the situation in northern Mali: One example is a report about solidarity protests of young Malians (including members of ethnic groups living in the north) in Bamako on December 8 in order to support the government (see *Mali Demain/Maliweb* 15.12.2011b). Another example is the coverage of the congress of the “Party for National Rebirth” in Bamako on December 10-11 on “the crises in the Sahelian zone”.³⁵⁸ According to *Le Malien* (*Maliweb* 17.12.2011), the participants of the congress (i. a. representatives of different civil society organisations and other political parties) conclude by speaking up for a “democratic and inclusive governance” and thus recommend to locally involve all ethnic groups in politics and administration in order to create collective security and to solve the crisis in the north.

In the second group, too, reports refer to specific events, particularly attacks against Malian military and civil facilities in order to spread big messages and recommendations of action: So, reporting about an attack on police stations in Bourem and Tarkint on November 28 serves as a prelude to bring out the comment that ex-soldiers from the Libyan military are responsible for the situation in the north – which is unbearable for true Malian patriots (see *Zénith Balé/Maliweb* 2.12.2011d). In the same way, an unconfirmed announcement about a

³⁵⁷ This point is attributed to *Ibrahim Boubakar Keita* (“IBK”) who declared to run for president in 2012 (additional information beyond the text corpus: IBK finally became president in 2013) and increasingly criticises ATT openly. As *Le Zénith Balé* (*Maliweb* 10.12.2011b) states, IBK makes a plea for rediscovering the basic values of the Malian society, i.e. tolerance and peace, but also for a reorganisation of the military in the light of drug trafficking and terrorism.

³⁵⁸ Nota bene: The “Parti pour la Renaissance Nationale” (PARENA) is a Malian political party created in 1995 by activists promoting democracy. During the mandate of ATT, the PARENA ranks among the smaller Malian political opposition parties. In the 2007 presidential elections, its candidate only combined three percent of votes.

Malian military convoy, i.e. a massive redeployment of troops, beginning to move towards the three northern regions gets released with a comment saying that “now all ingredients are there to set the whole region on fire”. This, in turn, gets linked to the information that the Malian military command increasingly disapproves the president’s strategy (see *Nouvelle Libération/Maliweb* 6.12.2011b). Likewise, the attack on a PSPSDN construction site for a military base in Abeïbara on December 3 whereby workers had been threatened with death by alleged Tuareg rebels in case they would continue their work is followed by an extensive assessment: There is a majority of people in Mali who do not agree with the president’s lax course in northern Mali and, in general, with far-reaching concessions that have been made to the Tuareg since the beginning of the 2006 peace process. According to the perspective of these sources, the Tuareg represent a minority among the ethnic groups in the north and, then again, all ethnic groups in the north taken together represent a minority in Mali as a whole. In sum, these considerations would lead to the inescapable insight that a whole country is taken as a hostage by a very small group of people (see *Lafia Révélateur/Maliweb* 7.12.2011c; 7.12.2011d).³⁵⁹ Finally, against the background of this atmosphere, there is a number of reports using explicit war rhetorics which thus correspond to similar rhetorics in government and MNLA communication (see above e.g. *GovMali* 27.11.2011; *MNLA* 23.12.2011):

“From now on, given the accumulation of attacks and kidnappings, Northern Mali is almost a war zone.” (*Le Zénith Balé/Maliweb* 2.12.2011d)

“The highest [Malian] authorities seem to adapt the motto saying: ‘If you want peace prepare for war’. (*Nouvelle Libération/Maliweb* 6.12.2011b)

“[ATT], as never before, stands with the back to the wall. In his situation, only one solution seems to open up: war, nothing but war!” (*Waati/Maliweb* 8.12.2011b)

“War to impose peace – Instead of making oneself understood among group-uscles that not give a damn about the future of Mali, ATT has to impose peace. This works out by a cleansing of the Northern part of the country.” (*Waati/Maliweb* 8.12.2011b)

This rhetoric is accompanied by reports blaming networks of drugs trafficking and Islamist groups as originators of attacks and kidnapping and thereby again referring to links between Polisario³⁶⁰ and AQMI (see *AFP/Maliweb* 15.12.2011a; *Le Malien/Maliweb* 20.12.2011). In this vein, the accusation of pursuing an overly lax strategy in northern Mali gets reinforced. All the more, as Algeria which is presented as having an ambivalent relation to AQMI deploys anti-terrorist units on Malian territory³⁶¹ while AQMI de facto seems to become stronger day by day (see *Le Prétoire/Maliweb* 22.12.2011a), resulting in headlines like the following:

“In Northern Mali, it’s AQMI who governs.” (*Le Républicain/Maliweb* 13.12.2011a)

³⁵⁹ Media coverage on the “Tuareg attack” on the street between Kolokani and Tioribougou (southern Mali) on December 11, too, fits this frame (see *Le Républicain/Maliweb* 15.12.2011c).

³⁶⁰ For background information concerning Polisario see above Phase I/December 2010.

³⁶¹ An ICG report (2.01.2012), too, mentions the presence of Algerian anti-terrorist units in Mali as a important factor fuelling a further escalation of the situation in northern Mali.

As an entirely new element in the text corpus, media reports in December deal with two newly founded Islamist groups: “The Movement for Unity and Jihad in West Africa” (MUJAO), presented as breakaway faction of AQMI already active in kidnappings in Niger and Mali (see AFP/Maliweb 12.12.2011a) and “Ansar ad-Dine” (Arabic for “Defenders of Faith”), a jihadist movement, too, that is presented as a locally founded Islamist movement, suprisingly initiated, according to media accounts, by *Iyad Ag Ghaly*, a Tuareg (Ifoghas) from Kidal who had already been active in the 1990s rebellion (see Le Prétoire/Maliweb 27.12.2011; see also above, section on November 2011, and below, chapter 6.3/Media and INGOs).

January 2012

The analysis of the last government documents within the investigation period paint the picture of a government that attends its ordinary business and acts in an unperturbed and solution-oriented manner. This is backed up by the example of ATT’s state visit to India which involved the conclusion of a new economic agreement particularly including investments in the agricultural sector (see GovMali 9.01.2012). Another example is the the government’s presentation of an emergency response plan for food supply and animal feed in case of an eventual shortage³⁶², a scenario that is, at that point, understood as a general security crisis, too (see GovMali 6.01.2012).

Still without any direct reference to the MNLA, the government presents itself as resolutely acting in view of the situation in northern Mali. In this sense, ATT, in his New Year’s address, explains that the security situation in the north, after the incident in Timbuktu on November 25 (four European tourists kidnapped, one killed by the kidnappers), is under control. “An immediate answer” would be given to this challenge by cooperating even more closely with riparian countries in the Sahelian zone and by accelerating PSPSDN. With the measures adopted, according to ATT, Mali can pass the next important test for the resilience of its democracy, namely the elections in 2012 (see GovMali 6.01.2012). And besides, notwithstanding the general “security psychosis” (GovMali 5.01.2012), tourists would begin to return to Timbuktu.³⁶³

On January 17, the government’s assesment of the situation changes abruptly. Against the background of the incidents in Ménaka, the ministry of defence writes:

“[...] Around 6 a.m., assailants involving soldiers returned from Libya joined by other units that became known as National Movement for the Liberation of Azawad attacked the town of Ménaka in the region of Gao. The counterstrike of army and security forces supported by a squadron of combat helicopters and army aviators registers the following results: On the side of the assailants, 6

³⁶² As L’Indicateur du Renouveau (Maliweb 14.12.2011b) notes, already in December, Oxfam had published a report that was picked up in many media accounts. Therein, Oxfam sounds the alarm since the Malian production of food had decreased by 25 percent (see also GovMali 31.12.2011 and, on the occasion of the national annual farmers convention, GovMali 9.05.2011a).

³⁶³ Later on, even after the attacks on Ménaka, the government points out that the region of Timbuktu, despite security concerns, was able to host the “Festival au Désert” on January 12-14, 2012 (see GovMali 19.01.2012a). On this, some media accounts highlight that even *Bono*, the international rockstar, participated in the festival (see AFP/ Maliweb 15.01.2012a). A short video of Bono’s performance at the festival can be found here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=N1n_3OsJZIU, accessed March 23, 2020.

vehicles destroyed, numerous deaths and injured persons, assailants arrested. On the side of the military one death is deplored.” (GovMali 17.01.2012)

In fact, this the first official announcement in which Malian authorities explicitly refer to the MNLA. In the days that followed, the responsibility for the attacks is attributed to the MNLA, the “secessionist movement” founded in November 2011. Moreover, government sources speculate about an eventual involvement of Islamist groups. According to further statements, however, the situation had been brought under control by the Malian military reinforced by army units from other regions.³⁶⁴ As the government assures, in that very moment, the whole region gets combed through thoroughly in order to guarantee security again (see GovMali 19.01.2012a).

MNLA statements in January 2012 issued until the attacks on Ménaka on January 17 basically deal with giving arguments to justify the main goal of the newly founded MNLA – liberating Azawad from Malian rule – to the address of the Malian society and the international community. To this end, the MNLA published *Moussa Ag Assarid*’s detailed declaration of accession³⁶⁵ from which, in place of many other points brought forward, the most referred to are presented here (see MNLA 3.01.2012b; numeration taken over from the original declaration):

1. the non-consideration of nomad children in Malian education programmes since 1960
2. the omnipresent corruption in Mali
3. a general militarisation of Mali’s administration
4. the poor management of Mali’s school system
5. the violation of treaties signed by Mali, such as the “Pacte National” (1992)
6. a policy of splitting ethnic communities in order to pretend problem solving in Northern Mali
7. an outrageous laxity of the Malian state concerning the fight against terrorism
8. a constitutional referendum at taxpayers expense imposed by the head of state

For Assarid, the quintessence of his engagement for the MNLA is that there is a deep desire for independence across society in northern Mali which feeds on the perception that the peace process, all the fine speeches about cultural diversity, and development efforts had not brought a true improvement of living conditions in the north. In this context, the Tuareg’s everyday life (e.g. concerning water supply, health care system, education, life expectancy) remains at a “medieval level” and PSPSDN should be seen as “a farce” (MNLA 3.01.2012a; 10.01.2012). In addition, the frequently invoked democratic culture of dialogue and exchange and the idea of equality before the law is not existent. Instead, an attitude of order and obedience, intimidation and contempt towards the population in the north prevails within the ranks of the central government (see MNLA 1.01.2012; 12.01.2012). Furthermore, according to Assarid’s declaration, the Malian government is a clandestine beneficiary of social imbalance and insecurity in Azawad

³⁶⁴ This conflicts with MNLA statements and media reports claiming that the area around Ménaka is controlled by the MNLA (see e.g. MNLA 17.01.2012; L’Indicateur du Renouveau/ Maliweb 18.01.2012c).

³⁶⁵ Nota bene: *Moussa Ag Assarid*, born 1975 in a Tuareg camp between Timbuktu and Gao, is a writer, a politician, a journalist and a comedian holding both a Malian and a French citizenship. From 2011 to 2016, he served as MNLA’s representative in Europe, based in Paris. Assarid’s best-known book is entitled “Y a pas d’embouteillage dans le désert!”, or in English: There are no Traffic Jams in the Desert!

since it is involved in cross-border crime and it tolerates terrorists and, as a consequence, the expulsion of Tuareg from the northern regions (see MNLA 9.01.2012).

According to the analysed documents, the road ahead for the MNLA at that moment is quite clear. Inspired by the Arab Spring, at this point, the timing is seen as being proper “to express Azawad’s forces and to take control of its own destiny” (MNLA 8.01.2012a). In other words, all ethnic groups in the north, especially the younger generation are called upon to unite and to risk “the noble cause of revolution”, not only in its armed dimension but also, and even more important, as a political and social “revolution of mentalities” (MNLA 10.01.2012) to overcome a system that had been built on lies, the Malian state:

“It’s up to us, brothers and sisters of Northern Mali, Songhay, Arabs, Peuls, Kel Tamasheq, to liberate our Azawadian people from the burden of ignorance and the central power of Bamako. [...] To be clear to all Northerners regardless of the ethnic group: there is no half peace and no half war. Some cannot live in peace while others are at war. Don’t forget that our history and destiny are linked by blood, by our land and by our common relations to the rest of the world.” (MNLA 3.01.2012b)

Furthermore, against the background of massive Malian troop movements to the north, MNLA statements consider all efforts to solve the situation through dialogue as eventually failed. As MNLA spokesman *Hama Ag Sid-Ahmed* confirms, armed conflict is imminent:

“Dialogue broke off. Malian authorities are just deploying tanks and thousands of soldiers to the North. We are in a recrudescence of an armed conflict between Bamako and the Tuareg.” (MNLA 9.01.2012)

In this context, further MNLA statements again come up with doubts as to the “car accident story” of Bahanga’s death on August 26 (see e.g. AFP/Maliweb 27.08.2011b). Accordingly, Bahanga was allegedly killed by a Malian special forces from an ambush – a fact which had been perceived as an extreme furtiveness and provocation way beyond the Tuareg community alone. In sum, the MNLA makes clear that the movement is ready to constitute Azawad as a state of its own with a functioning government and including all spheres of political, economic and social life. To this end, the MNLA, at this point in time, already disposes of a political and military organisation which make it possible to provide law and order for the population of Azawad, especially protection against violence. In other words, after its declaration of war against AQMI in October (see above section on October 2011; MNLA 30.10.2011), the MNLA confirms to be able to confront the Malian military as well as to create a bulwark against AQMI terrorism which had already absorbed Libyan arms and fighters.³⁶⁶

MNLA releases in the days prior to the attack on Ménaka on January 17 leave no doubt about MNLA’s perception of the Malian government’s actions in the beginning of January. They are understood as “Mali’s declaration of war against the people of Azawad” (MNLA 12.01.2012) and thus provoke countermeasures:

“President Amadou Toumani Touré straightforwardly reveals his preference for a violent confrontation to the detriment of political dialogue. [...] solely the president and the local militia under his control bear the heavy responsibility of

³⁶⁶ By its own account, the MNLA has approximately 1.000 soldiers and 40 well-trained officers under its command (see MNLA 9.01.2012).

triggering a violent upheaval in Azawad. [...] Now, the people of Azawad will claim the right to self defence in reaction to this military invasion.” (MNLA 12.01.2012; see also Introduction)

Moreover, ATT and his administration are not only accused of having consequently rejected any offer of dialogue but also having conjured up a violence-prone and chaotic atmosphere in order to present itself as the only legitimate ordering power later on: by medial and diplomatic manoeuvres insinuating a link between MNLA, AQMI and drug traffickers; by inciting and arming parts of civil society (e.g. the Ganda Koy citizens’ militia); by permanent patrolling of combat aircrafts and deliberate attacks on civilians by the military and other security forces, e.g. raids, confiscations, personal humiliations (see MNLA 14.01.2012). Against this background, the MNLA states to be determined to defend itself and to recapture Azawad:

“After severe hostilities including the use of heavy weapons, since a few hours, the town of Ménaka is under control of the movement’s military command.” (MNLA 17.01.2012)

As pointed out in the analysed sources, the MNLA presents itself convinced about having conducted a prudent military action in Ménaka without any civilian victims. There is a commitment to continue this kind of actions as long as Mali and the international community recognise Azawad (see MNLA 17.01.2012). And finally:

“These actions have only one objective: regaining peace and justice for the Azawad community and stability for our region.” (MNLA 17.01.2012)

By the end of the investigation period, the analysis of media coverage suggests that there is far less clarity and definiteness in assessing the situation than in the weeks and months before. First, there is a number of reports dealing with AQMI: Following L’Indicateur du Renouveau (Maliweb 4.01.2012), for example, AQMI attacks on military bases should be seen as a definitive proof that fighting terrorism had been largely unsuccessful in Mali. Hence, AQMI had finally managed to make the Sahelian zone a safe haven for terrorists. Moreover, according to this source, even the massive armament of Western militaries also operating on site is not able to change the situation significantly, as continuing kidnapping shows. With regard to the Malian troop movements to the north³⁶⁷, media accounts even cite AQMI threats against the Malian government and Western countries (whose nationals are still kidnapped by AQMI):

“We issue a warning to France, UK, the Netherlands and Sweden: If you authorise this operation [Malian troop deployment to the north], this means the death of your nationals for whom you have the responsibility.” (AFP/Maliweb 13.01.2012)

As it is depicted in government and MNLA statements, too, media reports confirm that small and highly mobile AQMI units are able to move freely while carrying a huge amount of Libyan arms along to Mali (e.g. surface to air missiles) which could be applied straightforwardly (see Libération/ Maliweb 7.10.2012). Furthermore, other accounts sketch the danger of AQMI

³⁶⁷ Just on January 15, media reports tell about “500 soldiers, 200 military vehicles and 4 combat aircrafts” that are to be deployed to the north (see Ankamali/ Maliweb 15.01.2012b; see also MNLA statements referring to “thousands of soldiers and tanks”; MNLA 9.01.2012).

getting increasingly stronger by incorporating more and more ex-soldiers from the Libyan army³⁶⁸ and then becoming a part of a resurgent Tuareg rebellion in the north (see *Nouvelle Libération*/ Maliweb 11.01.2012) which aims at creating an Islamic state (see *Le 22 Septembre*/ Maliweb 12.01.2012b).

Other media accounts, however, do still *not* establish a link between AQMI and an MNLA-led rebellion. In contrast, by bringing up an interview with the newly joined MNLA spokesman and well-known France-based writer Assarid (see above), for example, it is stated that the MNLA, at its core, constitutes a political movement, in which the idea of an eventual cooperation with terrorists is completely rejected as a deliberate disinformation (see *Ouest-France*/ Maliweb 10.01.2012; see also above MNLA declaration of war against AQMI). In the same vein, there are media reports pointing to the “Festival au désert”, which took place with high security measures and, unfortunately, very few international guests. Yet, the festival is presented as a cultural festival strongly identified with the northern populations and as a significant symbolic event “to say no to terrorism”, as a young Tuareg participant framed his motivation (see *AFP*/ Maliweb 15.01.2012a).

And finally, besides those media contributions applauding the government for demonstrating military strength (especially via troop deployment to the north; see *Ankamali*/Maliweb 15.01.2012b), there is a number of reports critical of the government, too: For example those pointing to the observation that development efforts via PSPSDN indeed had been funded by enormous sums but, in turn, had not brought the expected progress due to misappropriation of funds by local persons in charge.³⁶⁹ Following the analysed media sources, all of this leads to the current situation of the MNLA whose claim of self-determination, at this point, is more present and supported than ever before (see *Le Prétoire*/Maliweb 12.01.2012a). Based on this assessment of its own strength, on January 17, the MNLA risks the attack on the Malian state.

The day after the attacks on Ménaka, there are contradictory media announcements about what happened (and still happens) on the ground. According to some reports, the Malian military has gained control in and around Ménaka. Other reports tell the same about the MNLA. Spokesman Assarid in Paris, for example, is cited as officially claiming the successful attack for the MNLA while, at the same time, government voices are cited as referring to a massive Malian defence that led to a “shameful defeat of the insurgents” who are anyway not supported by a majority of the population in the north (see *L’Indicateur du Renouveau*/ Maliweb 18.01.2012c). So, in the light of the first MNLA attack on January 17, future expectations to the address of the lax Malian government become increasingly clear:

³⁶⁸ On the one hand, there are reports in this last phase dealing with returnees from Libya (e.g. a unit led by colonel *Enazague Ag Emakadey*, former part of the Libyan military’s high command, numbering at least about 300 soldiers) who declare their loyalty to the Malian state, even in a public forum (see e.g. *Mali Demain*/ Maliweb 3.01.2012a). On the other hand, representatives of the returnees from Libya, estimated at a number of 13.965 children, women and men at that time, express their dissatisfaction about the “catastrophic conditions of their returning and reception in Mali” (*Le Républicain*/ Maliweb 3.01.2012b) which even reinforces the latent suspicion against returnees who are by a large majority members of the Tuareg (see e.g. *Nouvelle Libération*/ Maliweb 11.01.2012).

³⁶⁹ In this context, it is reiterated that various actors who offer “good offices” (e.g. intermediaries, mediators, negotiators) may have no interest in sustainable security in the north but rather in continuing or even fuelling conflicts in order to be able to offer their services further on and to protect their lucrative business (see *Le Prétoire*/Maliweb 12.01.2012a).

“We are supporters of a heavy-handed method, of a state’s legitimate use of violence in order to restore its authority and preserve the national unity. [...] The time of hollow words is over. ATT has to proceed to concrete acts or to resign. To be continued.” (Le 22 Septembre/ Maliweb 18.01.2012d)

With this media commentary including a clear expectation of stronger measures to be taken towards those disputing national unity, the portrayal of the key themes of the conflict discourse ends. The detailed illustration of these themes, set within conflict communication, is based on the first part of codings of the text corpus. Building on this, the following section on the temporal dimension of conflict communication adds another facet.

6.3 The Temporality of an Unfinished Independence

“The temporal dimension is constituted by the fact that the difference between before and after, which can be experienced in all events, [...] is extended into the past and the future.” (Luhmann 1995: 77-78)

Communication about the Malian crisis, too, includes ever specific characterisations of the present.³⁷⁰ Thereby the present, or, more precisely, the experiencing of the present from different observing perspectives is structured according to varying differentiations of before and after. This section highlights the central tags of the Malian crisis’s temporal dimension based on the analysed text corpus.

Based on the analysis of the text corpora, the overview of codings in the temporal dimension shows one common thread running through: the actual communication in the here and now of the conflict is full of historical references and references addressing the future which more or less explicitly revolve around the topics of self-determination, autonomy/ heteronomy and independence. Thereby, various aspects of the topic area get actualised: from the Malian independence in 1960 and its development since then to a latent request of self-determination of ethnic groups living across national borders to independent media in a democratic society. On this, it can also be noted as a preliminary point that many statements show a certain expression of incompleteness and unfinishedness attributed to actors.

The following sections show the development of communication in a temporal dimension with a view to three conflict phases and, in addition, on the basis of three separate presentations of sources group codings. In doing so, it becomes evident how certain aspects of the past are actualised at a given moment of the conflict’s present and, accordingly, how plans and ideas about the future are condensed in the here and now of the conflict.

A Malian Success Story: “Peace, conviviality and social cohesion”

³⁷⁰ The ideas expressed in these lines as well as the introductory citation to this subsection quite similarly appeared at the beginning of chapter 5.3 within the context of the case study on the Maidan protests.

Phase I (Nov 2010 – August 2011)

Based on the analysis of government documents, communication in the temporal dimension, in phase I, is characterised by continuous discursive references to the “cinquantenaire”, the 50th anniversary of the independent Malian state.³⁷¹ Already beginning in June 2010, Mali celebrated its jubilee along a number of occasions throughout a whole year (i.e. officially until June 2011). In addition to what has already been outlined in the previous chapter, the narrative of Mali being a fifty-year success story serves as a discursive baseline for many government statements on Mali’s present situation issued during phase I. Hence, statements attributed to the government show four main threads of temporal references: (1) modernisation and progress; (2) cultural diversity; (3) global values and international cooperation; (4) heroism and patriotism.

(1) Referring to the achievements of the last 50 years, government statements use the term “modernisation” to outline the Malian “nation-building” in the political, economic and social sector. Often-cited examples include the expansion of jurisdictional infrastructure (see GovMali 6.11.2010), the promotion of the freedom of the media (see GovMali 28.12.2010a), the functionality of the state of law (see GovMali 21.06.2011a) and, as a consequence thereof, the holding of democratic elections in accordance with the constitution (see GovMali 13.06.2011a). On this, without citing concrete numbers, the president himself states:

“To this day, the recorded results from different branches and sectors are remarkable. They have to be entirely attributed to the people of Mali, which has every reason to be proud.” (GovMali 20.12.2010)

Looking back at the positive development of the last 50 years within the context of cinquantenaire seem to be an indirect reaction to both MNA statements and media reports which point to the Malian state’s lack of action concerning the poor development in the north. Thus, it had been possible to talk along “the best from the past” while orienting development towards the socio-economic progress of all parts of the Malian nation (see GovMali 31.12.2010b; 4.01.2011). In this context, as government documents highlight, development efforts had been initiated and led to success not just since PSPSDN. Even before, there had been holistic approaches combining the development of basic infrastructure (water, energy, health etc.) with security aspects.³⁷²

(2) In a second dominant thread during phase I, historical elements of a common Malian cultural heritage get linked to the present situation. This becomes obvious, for example, on the occasion of a cinquantenaire ceremony in Tarkint (Gao region) on December 16, 2010, where a camel race is held in the presence of ATT.³⁷³ As government reports on the event outline, ATT associates remarks on the camel, the “mystic desert animal” that symbolically represents

³⁷¹ Together with Senegal, Mali achieved its independence from France in June 1960 by forming the “Federation of Mali” (including present-day Senegal and Mali). In August 1960, Senegal withdrew from the federation to constitute a nation state of its own. In September 1960, Modibo Keita became the first president of the Republic of Mali (see Thurston and Lebovich 2013: 18-19).

³⁷² At this point, ATT mentions the circumstances of the 2007 presidential elections. According to ATT, he managed to get another mandate because a majority of Malians was convinced of his ideas about Mali’s future development, e.g. within the framework of the “Projet pour le Développement Economique et Social” (PDES) (see GovMali 4.05.2011b).

³⁷³ The presidency offers a reward of up to one million CFA-franc for the winner of the camel race (see GovMali 16.12.2010).

the human struggle against the forces of nature, with an explicit appreciation of the population in the north:

“[This solemnity] is about honouring the women and men of the desert who cultivate among themselves the values of endurance, bravery, courage, resilience, and fidelity. They share these values with their inseparable companions: the camels.” (GovMali 16.12.2010)

Similarly, the president addresses the population in Kidal on February 8, 2011, in the run-up to the Flame of Peace ceremony (see above chapter 6.2/phase I/February 2011). Following ATT’s speech, people in Kidal region, whether light-skinned or dark-skinned, “embody those values in their culture [...] and thus have a special place in the national community” (see GovMali 7.02.2011). Beyond these examples of explicit appreciations of Malian “partial cultures” in public speeches, there is a continuous narrative of cultural diversity being an essential trait and value enshrined in Mali’s history, society and politics: This includes, for example, references to a policy of decentralisation (as part of a development strategy) implemented since 10 years. Beyond symbolic actions³⁷⁴, this policy consists of promoting culture, broad in scope and decentralised (see support of cultural centres, CLACs, in rural areas; see above, chapter 6.2) which is literally qualified as an African role model (see GovMali 17.03.2011b). According to government documents, this becomes obvious when looking at the history of the biennials, i.e. the national cultural festival taking place every two years at varying locations. As it is highlighted, the biennials, since the first in the 1960s, are crucial for the celebration of the Malian culture, because they represent

“the most beautiful occasions to exchange and to give rise to fraternal feelings, social cohesion and the stimulation of cultural and artistic creativity.” (GovMali 20.12.2010)

As a visible symbol of cultural and, in this context, linguistic diversity, government sources point out that a new version of the national anthem had been released within the framework of the cinquantenaire festivities including eight of the languages spoken in Mali. As ATT makes clear, this is to raise awareness about the fact the Malians are heirs of a long-standing cultural treasure (see GovMali 31.12.2010a). This precious treasure consists of different parts that should be preserved as a whole, as references to the major importance of religious traditions show (e.g. the annual Muslim pilgrimage “Ziyara” on May 7-8; see chapter 6.2/phase I/May 2011; see also GovMali 9.05.2011b). Likewise, long way before the founding of the Malian state and even before European colonialism, science, especially philosophy, had been playing a key role in Malian and West African culture and history (see particularly the manuscripts of the historical university of Timbuktu; Gov Mali 22.06.2011). Finally, ATT illustrates this point within the framework of a state visit to France on the occasion of a vernissage dedicated to the Dogon culture in the Quai Branly Museum in Paris in July 2011:

³⁷⁴ On December 30, 2010, the Malian council of ministers, for the first time, met outside of the capital to set a practical example of decentralisation. On the occasion of the Biennale 2010 (see details below), it took place in Sikasso and discussed the topic of decentralisation (see GovMali 30.12.2010).

“We celebrate a vision of the world, which proclaims the complementarity of cultures and not the clash of civilisations.” (GovMali 13.07.2011)

Hence, as government statements repeatedly bring to mind, the multicultural Malian self-image is necessarily opposed to any idea of a supposed inevitable “clash of civilisations”.³⁷⁵

(3) The third thread of temporal references in phase I is about Mali’s international relations. Therefore, in view of its understanding of cultures outlined above, government statements characterise Mali as a kind of cosmopolitan society that is naturally linked to the world and engaged in cooperation with many international partners. In this context, the analysed documents mention cross-border relations of communities within West Africa, rooted in history, ethnicity and migration, particularly with regard to Senegal, Liberia and Sierra Leone since these countries became independent at about the same time in the 1960s (see GovMali 18.04.2011; 29.04.2011a/b). At various points within the text corpus, government documents refer to the history, size and grandeur of past epochs, such as the time of the Mali Empire (1235-1670)³⁷⁶, and the obligation of current generations to feel as heirs and thus as guardians of this heritage (see e.g. GovMali 16.04.2011).

Beyond that, a number of references deal with the good relations to France, the former colonial power, other Western states and states in West Africa, for example within the context of fighting terrorism in the Sahelian zone or the further development of regional integration within the framework of ECOWAS, and qualify Mali as a reliable and open-minded partner (see GovMali 22.01.2011; 31.01.2011b). As such, Malian authorities understand Mali (at least since 1991) as being on a clear path of democratisation (see GovMali 16.04.2011), integrated in a network of longstanding cooperation with a number of international organisations (see GovMali 4.01.2011; 14.04.2011) and signatory of all relevant UN conventions and treaties (see GovMali 21.06.2011b). In this context, on several occasions during the anniversary year, government statements point to the unique Malian historical contribution to modern human rights: the *Charter of Kouroukan Fonga* of 1236, one of the oldest human rights documents.³⁷⁷ And finally, a remarkable point against the background of claims concerning the autonomy of northern Mali: to the address of the entire diplomatic corps at the beginning of the year, the government announces its firm intention to further support the foundation of a Palestinian state and speaks in high terms of the Palestinian leadership having struggled for a long time to peacefully settle the conflict with Israel (see GovMali 3.01.2011).

(4) Finally, in phase I, the most emphatic temporal references are those recalling heroism and evoking patriotism. According to the analysed documents, the tendency to refer to patriotic heroes as landmarks of the own history goes back to the *Battle of Logo Sabouciré* (Kayes region,

³⁷⁵ Although not quoted explicitly, this expression was most probably used to refer to Samuel Huntington’s *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*, published in 1996 and elaborating on the subsequently much-contradicted thesis of an inevitable and violent confrontation of cultures.

³⁷⁶ Nota bene: The Mali Empire covered an area from the actual Senegal, Gambia to parts of Guinea-Conakry, Ivory Coast, Burkina Faso and most of the Malian territory. During the 15th century, the Songhay Empire (11th century-1591) gradually superseded the Malian Empire as hegemonic power in West Africa.

³⁷⁷ See e.g. GovMali (16.12.2010, 7.02.2011d). Nota bene: Proclaimed as the constitution of the newly established Mali Empire in 1236, the *Charter of Kouroukan Fonga* or *Manden-Charter* contains fundamental principles, such as equality of human beings or the integrity of the human body. In 2009, the charter was inscribed on the *Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity* of the UNESCO.

southeastern part of Mali) of 1878 when Malian troops rose up against “French penetration” for the first time and, at great cost of life, failed (see GovMali 16.12.2010). Any other mention of the Malian independence in phase I bristles with references to a long way of great suffering and sacrifice that had finally led into an independent Malian state. As ATT states to the address of the younger generation on the occasion of the biennials 2010, these sacrifices have to be paid honour and respect:

“Our thoughts once again turn to those who courageously and determinedly opposed colonial penetration and foreign domination with might and main. Those who resisted accepted the ultimate sacrifice in the name of liberty, honour and dignity. They deserve our eternal tribute, our appreciation and admiration.” (GovMali 20.12.2010)

Based on that, according to other government statements, learning from the past means that “the Malian people has to reconcile with itself” and “should not build its future on feelings of revenge” (GovMali 20.12.2010; see also GovMali 7.02.2011d).

At the same time, the analysis revealed a golden thread running through cinquantenaire appreciations: the military is presented as a backbone of the independent Malian state and thus as part of the self-image of its leaders, beginning with the first president, the “father of the nation”, Modibo Keita³⁷⁸, up to ATT (see GovMali 17.05.2011; 14.06.2011; 14.08.2011). In this context, the documents highlight a military or even belligerent tradition which formed the great empires in West Africa prior to colonial times. Malian patriotism is therefore still shaped by a certain pursuit of former greatness. In this sense, the Malian military represents a bearer of this legacy and, “in perfect harmony with the people”, serves as guarantor of independence (see GovMali 25.12.2010a).³⁷⁹ According to the Malian government, the following dates are particularly important for the military’s self-understanding (own table based on GovMali 19.01.2011b):

1964	Ifoghas Tuareg rebellion, Kidal region; military gets tasked with “defending the integrity of the national territory”
1968	coup d’etat of the military; seizing power by a military comitee; well received by population due to poor economic situation
1972/ 1973	severe droughts in the Sahelian zone; military assures provision of food and water by air in the northern regions
1991	17 military officers (including ATT) arrest the president and suspend the constitution as a consequence of mass protests for democracy

³⁷⁸ Modibo Keita (1915-1977), a socialist, served as Mali’s first president from 1960 until his overthrow in the military coup of 1968. A major politician in the post-World War II period, he was mayor of Bamako in the late 1950s (see Thurston and Lebovich 2013: 38).

³⁷⁹ In addition, the Malian military had also been engaged in the Panafrikan cause, i.e. in supporting liberation movement in the whole of Africa, for example in Algeria, South Africa, Mozambique, Zimbabwe, and Congo (see GovMali 19.01.2011b).

1991/ 1992	Tuareg rebellion; military as guarantor of the new constitution; conflict leads to peace agreement, the “National Pact”
2006	military is confronted with a mutiny, then a rebellion in Kidal region; conflict management combines dialogue and military measures leading to peace agreement “Algiers Accord”

In sum, it can be stated that the military is not only understood as a practical instrument to defend territorial integrity and national unity but also as a key symbol of identification and integration embodying the Malian state, beginning with its foundation to its successful socio-economic development to its consolidation as a multicultural society:

“Our military has reached maturity. It proved to be a melting pot of our national identity.” (GovMali 19.01.2011b)

Furthermore, as ATT argues on the occasion of the cinquantenaire and Flame of Peace ceremony in Kidal on February 7-8, those “fallen on the field of honor” and “died a hero’s death for their home country” have to be highly valued since they contributed to peace, in Kidal region and beyond (see GovMali 7.02.2011d). Appreciating the military combined with patriotic pleas to continue the way of reconciliation is a recurring element in phase I, at last when commissioning new policemen and gendarmes in July (see GovMali 8.07.2011; 22.07.2011).

Phase II (Aug 2011 – Oct 2011)

The beginning of phase II is marked by the death of Ag Bahanga which is, in the first place, not commented by the government (see also chapter 6.2/phase II). Instead, government documents describe the here and now as an increasingly critical situation due to a growing number of terrorist activities and a worsening crisis in Libya. In the course of this, three historical contexts get activated. First, government releases point out the imperative to continuously develop democratic institutions, obviously as a reaction to critical comments on the government’s constitutional reform plans. According to these statements, ATT highlights that he would definitely not run for president again (which would anyway be illegal) – a circumstance that should be seen as giving proof of politicians not at all aiming at the preservation of power. Therefore, the development of the democratic system follows an intrinsic motivation and can only succeed with the participation of all social and political players in Mali (see GovMali 6.09.2011).

Second, the commemoration day of September 22 (51st anniversary of the independent Malian state) gets used to celebrate the inauguration of the China-Mali Friendship Bridge across Niger in Bamako. As ATT’s addresses (and the reporting on it) around this day show, this symbolic date in Malian history does not only serve to present an important infrastructural project of modernisation. Against the background of a project that had been realised with Chinese investments only, it is also used to document a new form of independence or, in other words, a kind of emancipation from dominant Western investments and economic relations (see GovMali 22.09.2011).

Finally, third, governments statements, in their temporal dimension, too, include implicit reactions to the imminent breakup to the Libyan state as well as autonomy claims in northern

Mali articulated by the MNA. In this context, ATT's speeches appeal to unity by using the symbol of the river to refer to the Niger as lifeline, as source of inspiration, as defining momentum of a Malian identity including north and south at all times. In this spirit, the Niger is understood as the cradle of former empires, such as the Mali Empire (1235-1670), the Songhay Empire (11th century-1591) or the Bambara Empire (17th century-1861), all of which were larger and united more ethnic groups than the modern Malian state (see GovMali 17.10.2011).

Phase III (Oct 2011 – Jan 2012)

In phase III, the analysis of government documents shows a growing tendency to put temporal discursive references in a context of defense and self-justification. Historicising reactions to MNLA's and some media's allegation that the president could use constitutional reform efforts to soften limitation for presidential power and to undermine democratic rights and freedoms give evidence of this: ATT refers to the fundamental role of independent judges as an assurance for checks and balances as well as "free and transparent elections [...] to build a democratic society in which stability, peace and national cohesion continuously grows" (GovMali 22.11.2011). In view of the very beginning of democratic Mali, in 1991/1992, ATT is presented as an unconditional promoter of democracy, especially fighting for free media (see GovMali 24.11.2011; 2.12.2011a). Furthermore, government statements suggest that Mali's partners in the world have trust in the stability of the Malian democracy, which had always been supported on its democratic way. On this, for example, the German parliamentary president, *Norbert Lammert*, gets quoted with praising words on Mali's exemplary democratic development on December 8/9.³⁸⁰ Likewise, the documents highlight the positive mention of *Adama Dieng*, special UN envoy representing the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda, on December 22 presenting Mali as a model for Africa, especially concerning its history of peaceful transitions of power (see GovMali 22.12.2011; 6.01.2012). According to these government releases, lessons learned from the past are the only motivation for constitutional reforms, for example within the context of fighting against electoral fraud (e.g. voting by procuration) or to increase voter participation beyond the big cities (see GovMali 11.12.2011a; 19.12.2011).

A further example: As if to proof that the Malian government is able to recognise claims from different parties and to balance between groups of interest, government documents point out different examples of former engagement in successful conflict resolution, such as dealing with cross-border problems by regional cooperation, e.g. concerning the prevention of droughts and food shortages within the context of the Niger Basin Authority³⁸¹ or the Liptako-Gourma Authority³⁸² (see GovMali 31.12.2011) or economic cooperation within the framework of the

³⁸⁰ In this context, Norbert Lammert explicitly mentions the positive role of the GIZ (i.e. the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit) within the framework of development projects in northern Mali (see GovMali 8.12.2011).

³⁸¹ Nota bene: The *Niger Basin Authority* was founded in 1980. Its members are Benin, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Chad, Côte d'Ivoire, Guinea, Mali, Niger and Nigeria. According to government statements, member states found Niger Basin Authority as a result of the common insight that extreme climate conditions induce strong interdependence between countries (see GovMali 18.10.2011).

³⁸² Nota bene: The *Liptako-Gourma Authority* was founded in 1970. Its members are Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger. The regional organisation seeks to promote development in the contiguous areas of the shared Sahelian zone and, therefore, includes common research on securing food supply in critical climate-induced situations (see GovMali 25.11.2011).

UEMOA, whereby the Malian government is presented as a driving force (see GovMali 30.12.2011a). Beyond that, the analysed government releases foreground examples documenting Mali's lasting engagement to promote the values of freedom, democracy and human rights in the world: Mali's commitment within the UN and before the global public both in favour of West Saharan peoples' self-determination and the recognition of a Palestinian state (see GovMali 28.10.2011); Mali's efforts within the context of mediation initiatives to assure not only the Libyan people's "inalienable rights" but all peoples' desire to freedom and democracy in times of the Arab Spring³⁸³ (see GovMali 2.12.2011a).

Third and finally, as the Malian government gets increasingly blamed for inaction and incompetence due to a growing number of terrorist attacks and kidnappings in the north, authorities also refer to the violation of longstanding cultural values in order to justify the adoption of measures:

"In our country, hosting a visitor is a sacred cause. We feel sad and deeply grieved by these shameful and outrageous acts." (GovMali 27.11.2011)

Hence, attacks on foreign workers and tourists (e.g. in Hombori or Timbuktu, see above chapter 6.2/phase III/November 2011) are not only considered as singular criminal acts or isolated terrorist incidences but as attacks on Malian culture and history as a whole. In this context, Malian culture once again gets presented as open-mined and welcoming and, therefore, as paving the way for Mali's democratic development.³⁸⁴ As government sources make clear, authorities present themselves as being determined to defend this kind of Malian culture, even with military means, as it happened in the context of the 2006 rebellion, in order to protect and preserve independence, stability and peace. This is what ATT pointedly repeats on the occasion of the 51st anniversary of the Malian military, two days after the MNLA attacked Ménaka (see GovMali 19.01.2012d).

"50 Years of Colonisation and Invasion of Azawad"

Phase I (Nov 2010 August 2011)

"For centuries, ethnic groups that today inhabit these lands have known to live together and to fairly deal with their complementarity." (MNA 15.11.2010)

³⁸³ However, as ATT notes, Arab Spring uprisings in the subregion could indeed have serious consequences for security policy and thus could change into a hard winter (see chapter 6.2/phase III/December 2011).

³⁸⁴ On this, the world-famous Festival in the Desert gets once again mentioned as a positive example of a general appreciation of Mali's rich and diverse cultural life, especially the Tuareg part of it, by Malian themselves. In addition, despite many security concerns in advance, the festival could take place without any incidences (see GovMali 19.01.2012).

Based on the analysis of documents issued by the MNA, communication in the temporal dimension, in phase I, is also characterised by continuous discursive references to the 50th anniversary of the Malian state. However, in stark contrast to government statements, these last 50 years are presented as “decades of suffering” during which “the people’s identity was threatened with extinction.” (MNA 1.11.2010)

In sum, the text corpus shows a coincidence of contrasting temporal references running through the presentation of the respective present. Firstly, in the sense of this section’s opening quotation, there are many statements referring to the time prior to Malian independence and European colonisation: These statements, for example, deal with the unity of “all children of Azawad” who have always stood up for human rights and values “in continuation with the values of the ancestors”. According to these sources, Saharan and West African peoples, especially the Tuareg, have always founded their political and economic power related to the control of caravan routes³⁸⁵ on mutual respect of peoples and cultures, for example between sedentary agriculturalists and nomadic pastoralists (see MNA 15.11.2010). Following this, Azawad, in its huge geographical extension, hosts “one of the world’s most ancient civilisations” incorporating an immense cultural heritage, as the evolution of *Tifinagh* and Arabic writing systems and language cultures as well as manifold modes of social and economic life adapted to environmental conditions show (see MNA 25.05.2011).

Secondly, MNA statements extensively present the perception of Azawad which, since European colonisation and during independent Mali, has always been defrauded of its rights and its future. This view gets particularly stressed as a reaction to the overly positive presentation of Malian history on the occasion of 50th anniversary celebrations documented in government releases (see e.g. MNA 19.02.2011b). Following other MNA accounts, Azawad’s traditional authorities, i.e. tribal and religious leaders, already during French colonial rule declared that Azawad would be unwilling to permanently submit to foreign rule. Thus, immediately prior to the withdrawal of the French colonial power from Mali, tribal leaders, nobles and tradesmen appealed to the French president, *Charles de Gaulle*, in order to speak out against an integration of Azawad into a new independent Malian state without consulting Azawad’s population and to claim full sovereignty (see MNA 25.05.2011). As MNA releases further outline,

“These letters and a number of other documents that are secretly kept in the archive of French colonial history do indeed, today more than at the time, bear testimony to our aspiration to liberty and emancipation, but also to democracy and every people’s right to sovereignty in general.” (MNA 15.07.2011)

Against this background, it is also argued that French (and other European) colonialism in Africa, by arbitrarily drawing boundaries and thus deliberately violating cultural spaces, took advantage of the divide and rule principle. From this point of view, as the argument continues, “assimilation and acculturation” of Azawad’s population within the Malian unitary state and society ultimately represents another form of colonialism (see MNA 25.05.2011). In retrospect, the Tuareg consider this process as massive ethnic discrimination or even as an “attempted genocide” (see MNA 15.11.2010).

³⁸⁵ As mentioned earlier, the sources repeatedly highlight the close ethnic, cultural and thus historical relationship between Azawad and Morocco (see lettre of Malian Tuareg to Moroccan King, Hassan II; MNA 20.12.2010; see also chapter 6.2/ phase I/ december 2010).

Overlooking phase I, there is a number of text passages within the MNA part justifying the foundation of the MNA and Azawad's resistance in general by referring to a profound trauma inscribed in Azawadians' collective memory: After disappointed expectations at the end of French colonial rule (see above), the trauma commences, according to the analysed MNA documents, with the first Tuareg rebellion against the just established Malian central power under its first president Modibo Keita. Supported by the first president of independent Algeria, *Ahmed Ben Bella*³⁸⁶, Keita rigorously crushed the rebellion while accepting "thousands of deaths" (see MNA 15.11.2010). Hence, as the MNA (19.02.2011b) holds, resistance against a "forced integration into the Malian state", against a "violation of historical rights", against "marginalisation and degradation of Azawad's cultural heritage" has to be considered as a virtually logical and necessary consequence.³⁸⁷ Further incidences brought forward as negatively shaping Azawadians' collective memory nearly correspond decisive government dates mentioned earlier (see GovMali 19.01.2011b). From a government perspective, those dates were presented as positive milestone events for the development of the Malian state, especially with due regard to "the achievements of the military". From an MNA perspective, these events are presented under opposite circumstances (see below own table based on MNA 15.11.2010; 20.01.2011; 15.07.2011):

1963/ 1964	suppression of the Tuareg revolt (Adagh, i.e. Ifoghas), Kidal region; thousands of Tuareg victims; extradition (supported by <i>Ben Bella</i> , see above) of Tuareg leaders who fled to Algeria
1973	Malian government uses dramatic droughts in the Sahelian zone as a "weapon of war" (against Tuareg): poisoning of wells and food; misappropriation of international aid; forced migration, leading to erosion of traditional economy, decimation of livestock, hundreds of thousands fleeing to Libya and Algeria
1990	increasing number of attacks and massacres of (Tuareg) civilians in Mali and Niger; Tuareg and other ethnic groups discriminated, stigmatised, and increasingly threatened; beginning of armed resistance
1991	failure of <i>Tamanrasset Peace Accord</i> (January 1991): continuation of hostilities, <i>Massacre of Léré</i> (May 20): militaries execute Tuareg and Moor civilians in public without verifying identities (their families taken as hostages for more than a year)
1992	<i>Massacre of Gossi</i> (May 14): 12 foreign and domestic aid workers assassinated by Malian military; <i>Massacre of Foïta</i> (May 17): 48 herdsmen and their animals arbitrarily killed by Malian military; hundreds of thousands forced to give up properties and livestock, fleeing (to Mauretania, Algeria, and Burkina Faso); even after conclusion of the <i>National Pact</i> : returning refugees still exposed to attacks, arbitrary confiscation of property, especially livestock

³⁸⁶ Nota bene: Ahmed Ben Bella (1916-2012), an Algerian politician and revolutionary, was the first president of independent Algeria from 1963 to 1965.

³⁸⁷ In this context, even though the Festival au Désert is presented as a multicultural and cosmopolitan event, MNA voices consistently point to the festival as a primarily Tuareg-organised cultural event in Azawad (see e.g. MNA 11.11.2010b; 6.01.2011; 19.01.2011).

2006	beginning of Tuareg rebellion in Kidal region due to ongoing violation of National Pact: disarming of Tuareg followed by increasing presence of AQMI; government pretending peaceful dialogue while deploying military

Taking MNA sources in phase I together, the following picture emerges: the Tuareg and other ethnic minorities have been completely absent in Malian institutions as well as in political, social and economic life until the 1990s (see MNA 15.11.2010). Even though the National Pact (1992) by which the three northern regions Gao, Kidal and Timbuktu were granted a special status, has not changed this perception. Moreover, the ongoing non-recognition of “war crimes and crimes against humanity”³⁸⁸ has led to a growing climate of repression and denial of the northern population’s rights. Against this background, Azawads history since Malian independence is presented as “50 years of colonisation and invasion” (MNA 20.01.2011; see this subsection’s title).

Particularly as a result of the Flame of Peace ceremony on February 8, strong statements raising the topic of revolution gather momentum, for example within the framework of the Tuareg’s youth organisation:

“The Tuareg movement has to draw consequences from decades of armed conflict. [...] As the Tuareg have demonstrated several times, they have means to liberate their territory, to establish Tuareg institutions and to get rid of illegitimate and corrupt states having no right to subdue the Tuareg people.” (MNA 6.02.2011a)

Other general MNA statements, however, slightly qualify the revolution talk by referring to the Arab Spring which brings “a global turn of eras for the history of humankind” and thus can break “mental and emotional prisons”. Therefore, the MNA declares to stand in solidarity with those opposing occupation, repression and the violation of rights (see MNA 5.03.2011) and to join the ranks of “a universal and intellectual revolution of democratic values in favour of Azawad’s cause, to the end.” (MNA 15.07.2011)

Phase II (Aug 2011 – Oct 2011)

In phase II, MNA statements predominantly refer to the sudden death of Bahanga. In this context, apart from worshipping Bahanga as a popular Azawadian hero, the basic tone of the releases is the following: Already in the past, Bahanga made many sacrifices, the last one being his own life. Therefore, every “Tuareg warrior” should follow Bahanga’s example and give full commitment to the cause of Azawad (see MNA 28.08.2011).

Further statements also testify bitterness and depression: For the past 50 years, Azawadians have felt unwelcome in their own country. But that’s not all, now they even become suspected of making common cause with terrorists (see MNA 2.09.2011). As *Moussa Ag Achar-toumane*, MNA person responsible for external relations once again makes clear, Azawad’s values are freedom, democracy and independence from any form of colonisation. Based on that, the

³⁸⁸ As a subsequent statement points out, the MNA submits a list of dossiers on human rights and international law violations committed during “Malian occupation of northern Mali” to international human rights organisations. With this, the MNA aims at bringing a lawsuit at the International Criminal Court (see MNA 15.07.2011).

MNA seeks “to achieve more autonomy and better living conditions”. Moreover, the MNA brings charges against the international community which has not only ignored decades of marginalisation and repression but also the most evident violation of the Algiers Accord, particularly when it comes to the implementation of a broader autonomy for the northern regions (see MNA 13.09.2011). Even though MNA documents in phase II stick to basic belief that the question of Azawad’s autonomy can definitely not be considered as a militarily solvable problem but as a political one, statements nevertheless show a growing vehemence (see MNA 2.09.2011).

Against the background of this tense atmosphere which becomes increasingly tangible in the weeks before October 16, representatives of different Tuareg tribes (including the Bahanga faction) and other ethnic groups based in northern Mali agree that Azawad’s voice would be best consolidated by founding a new umbrella organisation integrating even more parts of the Azawad’s population: the MNLA (see MNLA 16.10.2011).

Phase III (Oct 2011 – Jan 2012)

Based on the analysis of the text corpus, releases of the newly founded MNLA in phase III show strong temporal references while being particularly directed to three groups of addressees: “the people of Mali”, “the people of Azawad” and the Malian government.

First, in an “open letter addressing the people of Mali”, the MNLA appeals to the Malian population (obviously not including the population of Azawad) in the strongest terms to “reanimate relations between the two people with warm-heartedness” in order to mutually support themselves in achieving true self-determination. Furthermore, according to this letter, looking at the common history supports one conclusion: 50 years of political games, of cheating the Malian population and its military, of deliberate measures to the disadvantage of Azawad’s population, of armed conflict with countless victims now has to end (see MNLA 3.11.2011g).

Second, a number of texts pointedly address the population of Azawad by promoting the unity of all ethnic groups in northern Mali. Especially the younger generation is presented as being able to head for an independent Azawad which recognises and incorporates the political, social and cultural continuum of different but related parts of Azawad, even beyond the Malian borders (see MNLA 6.11.2011). Azawad’s youth, according to these sources, which had not been involved in earlier rebellions and can thus be seen as “unburdened”, is called upon to overcome the lethargy of previous generations:

“Don’t let yourself be fooled about that: small solutions, such as a calculated integration of some into the Malian public service, promises concerning the promotion of our officers, the quota system regulating the recruitment within the Malian military, all of it based on principles of corruption, inequality, injustice would not compensate the proliferation of terror, discriminations and atrocities of all kind experienced by our people for 50 years.” (MNLA 8.01.2012a)

Furthermore, when reflecting the preceding year (see arbitrary detentions of those protesting for self-determination, denial of drought and food shortage in 2010 season, sudden and mysterious death of Bahanga), more than ever, standing up in unity is a basic condition to fulfil the only request of northern populations: living in peace and freedom (see MNLA 14.11.2011; 9.01.2012). In sum, MNLA documents in this phase offer many references expressing a certain now or never feeling: Some statements confirm that “thousands of Tuareg” had already returned to Mali (and Niger) before and in the very moment of the Gaddafi regime’s fall in

October (see MNLA 28.11.2011); other statements extensively outline the story of prominent deserters from the Malian military, such as the example of Hama Ag Mahmoud (see above chapter 6.2/phase III/December 201; see also MNLA 20.12.2011b).

Hence, those points in favour of fighting for Azawad's self-determination right at this particular time which are derived from a (world) historical perspective are presented as the most important ones: As continuous resistance towards Islamisation and, later on, towards French colonial power shows, the history of Azawad and its people can be characterised by a resistant basic attitude towards external powers.³⁸⁹ Even though this heroically glorified resistance and further rebellions in Mali's recent history had been unsuccessful, the situation at that time, according to MNLA accounts, can be considered as more favourable than ever before. On the one hand, as the Arab Spring accelerates, it boosts democratic developments all over the world. On the other hand, looking at the last two decades, a number of new nation states emerged and were recognised.³⁹⁰ Against this background, the international community is expected to be vigilant with regard to developments in Azawad as well as in Catalonia or in the Basque region. And finally, based on MNLA voices, for the first time, a majority of Tuareg (as well as other ethnic groups) declares to be in favour of self-determination and presents itself confident enough to wage a promising struggle, both by making use of international law and international organisations as well as adequate weapons, if necessary (see MNLA 23.12.2011; 3.01.2012b).

Third, in the last weeks before the armed conflict starts, there are statements to the address of the Malian government showing temporal references in a new confrontational quality. Therefore, the main allegation is "institutional racism" being a longstanding reality while the "Malian democracy" is depicted as a pure façade (see MNLA 3.01.2012a; 8.01.2012b). Over decades, as MNLA documents illustrate, a structural division of society was pursued which led to a political, economic, social, cultural, linguistic stigmatisation and discrimination and, ultimately, to a reinforcement of ethnic rivalries (see MNLA 10.01.2012). In this context, numerous government speeches about respecting cultural diversity turned out to be hollow words. While, for example, the *N'Ko* script developed in 1949 was massively promoted, the thousands of years old *Tifinagh* script was not at all integrated into the Mali's constitution or cultural heritage (see MNLA 10.01.2012). The systematic exclusion of nomad children from Malian schools represents another example drastically paraphrased in MNLA documents as a form of "cultural eradication of a people" (MNLA 3.01.2012b).

In sum, based on the analysed MNLA statements, even with a favourable view on two decades of a democratically constituted Mali, the overall assessment is clear-cut and tough: Billions in investments in the north have left no positive marks, especially with a view to water supply, health care and education (see MNLA 3.01.2012a; 10.01.2012). Likewise, those who expected that Malian war crimes within the context of past rebellions would be dealt with and a national reconciliation would be encouraged have been deeply disappointed.³⁹¹ And finally,

³⁸⁹ On this, an MNLA source explicitly mentions the example of the *Kaocen Revolt* (1916-1917) when Tuareg from the Air Mountains in Niger rose up against French colonial power during World War I (see MNLA 23.12.2011).

³⁹⁰ At this point, the document lists recent examples of recently established nation states in Africa and beyond: Namibia (1990), Eritrea (1993), Montenegro (2006), Kosovo (2008), Timor-Leste (2002), South Sudan (2011).

³⁹¹ In this context, two publications dealing with Malian war crimes are mentioned: *Les rébellions touarègues*, Anne Saint Girons (2009) and *Tuaregs. Voix solitaires sous l'horizon confisqué*, Hélène Claudot-Hawad (1996) (see MNLA 15.12.2011; 22.12.2011).

democratic Mali has never been a reliable and credible contracting party (see MNLA 1.01.2012): The National Pact has never been implemented while denial, repression and violence endure.³⁹² Therefore, according to MNLA accounts, the rebellion of 2006 was a logic and in a way necessary consequence. And this history, at this point, repeats itself when looking at the sparse implementation of the 2006 Algiers Accord (see MNLA 15.12.2011). In order to prevent a negative déjà-vu for the population of Azawad, the MNLA calls up to be vigilant and able to defend oneself: Efforts are undertaken to reactivate ethnic defense militias and special forces (Ganda Koy, Kokadie legion; see above chapter 6.2/phase III/December 2011) in order to proceed against civil society and the autonomy movement (see MNLA 22.12.2011; 28.12.2011). In addition, the security situation deteriorates from day to day since Malian security forces let drug traffickers and AQMI do as they like (see MNLA 26.12.2011; 28.12.2011). At the same time, Malian authorities and media fuel a climate of distrust and suspicion:

“National and international media accuse the Tamasheq and Azawad as a whole of being terrorists, drug traffickers, mercenaries and slave traders. [...] These amalgamations are wrongfully used because they are effective to silence the claims of one side and strengthening the power of the other side.” (MNLA 3.01.2012a)

And finally, on the day when Ménaka gets attacked (January 16), MNLA voices express a sobering observation that is used as a quasi justification: For years, MNA/MNLA issued offers of dialogue associated with a strong commitment to a political solution.³⁹³ Yet, these offers have always been ignored or rejected. Therefore, according to an MNLA spokesman, the signs point to armed struggle to ensure Azawad’s future:

“Fighting means to dare winning. The fight has just begun.” (MNLA 8.01.2012a)

Media and INGOs

Phase I (Nov 2010 – August 2011)

In addition to that what has already been outlined as the factual dimension of media accounts in phase I, the text corpus shows some recurring temporal references: First, even though the analysed media statements do not agree with the self-declared aims of the MNA, the narrative of its foundation as a consequence of discrimination and oppression in Azawad for decades gets extensively portrayed. At the same time, however, it is presented as a “complot against the Republic”, or, in other words, as high treason (see L’Aube/Maliweb 11.11.2010b).

Second, concerning the ongoing issue of kidnappings which take up much room in coverage, media reports in phase I especially show their discontent with European countries’

³⁹² In this context, for example, the portrayal of northern Mali’s history as a success story on the occasion of a photo exhibition (“Kidal 1960-2010”) within the framework of the cinquantenaire is perceived as one-sided and provokes the expression of traumatic experiences. As the MNLA (3.11.2011c) holds, there is no reason at all to celebrate with regard to oppression, denial, humiliation, everyday violence, torture and lives lost.

³⁹³ To underline the commitment to non-violence and to finding political solutions, the MNLA presents itself as being in one line with the anti-Apartheid movement in South Africa. By citing *Nelson Mandela*, it seeks to earn legitimisation credit for its own goals: “For to be free is not merely to cast off one’s chains, but to live in a way that respects and enhances the freedom of others.” (Nelson Mandela, as cited in MNLA 8.01.2012a).

repeatedly downgrading assessment of the security situation in northern Mali. In this context, some reports argue that kidnappings, in most instances, did not take place on Malian territory. Other reports point out that travel warnings, especially French ones, can also be understood as a political punishment in reaction to an overly “peaceful” Malian strategy in fighting terrorism in the Sahelian zone (see e.g. AFP/Maliweb 15.11.2010; Maliweb 10.02.2011c).

Third, media accounts address a number of historical background factors accounting for the ever-deteriorating security situation. Sources point to the rising tensions between Peuls and Tuareg (e.g. which trace back to historical conflicts between nomads and sedentaries. In this context, reports react to alleged attacks by Tuareg members within the Malian military against Peuls populations (see L’Indicateur du Renouveau/Maliweb 4.04.2011). In addition, “Malian mercenaries”³⁹⁴ heavily armed from Libyan arsenals are presented as being responsible for the aggravation of the situation (see Lafia Révélateur/Maliweb 13.04.2011; AFP/Maliweb 3.05.2011a). Finally, as other media accounts bring up, the MNA corresponds to “a political return of armed bandits” linked to the “May 23 Alliance” respectively the Bahanga faction. And Bahanga is accused of sabotaging the peace agreement which led to an increasingly growing influence of AQMI in Sahelian zone (see Le Prétoire/Maliweb 3.05.2011c; El Watan/Maliweb 20.05.2011). After the death of Bahanga, as mentioned earlier, reports indeed show a certain satisfaction and confidently express expectations towards the government as to dealing with MNA in the future:

“This man has always been considered as the public enemy number one. However, Koulouba Palace never wanted to eliminate him. Now, as he was blown up by a mine he had probably dropped with his own hands at the Malian-Algerian border before, all Malians can breathe a big sigh of relief. This means that a crime never goes unpunished. *Authorities will have to retain this lesson: Never again let another Bahanga ridicule the nation.*” (L’Indépendant/Maliweb 29.08.2011; italics R.B.)

On top of that, MNA’s goals are presented as incomprehensible and ignoring history: Mali, not only being a huge country concerning its geography but also in view of its immense cultural heritage as the cradle of former empires (Mali, Songhay, Bambara) has always been integrating different cultures and showing a “legendary tradition of hospitality” (Maliweb 10.02.2011c). Against this background, the idea of releasing a part of country from its political and cultural connection in order to be independent gets branded as completely senseless (see Lafia Révélateur/Maliweb 4.05.2011b).

Phase II (Aug 2011 – Oct 2011)

In phase II, as illustrated earlier (see chapter 6.2/phase II), the basic tone of media coverage towards the government gets more critical. The government is thus made responsible for the critical security situation caused by past neglect, for example concerning dilettante implementation of PSPSDN or laxism in fighting terror (see e.g. Lafia Révélateur/Maliweb 2.09.2011; Le 22 Septembre/Maliweb 16.09.2011a). At the same time, historical references to the “problematic history of the north” intend to reduce the responsibility of the young Malian state for the

³⁹⁴ As it becomes clear, “Malian mercenaries” represents a terminology that is strictly rejected by the MNA/MNLA but indeed appears in government documents (see e.g. GovMali 5.03.2011b; MNLA 14.11.2011, 3.01.2012a).

current situation. On this, reports suggest that there has always been a notorious insecurity in northern Mali, even before French colonial rule during the times of the West African empires. The reasons for this are rivalries deeply rooted in hierarchical structures of tribal societies in the north. As these rivalries continued to be fought during colonial times, so they are presented as the basis of the 1960s and 1990s rebellions and, ultimately, the current insecurity. This basic conflict, according to the analysed media sources, was further exacerbated by droughts and food shortages in the 1970s and 1980s (see *Le Combat/Maliweb* 23.09.2011; *Lafia Révélateur/Maliweb* 28.09.201).

As if to prove the existence of ongoing intra and interethnic rivalries in northern Mali, some reports pick up the dissent within the Tuareg community, as an interview with *Deyti Ag Sidimo* shows. Sidimo, member of parliament from Tessalit and former companion of Bahanga, advocates for an implementation of the Algiers Accord and strives against MNA's claims for self-determination:

“I am a man of words. Today, nothing urges us to take up arms. We fight for the entire application of the Algiers Accords. We think that the government makes every effort in this sense.” (*Le Prétoire/Maliweb* 13.10.2011a)

However, shortly before the imminent foundation of the MNLA³⁹⁵ on October 16, affirmations of this kind are suspiciously received by media coverage. As reports dealing with the attack on the PSPSDN military base under construction in Abeïbara on October 2 show, besides concrete evidence pointing to an AQMI and drug trafficker involvement, the Abeïbara incidence immediately gets associated with an armed conflict between Tuareg rebels and the Malian army in 2008. At that time, the Bahanga faction initiated an attack that led to 32 deaths and many casualties (see e.g. *L'Indicateur du Renouveau/Maliweb* 6.10.2011b).

Phase III (Oct 2011 – Jan 17, 2012)

The foundation of the MNLA, documented by MNLA's founding declaration, marks the beginning of phase III. This is accompanied by a number of media publications critically picking up both MNLA statements and government releases. In this context, the foundation of MNLA reflexively gets pinned down into a historical context by using different temporal references to explain its emergence.

As suggested earlier in phase II, there are reports arguing that competition, rivalry and enmity is an essential feature of Tuareg history and culture, particularly when it comes to striving for a common goal, such as autonomy or independence in modern times.

“The Tamasheq [i.e. the Tuareg] are inherently vicious among themselves.” (*Le Combat/Maliweb* 22.10.2011a)

Following the explanations outlined in media accounts, the Malian government has always used the divide and rule method when addressing the hierarchically structured tribal Tuareg community. Accordingly, by political patronage and clientelism, the traditionally leading factions (Ifoghas and Chamanaman) have been successively disempowered while other factions (e.g. Imghad)

³⁹⁵ Beginning in September, MNA statements show a growing vehemence as to the true implementation of the Algiers Accord and an eventual enforcement of northern regions' autonomy (see MNA 2.09.2011; 13.09.2011).

have been favoured.³⁹⁶ In conjunction with that, media contributions point to the fact that recently returning Tuareg fighters from Libya and those who remained in Mali and supported the National Pact have continued to compete with each other since the rebellion in the beginning of the 1990s and onwards.³⁹⁷ In view of these intra-Tuareg antagonisms presented as unsolvable, it is once again underlined that the constituents of Azawad taken together or in isolation would never be able to exist as a viable entity on its own, such as Kidal region which is considered home by a vast majority of Tuareg:

“Kidal will need Mali more than Mali needs Kidal.” (L’Indépendent/Maliweb 20.10.2011d)

In addition, as media contributions during phase III hold, a new rebellion would *not* have unanimous support by all ethnic groups in northern Mali, for example by dark skinned Songhay or Peuls.³⁹⁸ On the contrary, actual events are expected to bring about rising mutual distrust and interethnic tensions, especially between light and dark-skinned populations in the north, as rumours about the resurgence of “Ganda Koy” units show (see Le 22 Septembre/Maliweb 1.12.2011a; see also above chapter 6.2/Phase III/Dec 2011; MNLA 28.12.2011). In this way, media coverage gives the assessment that, in the light of public demonstrations in favour of Azawad’s independence on November 1 in Kidal and Ménaka³⁹⁹, there could be violent clashes between rebel groups and the Malian government but shows itself convinced that there would not be a broad rebellion supported by a majority of the population in the north.

“Rebellions in Azawad are as old as the Niger river.” (Le 22 Septembre/Maliweb 3.11.2011d)

In contrast, other media accounts take the emergence of the MNLA much more seriously by referring to “the return of old demons” (Maliweb 25.10.2011b) and by recalling the disastrous consequences of past rebellions in northern Mali bringing out nothing but pure barbarity and total destruction.⁴⁰⁰ To explain how this precarious situation came about, it is argued that both

³⁹⁶ According to Le Républicain (Maliweb 31.10.2011d), for example, Imghad representatives explicitly support PSPSDN and benefit from its measures.

³⁹⁷ See particularly *Iyad Ag Ghaly*, an Ifoghas and former rebel leader of the “People’s Movement for the Liberation of Azawad” (MPA) who signed the National Pact and then supported the government in fighting other Tuareg rebel groups. During the 1990s, Ghaly had grown increasingly religious, gradually approaching extremist Islamist ideologies. Offering himself as an important intermediary in hostage negotiations in the 2000s, Ghaly became a relevant partner of the Malian government and later on a Malian diplomat (cultural attaché in Saudi Arabia, 2007-2010). Expelled by Saudi authorities in 2010 for interactions with suspected extremists, he returned to Mali and was again asked by the government to continue negotiations with AQMI and to intercede with Tuareg returnees from Libya. On the other side, *El Hadj Ag Gamou*, an Imghad and former rebel leader of “Revolutionary Liberation Army of Azawad” (ARLA) who integrated his units into Mali’s security forces in 1996 and later became a loyal colonel of the Malian military (see L’Indépendent/Maliweb 20.10.2011d; Le Combat/Maliweb 22.10.2011a; Le 22 Septembre/Maliweb 12.01.2012b). In this context, media accounts also speculate on which of the two former rebel factions may first join AQMI (see Le Prétoire/Maliweb 22.12.2011a).

³⁹⁸ In this context, the tribal leader of the Kounta, an ethnic group of Arab origin living in Northern Mali, declares that the Kounta will continue to support peace and security in Mali and, thus, will definitely not provoke any kind of armed conflict (see Le Combat/Maliweb 16.11.2011c).

³⁹⁹ One year after the foundation of MNA, on November 1, 2011, pro independence marches take place in all three capitals of the Northern regions, Kidal, Gao and Timbuktu (see El Watan/Maliweb 1.11.2011a).

⁴⁰⁰ To substantiate their assessment, some articles pick up quotations from *Dying for Azalai*, a book published in 2010 and written by *Noumon Ben Diakité*. The author witnessed past rebellions in northern Mali and portrays their

the National Pact and the Algiers Accord included a fatal waiver of sovereignty on the part of the Malian central state. Interpreted as a kind of political withdrawal, particularly the demilitarisation of the northern regions is thus presented as being one of the main reasons for insecurity at that time.⁴⁰¹ However, media accounts also put long-term foreign interferences into play: On the one hand, Mali gets criticised for its ongoing laxism concerning the fight against terror by Western countries (see *Le 22 Septembre/Maliweb* 18.01.2012d); on the other hand, the MNLA is able to unaffectedly maintain an office in Paris (see *L'Indicateur du Renouveau/Maliweb* 18.01.2012a). Furthermore,

“The European Union [...] has pursued its plan of destroying and destructuring Northern Mali for a long time. The Tuareg rebellion and its offspring, drug trafficking and the presence of AQMI, are created by politics of Western, especially European countries.” (*Le Potentiel/Maliweb* 29.11.2011e)

“Whenever insecurity assumes shape in the region, one gets the impression that France can be found behind this situation and, moreover, that oil in the region stimulates the voracious appetite of Westerners.” (*Le Combat/Maliweb* 19.10.2011a)

Besides such accusations, media coverage during this phase gets increasingly dominated by explicit criticism against the government and the president who had not been able to adequately face the growing crisis in the north in the preceding years and, therefore, had been continuously losing consent among a majority of Malians (see *Mali Demain/Maliweb* 5.12.2011a; *Lafia Révélateur/Maliweb* 7.12.2011c). Although ATT's intention to preserve his heritage of a president of peaceful dialogue by the end of the term can be seen as understandable, the seriousness of the situation would require a strategy of a heavy hand against old and new threats (AQMI, drug trafficking, returnees from Libya, citizens' militias, MNLA). From this point of view, further concessions would only instigate a civil war like conflict following the Iraqi example. This is presented as an assessment in media coverage that is also shared by *Ibrahim Boubacar Keïta*, regarded as a ATT's potential successor in office.⁴⁰²

In sum, according to the analysis of the media coverage's temporal dimension in phase III, the foundation of the MNLA and its claims are presented as a pure provocation when related to concessions made to northern populations in the last decades. In this context, ATT's answers to the crisis – accelerating development efforts via PSPSDN, pursuing a strategy of dialogue and welcome towards returnees from Libya, and implementing a territorial and administrative reorganisation⁴⁰³ – are not seen as convincing: the president is no longer given credit

disastrous consequences by illustrating personal life stories of people subsisting on the salt caravan from Taoudenni to Timbuktu. In Tamasheq, the salt caravan is called “Azalai”.

⁴⁰¹ In this sense, considering the peace agreements as structural causes of insecurity in the north is a repeated standpoint in media reports (see e.g. *L'Essor/Maliweb* 4.11.2011b; *L'Inter de Bamako/Maliweb* 22.11.2011b; *Le Zénith Balé/Maliweb* 10.12.2011d; *Le Prétoire/Maliweb* 12.01.2012a).

⁴⁰² See *Le Prétoire/Maliweb* (5.12.2011b), *Lafia Révélateur/Maliweb* (7.12.2011c) and *Waati/Maliweb* (8.12.2011b). Nota bene: Ibrahim Boubacar Keïta served as president of the National Assembly of Mali from 2002 to 2007. In 2013, he was elected as president of Mali.

⁴⁰³ According to ATT's plan, Mali should overcome colonial partitions of its territory by adapting administrative and territorial units to different sections of the population, for example by creating new and smaller regions to bring administration nearer to the population.

for controlling the situation of the north which had been neglected for years and, at that point in time, reaches an explosive point.

Finally, in view of the temporal dimension of the analysed documents, INGO reports present a rather short but nuanced assessment. On the one hand, as, for example, FES publications show, it is recognised that the Malian government pursues a long-term interest to seek for a constructive resolution of the situation in the north which is documented by a number of concrete measures over the years:

“Mali is permanently working on resolving the old Tuareg conflict. The installation of Tuareg units within the Malian army is a positive sign which shows the implementation of the 2006 peace agreement [i.e. Algiers Accord].” (FES June 2011: 5; brackets added R.B.)

On the other hand, discontent with democratic institutions in Mali had been steadily rising in the preceding 20 years, as an FES study on decreasing voter participation illustrates. Also, this insight gets confirmed by rather unsuccessful mediation efforts between civil society and the government supported by FES initiatives in the years before.⁴⁰⁴ Ultimately, according to a FES report which also gets picked up in media repeatedly, the situation should be taken very seriously since the 2012 elections are right on the doorstep. As these presidential elections combined with a vote on constitutional amendments are intended to be held against the background of a tense situation in the north and the country as a whole, the FES assesses the situation at this point as decisive moment in Mali’s democratic development (see FES October 2011; see also Le 22 Septembre/Maliweb 18.01.2012d).

6.4 The Social Dimension: United We Stand?

As demonstrated in previous chapters (6.2 and 6.3), within the discursive arena that is reflected by the text corpus, conflict topics and themes get differentiated from non-conflict ones (factual dimension).⁴⁰⁵ Likewise, the here and now of the conflict gets differentiated from non-conflicting parts of the past and the future (temporal dimension). As outlined above within the context of the Maidan protests (see beginning of chapter 5.4), considering the evolution of the Malian conflict as a conflict system in its social dimension means approaching the text corpus providing that conflict identities are constituted within communication itself and thus undergo an evolution. Recalling Luhmann (1984: 426-436; see chapter 4.1), identities are understood as stable

⁴⁰⁴ A few years in succession, the FES organised conferences on security and democratic governance in the Sahelian zone. These conferences included participants from governments *and* civil society, as the last one on a grand scale in 2009 showed. Media reports, too, refer to INGO activities (see Le Malien/Maliweb 17.12.2011).

⁴⁰⁵ The chapter heading makes recourse to Mali’s motto taken from its national anthem: “United we stand. One people, one goal, one faith.” (see also quotation at the beginning of chapter 6.1).

structures of expectation appearing in regard to four interconnected layers: persons, roles, programmes and norms.

As the analysis reveals, the text corpus, at different points in time, includes different references, for instance, to members of the Tuareg community [persons] such as potential “rebels” or even “enemies” of the Malian state [roles] pursuing their goal of “autonomy” or “independence” [programmes] in order to make “the right to self-determination” a reality or to “liberate the oppressed people of Azawad” [norms]. The synopsis section (chapter 6.5) draws on these layers in greater detail. However, in preparation for this, the following sections build on an examination of how discursive addresses got differentiated and repeatedly actualised through the conflict discourse.

Phase I (Nov 2010 – Aug 2011)

As mentioned in the chapters above, the beginning of phase I is marked by the foundation of the MNA. The founding declaration expresses a certain kind of pioneering spirit by highlighting the fact that the MNA is a political organisation which, for the first time, claims to represent the three northern regions including all ethnic groups and to lead the “legitimate resistance of the peaceful people of Azawad” (MNA 1.11.2010). In phase I, MNA representatives see themselves as Malian citizens who do not claim independence but more autonomy within the Malian state including a true implementation of democratic rights, especially concerning freedom of expression:

“Long live Mali, long live the Malian motto [i.e. ‘United We Stand’], and long live freedom of expression!” (MNA 2.11.2010; brackets added R.B.)

In this regard, releases emphasise that the MNA represents a lawful organisation pursuing legal activities. In addition, as MNA sources hold, the MNA emerged from an initial congress in Timbuktu on October 31/November 1, 2010, that had been approved by Malian authorities. Furthermore, the arbitrary detention of congress organisers in the aftermath is clearly seen as compromising Malian laws (see chapter 6.2/phase I/November 2010). Thus, the MNA presents itself as adhering to Malian rights and promoting universal values of democracy and the rule of law (see MNA 17.11.2010). To address potential supporters, MNA statements highlight that all inhabitants of Azawad, irrespective of their ethnic background, are called upon to join the political fight of the MNA.⁴⁰⁶ These statements also attach great importance to present the MNA as an entirely new organisation founded by a younger generation of well-educated Azawadians with international experience who are determined to get over the “unsuccessful bungle” of older generations who had poorly tried to stand for Azawad (see MNA 11.11.2010a).

In phase I, according to the analysed text corpus, there is hardly any reaction in the government’s communication dealing with the MNA. At the same time, the president, its government as well as Malian state institutions in general are presented as a monolith, represented by ATT as a person. Accordingly, PSPSDN gets introduced as ATT’s plan against growing insecurity in the Sahelian zone without any alternative (see e.g. GovMali 24.11.2010).

⁴⁰⁶ However, as MNA releases also show, approaching the target group in these documents oscillates between addressing the Tuareg (alone) and addressing the population of northern Mali as a whole (see e.g. MNA 7.11.2010; 11.11.2010a).

As it has been outlined earlier, media coverage represents a kind of projection surface. In the case study on Mali, this surface reflects observations of communication both by the government and by opposing voices, especially from Northern Mali, which can help to gather the process of emerging and changing identities in conflict. Now, a common feature of the analysed media reports is that the political contradiction that stepped forward by the foundation of the MNA straightaway refreshes and thus reproduces long-known patterns of contrast in coverage, such as Northern vs. Southern populations, underdeveloped vs. developed regions, and, not least, loyal to the regime and, based on the experiences in the past, potential rebels. In this context, headlines like “Birth of the MNA in Timbuktu: New rebellion or sabre rattling?” (Le 22 Septembre/Maliweb 4.11.2010a) or “The National Movement of Azawad: Conspiracy against the Republic” (L’Aube/Maliweb 11.11.2010b) come about at the beginning of phase I after the publication of MNA’s founding statement. Therein, an imminent rebellion is announced. Also, the MNA gets presented as an organisation controlled by external actors and aiming at the destabilisation of Mali. In this context, following the analysed media accounts the MNA, encouraged by international attention, already calls for an international conference on the status of Azawad (see L’Aube/Maliweb 11.11.2010b; Le 22 Septembre/Maliweb 25.11.2010a). Other media pieces, however, focus on the MNA as a genuine Malian foundation which emerged due to the significant concessions (e.g. as to demilitarisation of the north) made by the government during the peace process.

Beyond these first impulsive reactions to the emergence of the MNA, media releases particularly reproduce an already existing dichotomy with many variants in the discourse: north versus south. Whereas “southern Mali” gets rarely presented as such, “northern Mali” represents an omnipresent figure of speech (see below examples from the beginning of the investigation period/ phase I):

- PSPSDN, presented as a national programme to promote peace, security and development *in northern Mali* (Le 22 Septembre/Maliweb 1.11.2010a);
- *the north* as plaything of Western interests (in raw materials)⁴⁰⁷ and extremist groups (see Le Républicain/Maliweb 3.11.2010);
- *the north* as a precarious tribal territory where even factions of the same tribe conduct armed conflicts (see Lafia Révélateur/Maliweb 8.11.2010a);
- a growing number of kidnappings of Malian and foreign nationals *in the north* by terrorists and/or other armed groups (see Le Républicain/Maliweb 8.11.2010b; Le Républicain/Maliweb 22.11.2010; Maliweb 29.11.2010);
- *the north* as safe haven for AQMI which is considered an ideological and military threat; *the north* as a region from which international development partners and terrorists withdraw since it is an area of operation for international military engagement (see Le 22 Septembre/Maliweb 11.11.2010a; Lafia Révélateur/Maliweb 15.11.2010; Maliweb 24.11.2010);
- the situation in *the north* makes whole Mali a “hostage” (see Maliweb 25.11.2010b).

Analysed documents in all source groups in phase I exhibit a mostly negative connotation of the north and the population of Azawad respectively seen in an implicit opposition to the rest of Mali. One striking feature is that government documents tend to use an additional wording

⁴⁰⁷ According to Le 22 Septembre (11.11.2010a), already in November 2010, a considerable number of French, Canadian and US military advisors are based in Mali in order to train the Malian military in anti-terror strategies.

(later on adopted by the media) which further broadens the geographical focus. In this sense, the texts describe security problems and challenges in “the Sahelo-Saharan region” or “the Sahelo-Saharan strip” (see e.g. GovMali 25.12.2010d; 3.01.2011; 16.02.2011a) and, at the same time, underline a common responsibility of all neighbouring countries and the imperative of cross-border cooperation:

“The president revisits the security situation in the Sahelo-Saharan zone. He again insisted on the necessary cooperation between the countries [in the region] in order to overcome insecurity in this region which is exposed to plagues such as terrorism, drugs trafficking and other illicit activities.” (GovMali 16.12.2010)

As it is pointed out at various points, the military and other security forces are attached vital importance to fight these “plagues”, for example when ATT frequently and publicly honors the heroic dedication of the military in the past (see e.g. GovMali 26.12.2010; 31.01.2011b). Likewise, for the future, ATT intends to use the military as an executing instrument to guarantee peace, security and development, as intended within the context of PSPSDN which is essentially associated with the president personally (see GovMali 7.02.2011d; 16.02.2011a).

In MNA statements during phase I, too, the troublesome north appears as a prominent figure of speech, slightly modified within the wording of a discriminated and marginalised Azawad. Here, Azawad and its population gets often equated with the Tuareg while other ethnic groups based in northern Mali, do not appear in the first place. This becomes obvious in a public MNA appeal to the Moroccan king asking for “protection of his threatened brothers and sisters” in Mali while referring to the common Berber or Amazigh kinship (MNA 20.12.2010).⁴⁰⁸

Media accounts, too, associate the “precarious north” with its population, especially the Tuareg, in two different ways: On the one hand, they appreciate that Tuareg ex-rebels support the US, France and Malian security forces in tracking hostages held by AQMI and fighting against Islamist groups in the region.⁴⁰⁹ On the other hand, other reports suggest the opposite by referring to Tuareg militants, such as Bahanga, who continue to fight against the Malian state, as it could be witnessed by the end of December when several Malian soldiers died due to alleged rebel landmines (see AFP/Maliweb 10.12.2010b). Also, Tuareg fighters are accused of having a share in the profits from kidnapping activities (see *Le Potentiel*/Maliweb 21.12.2010a) as well as willingly recruiting new AQMI fighters from within their own ranks (see *L’Expression*/Maliweb 26.12.2010). By and large, however, the Wikileaks documents (see also chapter 6.2/phase I/December 2010) have the strongest impact on the character of media coverage since they pave the way for a growing thread of reports critical of the government. Based on

⁴⁰⁸ Nota bene: “Berber” is often used as an umbrella term for indigenous ethnic groups in North Africa and West Africa, including Morocco and Mali, having a common origin. Since “Berber” traces back to the Latin appellation “barbarians” it is nowadays rejected as a devaluating term imposed by others. Rather, members of the Berber ethnic groups call themselves “Amazigh”, which also refers to the common origin of their language. However, a large part of the kinship members (especially those living in Morocco) had lost their mother tongue in the course of centuries in favour of Arabic (see Shoup 2011: 53-58). For a map of a simplified spatial distribution of ethnic groups in Mali see Appendix A.3.2.

⁴⁰⁹ As provided within the framework of the Algiers Accord, Tuareg units had indeed joined the fight against terrorism, for example against the Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat (French acronym in use: GSPC), a terrorist faction founded in Algeria in 1998 during the Algerian civil war. In 2007, GSPC merged in the newly founded AQMI (see Maliweb 7.12.2010; *Le Temps d’Algérie*/Maliweb 27.12.2010; see also MNA 6.01.2011a).

Wikileaks information, accusing the government of playing a “double game” by only pretending to fight terror while cooperating with AQMI terrorists secretly is taken particularly serious:

“The authorities of Bamako [are accused of] collaborating with AQMI while playing on two fields: First, by trying to discredit the Tuareg by assimilating them with Islamists and, moreover, by trading with AQMI in order to assure a certain percentage of eventual ransom money.” (Maliweb 7.12.2010)

“The population is stunned as never before about its highest authorities playing a double game concerning their engagement in fighting AQMI which, at the same time, take up quarters in the North of our country.” (Le Potentiel/Maliweb 21.12.2010a)

Other leaked information published by the media affirms that US diplomats consider Malian authorities not only as incapable but also unwilling to effectively fight AQMI. Therefore, US military aid for Mali could possibly be seen as a bad investment (see Le Matinal/Maliweb 24.12.2010a). At the same time, some media still provide a favourable platform for the presentation of the government’s justificatory remarks:

“No country can succeed on one’s own in eradicating threats like terrorism, especially in a region where borders are rather porous. [...] Today, the US and its allies face an acid test in countries like Afghanistan where Al Qaeda gives them a hard fight since many years. We need to have the same alliance against AQMI in the Sahelo-Saharan strip.” (Le Matin/Maliweb 9.12.2010)

Against this background of an increasingly split media coverage, the FES – highly recognised for its support of Malian civil society from INGOs’ side – offers a broad insight in its annual Media Barometer. The FES assessment points out that there is an extraordinary pluralism in the field of Malian newspapers, radio and television, backed up by a clear legal basis of freedom of speech and press.⁴¹⁰ At the same time, the FES report addresses a number of restrictions concerning these fundamental rights in the actual practice of media work (see FES 2010):

- journalists while doing their work are harassed, intimidated or even life-threatened, for example by religious groups but also by state actors;
- sources do not enjoy complete legal protection;
- there are no laws regulating competition in the media sector;
- and no laws penalising political interference;
- basic journalistic principles such as accurateness and impartiality are often neglected;
- self-censorship due to social and economic reasons is a common practice;
- there is too much “event journalism” and not enough journalistic background research and reportages.

In sum, according to the FES, there is a growing deficit of moral integrity among Malian journalists and press organs.

⁴¹⁰ In particular, according to the FES, the radio section of Malian media develops at a great speed: 498 licences have been distributed, 300 of them broadcasting in different regional languages, with the result that nearly the whole Malian population is well provided with radio service. In addition, as the basic infrastructure in Mali steadily grows, internet access and web usage develops positively, too. In this context, newspapers, radio and television are boosting factors since they provide their programmes online in parallel (see FES 2010: 6).

In the course of phase I, MNA documents show an increasing effort to counter one-sided representations of the MNA as an organisation of Tuareg only in government and media publications. Hence, it is pointed out that the MNA declares itself as an organisation representing “the people of Azawad” as a whole and embodying its desire to

“[...] to be the framer of its future by taking its matters in hand, for a definite and sustainable solution of its problems in economic, political or security affairs.” (MNA 20.01.2011)

Moreover, further statements reject any accusation, especially against the Tuareg, of being involved in terrorist activities as a deliberate disinformation (see MNA 11.01.2011; 20.01.2011; see also chapter 6.2/phase I/January 2011).

Based on the analysis of the text corpus, three incidences can be seen as especially important with a view to the evolution of conflict identities (i.e. persons, roles, programmes and norms): (1) The Flame of Peace ceremony on February 7-8, (2) the MNA congress on April 15-17 and (3) the reaction to returnees from Libya against the background of dealing with AQMI terrorism.

(1) For Malian authorities, the Flame of Peace ceremony on February 7-8 in Kidal is of central importance as a symbol and ritual of the peace process that is intended to forge a common identity, especially in the anniversary year. From the government’s perspective, participants of this ceremony, be they representatives of the Malian government or former rebels, show their commitment to the peace process. And what’s more, as it is announced, the population perceives the ceremony as

“a victory of peace, achieved by the people of Kidal who are definitely determined to close the sad chapter of armed conflict.” (GovMali 9.02.2011)

Even though a majority of the population in the north supports the peace process, government voices point to the observation that “the former leader of the armed bandits, Ibrahim Ag Bahanga” and those supporting him still refuse the peace process, and, even worse, are held in high esteem by large parts of the population. At the same time, the “honourable values of the Tuareg warrior”, their culture and way of life rank among the most important basic Malian values (see GovMali 7.02.2011d; see also L’Indépendant/Maliweb 10.02.2011b). Concerning media coverage of the Flame of Peace, again, accounts are at least twofold (see also chapter 6.2/phase I/February 2011): Those sharing the government’s argument, appreciating the president’s authority and qualities, particularly as a former general, and praising the Malian policy (see e.g. Maliweb 10.02.2011c); and others, openly criticising ATT for his immoderate concessions to former rebels and demanding tougher action in the north (see e.g. L’Indicateur du Renouveau/ Maliweb 3.02.2011a; 8.02.2011a).

Reactions to the Flame of Peace ceremony from Tuareg youth groups published on MNA channels mirror these latter media voices. They show an obvious frustration about the government’s non-reaction to the offer of a political dialogue to resolve the situation (e.g. made by Bahanga’s ATNMC as early as November 2010) which is then used to justify the threat of resuming the armed conflict (see MNA 6.02.2011a). Yet, some MNA sources include efforts to counterbalance these rather young and Tuareg-dominated voices from Azawad

“The movement condemns the false political montage offered by the Malian president intended to delude the international community about the reality of the question of Azawad and to draw off the attention of Azawadiens from the true problem they have since 50 years which is the occupation.” (MNA 19.02.2011a)

These statements highlight that the MNA is determined to finish a struggle that had begun 50 years ago and to finally and *peacefully* fulfil the legitimate desire of a people of its own (see MNA 19.02.2011b; italics added).

(2) As presented earlier in chapters 6.2 and 6.3, the first national MNA congress held on April 15-17 represents a central reference point for a number of speech acts related to each other and showing elements of roles and programmes which make up conflict identities. In particular, the much-cited closing statement of the congress documents MNA’s main objective in black and white: the autonomy of the northern regions, not their independence, is meant as a “national project”, including “all sons and daughters of Azawad”, which means all ethnic groups of Azawad although Tuareg voices may have been the loudest ones before (see MNA 29.04.2011).

As if, at first glance, directly reacting to the first national MNA congress, ATT had the first meeting ever with Arab tribal leaders from all Northern regions on April 28. Even though, this meeting is welcomed in MNA sources (see e.g. MNA 29.04.2011), overall reactions remain highly sceptical since ATT does still not face up to MNA claims in general but turns towards claims of a specific ethnic groups only. Moreover, according to the MNA, this kind of privileging one group at the expense of others contradicts ATT’s earlier appeals to unity in diversity (see e.g. ATT’s Easter speech; GovMali 24.04.2011). According to media coverage, ATT assumes that the MNA represents a largely unknown, rather virtual and thus a hardly relevant organisation. A number of media releases do not share this implicit conclusion and warn their readers not to underestimate the MNA (see Le Combat/Maliweb 4.05.2011a; Lafia Révélateur 4.05.2011b; Le 22 Septembre/ Maliweb 5.05.2011b). Moreover, the MNA congress’ closing statement which calls Azawad a widely supported national project arouses media criticism in substance: Referring to interethnic rivalries and even armed conflict in northern Mali, for example between Peuls and Tuareg on land and livestock or between Tuareg and Arabs over water resources, a number of reports have doubts about the alleged broad backing of the MNA in Azawad’s population.⁴¹¹ As the following and other statement from tribal leaders repeatedly suggest (see also chapter 6.3), relations between tribes and ethnic groups have always been tense, in this situation more than ever.

“However, when the Arabs or other ethnic groups pressure us into a reaction, we will react with utmost rigour. The others are not the only ones possessing weapons.” (Le 22 Septembre/Maliweb 18.04.2011a)

⁴¹¹ Media reports in April 2011 refer to two concrete incidences approving the latent and violence-prone conflict between ethnic groups in northern Mali: First, as it came out after a few weeks of investigation, on March 22, 2011, members of Peuls attacked a Malian military base in Ansongo in order to liberate one of their combatants (who was imprisoned because of illegal possession of arms). For several weeks, however, it had been tried to lay the blame for the attack at the feet of the Tuareg (see L’Indicateur du Renouveau/ Maliweb 4.04.2011). Second, reports deal with increasing violent confrontations between Arabs and Tuaregs in Temberemtt/ Gossi (Gao region) over water resources in early April (see Le 22 Septembre/ Maliweb 18.04.2011a).

According to *Le Combat/Maliweb* (21.04.2011a), AQMI threats against a single ethnic group, for example against the Arabs (by means of a pamphlet distributed in Timbuktu and neighbourhoods) breeds additional discord and thus an incentive to rearm. Further media accounts can be characterised as fuelling the atmosphere, for example by continuously label the MNA cause as one of “independence” instead of autonomy (see e.g. *Lafia Révélateur/Maliweb* 27.04.2011f) or by imputing racist motives to the MNA as an organisation of light-skinned Berbers or Arabs against dark-skinned Africans (see above May 2011/*Le Prétoire/Maliweb* 3.05.2011c).

In contrast, by referring to the context of the Arab Spring, MNA voices claim to promote “an intellectual revolution of democratic values” and to bring it “to an end” (see MNA 5.03.2011; 15.07.2011). As mentioned earlier (see chapter 6.2/phase I/May 2011), from an MNA perspective, the time has come to move on from “50 years of endless rebellions” and to enter into a dialogue with the Malian government:

“We, the National Movement of Azawad, ask the Malian government [...] to organise a referendum in consultation with all structures of Azawad’s civil society and foreign partners. [Let us] give preference to the peaceful way of solving this crisis under best conditions and by preventing any aggression against Azawadians.” (MNA 25.05.2011)

However, as a precondition to enter a true dialogue, the MNA presses the Malian government to take over responsibility for the great sacrifice Azawad made in prior decades (see MNA 15.07.2011). In addition, the MNA shows itself convinced to be able to continue its “revolutionary work” within Azawad-wide structures while being guided by principles of democracy and hoping for international support to realise these democratic values in Azawad (see MNA 15.07.2011; 6.08.2011).

This taken into consideration, government announcements regarding the mid-term review of PSPSDN, which is very much considered to be a ATT project, can be read as a reaction to the MNA-proclaimed “intellectual revolution” backed up by international support (see *GovMali* 13.07.2011; 11.08.2011). Therefore, PSPSDN has especially been successful because of its massive international support:

“The head of state appreciated all actors involved in the execution of PSPSDN. In particular, he gave thanks to international development partners for their significant contribution.” (see *GovMali* 27.07.2011)

In an overall picture, phase I includes government statement that repeatedly present the Malian state institutions as credible and reliable by referring to external actors, such as international development organisations, which place great confidence in Malian authorities. On this, especially reports on the awarding of an international ethics price to ATT and other external appraisals for his policy of promoting human rights and Mali’s democratic development are obvious examples (see *GovMali* 18.04.2011; 21.04.2011; 29.04.2011b; 14.06.2011; 20.07.2011; 1.08.2011a).

(3) Beginning in March 2011, the topic of Libyan returnees becomes increasingly present; (self-)descriptions in all source groups make reference to it, particularly because it can be linked to the long-burning issue of growing insecurity in the light of AQMI terrorism. The Malian government, for example, does not want to be associated with alleged “Malian mercenaries” engaged in Libya, neither in the present nor in the past (see *GovMali* 5.03.2011b). Hence,

the government expresses a certain feeling of loyalty to those Malians who emigrated the country long ago and now should be given the possibility of a “safe return home” (GovMali 21.03.2011). As ATT points out in his Easter speech, here too, “unity in diversity is a superior interest of the nation” (GovMali 30.04.2011). On top of that, as often mentioned during phase I, the multicultural historical legacy and present has to be preserved under all circumstances (see GovMali 29.07.2011).

In MNA releases, too, right from the beginning, solidarity with Libyan returnees, being members of Tuareg tribes in their vast majority, is presented as a high value (see MNA 5.03.2011a/b). By putting themselves into the context of the Arab Spring, the MNA portrays solidarity with Libyan returnees as a reaction to the global “wind of change” which breaks “mental and emotional prisons” (MNA 17.04.2011). A few months later, MNA statements finally state that the “glimpse of a new era” and thus the time for change has come in Mali, too, and frame slogans like the following:

“The MNA is our choice, the peaceful intellectual and political struggle is our right, and Azawad is our home.” (MNA 15.07.2011)⁴¹²

As other statements suggest, this slogan and further messages are intended both to ensnare Libyan returnees and to induce Western governments and societies to support MNA’s democratic project (see MNA 16.07.2011). At the same time, the government, too, urgently and critically appeals to Western countries: it condemns the ongoing NATO aerial attacks on Libya and its catastrophic consequences for civilians and and complains about Libya’s neighbouring countries who reject refugees from Libya (see GovMali 28.06.2011).

In media coverage on the developments in Libya, the dominating voices are those focusing on threatening and dangerous scenarios of growing insecurity in Mali and the Sahelian zone due to a massive influx of ex-soldiers from Libya and their families, such as the following:

“When the Libyan revolution turned into a rebellion, Muammar Gaddafi opened arms depots and called all his supporters to provide themselves in order to combat insurgents. This is how mercenaries including Malians seized an substantial amount of weapons and ammunition [...] which has already entered Mali, particularly the north. To what purpose? To supply growing networks of drug traffickers in the Malian desert? For a new rebellion? For the benefit of AQMI? Or simply to hand them over to NGO in exchange for some CFA-Franc? We know nothing about it!” (Lafia Révélateur/Maliweb 6.04.2011)

In this context, reports show the major concern that Libyan returnees would find themselves new areas of activity within the framework of fragile statehood in the north, such as drug trafficking and supporting AQMI (see Nouvelle Libération/ Maliweb 15.04.2011; Le Combat/ Maliweb 18.04.2011b). Some media remarks consider the Libyan developments as a root cause of Mali’s destabilisation (see L’Indicateur du Renouveau/ Maliweb 29.04.2011a) that has made the MNA a beneficiary:

“Why did the initiators of this movement choose this precise point in time to revive the desire for self-determination of the peoples of Azawad? Because a

⁴¹² In its French original, this slogan rhymes and can thus easily be memorised: “Le MNA, c’est notre Choix, la lutte politique pacifique et intellectuelle c’est notre Droit, et l’Azawad, c’est notre Toit!”

sufficient amount of arms has come from Libya?” (Lafia Révélateur/Maliweb 27.04.2011f)

A number of media comments, however, present AQMI as the major threat: Therefore, terrorists do most probably have surface-to-air missiles at their disposal, a circumstance that alarms both countries in West Africa and Western powers (see Reuters/Maliweb 11.05.2011). According to the Malian council of ministers by the end of May cited by the media, new movements promoting autonomy in the north (i.e. MNA) do not pose the primary threat but terrorism (see *Le 22 Septembre*/Maliweb 21.05.2011). Moreover, especially AQMI's methods are seen as deeply troubling: people are forced to quote the Kuran in arbitrary inspections in the streets; teachers and other public servants are offered triple salaries if they declare to support AQMI; new supporters are deliberately recruited among all ethnic groups and tribes – and this all the more so as the government is said to have no means to counter these activities:

“The actual strategie of the Malian state seems to be: As long as you don't attack neither my civilian population nor my military, I close my eyes before you.” (Lafia Révélateur/Maliweb 26.05.2011)

In sum, notwithstanding a certain success in pushing back the advance of AQMI on the government's side⁴¹³, sceptical media comments prevail by the end of phase I. In the light of Bahanga's death, accusations from the media against the government reach a new peak: ATT is presented as an accomplice of terror since he had granted privileges for Bahanga who at least temporarily coquetted with Islamists (see *L'Indépendent*/ Maliweb 29.08.2011). Against the background of these frequent accusations, ATT occasionally gets cited in the media as distancing himself by saying that AQMI members could not be seen as true Muslims since they are involved in kidnapping, drug trafficking and mercenarism (see *Le Républicain*/ Maliweb 10.08.2011) and referring to other countries which face similar challenges with transnational terrorism (see RFI/ Maliweb 27.08.2011).

The analysed INGO sources clearly confirm the sceptical view expressed in media coverage. According to their regular reports, AQMI establishes new military bases in the north while at the same time incidences of intimidating civilians and kidnappings by AQMI increase (see e.g. ICG 1.05.2011, 1.07.2011). Following an FES assessment, the Malian government does not show any political will to face this development. The international community, in turn, is presented as being obsessed with AQMI terrorism while ignoring latent interethnic conflicts and not having a grandstand view on the region as a whole:

“Western support, to date, has concentrated on strengthening the capacities of security forces in the countries of central Sahara which has not permitted to resolve the complex security situation. Only an inclusive approach taking the complexity of the conflict system into account and based on regional and international mechanisms will permit to achieve a truly peaceful situation in northern Mali and central Sahara.” (FES June 2011: 5)

⁴¹³ As, for example, AFP (19.07.2011) reports, the advancing AQMI has been fought back by the Malian army supported by the Mauretanian military in Wagadou Forest near the Mauretanian-Malian border. This joint military operation resulted in 17 deaths (15 AQMI fighters, 2 Mauretanian soldiers). Moreover, as AFP adds, the Malian military repeatedly engaged in emergency food assistance for the northern regions.

At the end of phase I, INGO reports, too, express deep worries about “a danger of destabilisation due to hundreds of returnees from Libya” (ICG 1.09.2011) or even see the democratic development of Mali at risk (see FES August 2011).

Phase II (Aug 2011 – Oct 2011)

In phase II, conflict communication in its social dimension can be followed up along three reference topics: (1) unity and division, (2) a more present state, and (3) solidarity.

(1) Taking the widespread perception of an escalating civil war in neighbouring Libya as a starting point, the analysed government documents in phase II not only stress the Malian government’s support for the “legitimate claims of the Libyan people” but also the importance of unity and integrity of Libya for Mali’s stability. Using the metaphor of the Niger river that geographically unites south and north and historically figures the common lifeline of big and diverse empires, official voices firmly state that Mali’s unity can never be up for discussion (see GovMali 6.09.2011; 17.10.2011). In marked contrast, MNA statements pay tribute to Bahanga for his exemplary commitment to the cause of Azawad’s unity and self-determination (see MNA 28.08.2011). Comments on Bahanga’s death from the media’s side, however, convey a certain feeling of satisfaction, especially because Bahanga had always been characterised as an outlaw who gets away unpunished with divisive and violent actions against Mali’s unity (see e.g. L’Indépendant/Maliweb 29.08.2011).⁴¹⁴

Yet, Malian authorities, too, are confronted with the accusation of deliberately advancing cleavages and division. According to representatives of Arab groups, the government acts in an amateurish and divisive manner, especially concerning a fair participation of ethnic groups in PSPSDN:

“[...] the programme had a bad start because Koulouba [i.e. the building of the presidency] was once again blinded by its amateurism, its laxism and its divisive spirit. [...] Under no circumstances, communitarian and regionalist considerations should intervene in the implementation of this programme, since PSPSDN belongs to Mali and not the benefitting localities.” (Lafia Révélateur/Maliweb 2.09.2011)

The MNA, by the time one year old, is considered to jeopardise Mali’s unity in most media accounts. This becomes particularly obvious in reports about highly symbolic public actions, such as hoisting the Azawad flag on an administration building in Ansongo (Gao region) by young MNA activists which was immediately interpreted as a strike against state authority (see Le Républicain/Maliweb 16.09.2011). Government announcements do usually not pick up these kinds of minor incidences. Instead, to react and send messages, they use occasions such as the inauguration of the China-Mali Friendship Bridge across Niger in Bamako (see chapter 6.2/phase II/September 2011) when ATT quoted Isaac Newton within the context of international understanding but addressed to his own population, especially in the north:

“We build too much walls and not enough bridges” (GovMali 22.09.2011)

⁴¹⁴ Among the analysed government documents, there is *no* comment similarly denouncing Bahanga. In contrast, as Le Combat (Maliweb 19.09.2011) reports, a few weeks later, a government delegation is sent to the north in order to do a visit of condolence to Bahanga’s family, to establish contact to his faction and to convince them from being loyal to the government as a better choice.

At the same time, further media accounts give prominence to the historical observation that the danger of division or, in other words, precarious unity represents an ancient topic. Conflict-laden rivalries between hierarchically organised tribal societies and their economic systems (sedentarism vs. nomadism) have always been passed on (see *Le Combat/Maliweb* 23.09.2011). A topic of growing attention in the media in phase II: religious authorities increasingly appear as potential reconcilers. By referring to the common values of Islam – understanding, equality, solidarity and mutual help – media voices thus address religion as a remedy to build bridges between north and south or between ethnic groups in the north (see *Lafia Révélateur/ Maliweb* 28.09.2011).

(2) The perception of northern Mali as a territory where state structures are not as present as they should be is a common thread in the course of the conflict discourse. At one point or another, government statements, MNA/MNLA announcements, media accounts and INGO reports qualify fragile statehood as a key problem of the north. The question of how to react to this situation, of course, is answered in different ways depending on different perceptions about the causes. MNA statements, for example, steadily complain about a growing militarisation of northern Mali disguised as development efforts via PSPSDN but still threatening and intimidating the population (see MNA 2.09.2011). These perceptions are also bluntly published in media accounts:

“This is a project of militarisation of the whole region. There will be military training camps and fightings between Western powers and AQMI. And a consequence, our population will come under attack from both sides. We thus risk to have collateral damage which brings our movement to refuse PSPSDN.” (*Le Combat/Maliweb* 19.09.2011)

At the same time, government releases demonstrate a striking continuity concerning ATT’s firm beliefs: peace and security represent the backbone of any form of development; poverty and underdevelopment is not an inevitable fate; and, northern Mali is well on the way because state is coming back (see *GovMali* 21.09.2011). Nevertheless, the fact that drug traffickers and terrorists can still easily attack military bases, for example on October 2 in Abeïbara, nourish media speculation on insufficient communication between the Malian government and the Malian military and, in the light of an increasing number of incidences showing a loss of control, about the general inappropriateness of a strategy that aims at bringing the state back in by measures of security policy (see *Le Prétoire/Maliweb* 6.10.2011a).

Taken together, a number of passages across all text sources in phase II show references to the goal of a comprehensive and present state, especially in the domains of security, economic development, health care, education and basic infrastructure. On the one hand, media accounts mirror government voices that are convinced about PSPSDN being a working instrument to reach this goal, as, for example, the cue to the concept of “development poles” (*Le Républicain/Maliweb* 18.10.2011) illustrates.⁴¹⁵ On the other hand, at this point, there are still those media reports expressing the view that there is not much success in building up state structures

⁴¹⁵ In this context, media reports quote the director of PSPSDN, *Mohamed Ag Erlaf*, who reacts to the accusation of having established an unfair participation of ethnic groups in PSPSDN (see above e.g. *Lafia Révélateur/ Maliweb* 2.09.2011). According to Erlaf, PSPSDN pays particular attention to the principle of transparency and does not allow any privileging of regions, localities or companies, or, in short, any form of discrimination (*Le Prétoire/ Maliweb* 6.10.2011a).

in the north because Malian authorities had been tolerating opposed developments that led to the foundation of a new and even more militant organisation, the MNLA, and made AQMI increasingly stronger (see e.g. L'Express/ Maliweb 21.10.2011c).

(3) At various points in the analysed text corpus, solidarity appears as a central signifier which conveys elements of relations between actors and thus evolving conflict identities. The MNA, for example, repeatedly presents itself as the only representation of the people of Azawad and complains about UN institutions which do not show enough solidarity with MNA's fight for freedom and democracy as well as against decades-long marginalisation and oppression or, in short, against any form of (neo-)colonialism (see MNA 13.09.2011). Elsewhere, media reports quote a message of solidarity from Malian Chamanamas members (i.e. one of the Tuareg tribes) to tribe members among Libyan returnees:

“The Chamanamas prepare for receiving their brothers from Libya. [...] The Chamanamas community engages in strengthening social cohesion among the community in particular and with all other Malian communities in general.” (Le 22 Septembre/Maliweb 26.09.2011)

With regards to returnees from Libya in general, some media articles speak of a good supply situation and security environment, at least in Timbuktu region, and emphasise the great deal of solidarity on the part of Malian authorities (see Lafia Révélateur/ Maliweb 5.10.2011). Others outline that refugees from Libya who were promised comprehensive solidarity by the Malian government, once arrived in northern Mali, feel disillusioned, unwelcome and mistreated (see Le Combat/ Maliweb 10.10.2011a).⁴¹⁶ According to RFI (Maliweb 16.10.2011), observations even suggest that reception, treatment and supply of refugees happens in a differentiating way, which means, for example, that it makes a considerable difference if refugees are members of Ifoghas, Imghad or Chamanamas (i.e. Tuareg tribes).⁴¹⁷ Finally, the government states that its “helping hand policy” towards returnees from Libya can be taken for granted and, at the same time, is guided by the principle of reciprocity: solidarity with refugees in exchange for loyalty to the Malian state (see GovMali 24.10.2011).

In sum, as the analysis of phase II within the context of these three reference points (unity and division; a more present state; solidarity) shows, communication conveys the impression of missed chances:

“The National Movement of Azawad, while giving preference to a peaceful political way, reiterates its appeal to the Malian government to respond to its claims [...]. The MNA will grant itself the right to use all necessary means to implement the right to self-determination of the people of Azwad.” (MNA 4.10.2011)

⁴¹⁶ As more and more units of Libyan ex-soldiers including their families reach Mali (such as colonel *Enwaɣne Ag Emakadeye*'s unit including 700 civilians), AFP (Maliweb 12.10.2011) and Le Prétoire (Maliweb 13.10.2011) report that Malian humanitarian aid leaves much to be desired. Moreover, according to these sources, since nobody wants to make an ex-Libyan military unit an enemy, a quick integration would be desirable.

⁴¹⁷ As HRW (4.09.2011) adds, ethnically connoted discrimination between light-skinned and dark-skinned ethnic groups is accentuated by the massive influx of light-skinned Libyan refugees. To top it all, according to Lafia Révélateur (Maliweb 28.09.2011), national and international aid agencies find themselves in a kind of competitive situation since they quarrel about where to locate best development investments.

Especially as this “last and final appeal” of the MNA (see above), including both the offer to engage in dialogue and the threat to take other measures, comes out, the militance in conflict communication from all sides seems to reach a new level.

Phase III (Oct 2011 – January 17, 2012)

October 2011 – the foundation

The representation of the conflict discourse in its social dimension in phase III follows in four monthly sections, beginning on October 16 after the foundation of the MNLA. At this point, on October 16, as the “last and final appeal” of the MNA provokes no reaction not to mention a recognition on the part of the government, MNA leaders present themselves forced to set up the MNLA “in order to create a future for the people of Azawad” (see MNLA 16.10.2011). Furthermore, this step is presented as necessary since only the new and broader movement would be able to help the people of Azawad out of their state of emergency and thus to make their liberation possible. This liberation could also take place with the help of Libyan ex-soldiers and deserters from the Malian military, as MNLA spokesman of the political bureau, *Hama Ag Sid-Ahmed*, clarifies later on from a Tuareg perspective:

“The Tuareg have adapted themselves by creating the MNLA. A new dynamic has taken form in relation to the military due to the influx of Tuareg soldiers from the Libyan and Malian army.” (MNLA 30.10.2011)

In addition, the MNLA declares to make comprehensive efforts in order to collect the many weapons in circulation before they would fall into the hands of bandits and terrorists. Also, its leaders maintain their offer to enter into a serious dialogue with the government. At the same time, as the same MNLA statements show, Malian officials are once again accused of secretly supporting terrorists and playing a double game (see MNLA 30.10.2011).

Following the analysed media releases, UN observers confirm that the most imminent danger in West Africa arises from the huge amount of weapons circulating and partly falling into the hands of AQMI and drug traffickers (see AFP/Maliweb 17.10.2011). Other media pieces once more allege that Western powers, especially France, seem to be interested in fuelling insecurity in northern Mali as part of a neocolonial strategy to ensure their share of Malian gas and oil (see *Le Combat*/Maliweb 19.10.2011a; see also chapter 6.2/phase I/January 2011). Besides the foundation of the MNLA and its declared goals, further media reports in October focus on Libyan returnees: For example, colonel *Hassan Ag Mehdi*, liaison officer within the office of the prime minister and Chamanamas member, goes on media record as saying that returnees immediately have to be taken care of and that, ultimately, “Mali will be defended to the last drop of blood” (*Le 22 Septembre*/Maliweb 20.10.2011a). Also, several reports assume that even in Kidal region where a new rebellion is rated as being most likely only a minority would support it (see *L’Indépendent*/Maliweb 20.10.2011d). Likewise, *Wadossane Ag Simitala*, a former member of parliament from Kidal, speaks out in an interview:

“The independence of Azawad is too complicated since each groups only aspires its individual interests. The arabs don’t like instability because their businesses won’t develop. The Peuls and the Songhay are very present within the administration. All these classes and ethnic groups won’t accept the independence of Azawad. If this continues as far as a referendum (like in South Soudan), Arabs

and Songhay will vote no and more than half of the Tamasheq will do so, too.”
(Le Combat/Maliweb 22.10.2011a)

INGO reports, in turn, do still not mention MNLA as a source of instability. Instead, an imminent alliance between returnees from Libya and AQMI is presented as the most important danger. ICG, for example, discerns a connection between 400 ex-soldiers arriving in Mali and, shortly thereafter, an increasing number of attacks against state institutions in the very same northern district (see ICG 1.11.2011). According to a commentary on Maliweb (25.10.2011b), all of this takes place under the eyes of a lax government which is not able to control the borders, communicates poorly what happens and does little to stop the multiplication of dangerous forces equipped with Libyan weapons. Indeed, against the background of daily reports about new arrivals from Libya having lost their mother tongue, living in severely restricted areas and being shepherded by government delegations and abundant food supply, suspicion and fear grows (see Le Combat/Maliweb 26.10.2011). In this context, for example, a delegation of Imghad returnees from Libya express their loyalty to the Malian state within the framework of special visit to the president in Bamako (see Mali Demain/Maliweb 28.10.2011c). What is more, according to Le Pretoire (Maliweb 31.10.2011b), groups of returnees from Libya with different tribal backgrounds veritably court the government, i.e. for money and positions. Despite a certain success in receiving and enclosing Libyan returnees, a worsening of the security situation is expected:

“I am indeed in fear for peace and stability in this region. [...] If [the Malian state] handles the situation badly, we have open war and we will suffer. There is a huge amount of weapons already circulating. The Malian state established a programme to collect these weapons. If weapons from Libya now come in on top, I am deeply worried about my country.” (*Ighlass Ag Oufene*, ex-governor of Kidal, as cited in Le Combat/Maliweb 22.10.2011a)

Following Oufene in the above-cited interview with newspaper Le Combat, there is even reason to fear an open war. Other newspaper articles refer to the assessment of the situation by the FES which says that AQMI should be considered the predominant and most serious threat to peace and security in Mali since the terrorists took best advantage of the already existing massive proliferation of small arms and light weapons in the Sahelian zone (see Le Pouce/ Maliweb 31.10.2011e). According to the FES, however, this problem can only be addressed with the help of ECOWAS and its conflict management mechanisms (see FES October 2011).

November 2011 – month of no return

In the beginning of November, analysed statements from all source groups appear to be totally under the impression of the demonstrations on November 1 that took place in many localities in the north, initiated by the MNLA. Around these activities, the most important claim is once again framed: from MNLA’s perspective, Azawad’s autonomy would be “a better solution for all, both the population of Azawad and for the rest of Mali” (see MNLA 2.11.2011). In this context, the MNLA invokes the right to self-determination of indigenous people which is documented in the UN system and in basic legal AU documents. Therefore, the people of Azawad is presented as being entitled to make use of this right. Its implementation, in turn, then

legitimately resides with the MNLA, a dialogue-oriented, peaceful and growing social movement that clearly represents the people of Azawad (see MNLA 3.11.2011a; 6.11.2011; 28.11.2011).⁴¹⁸

As illustrated on the banner carried on November 1 in Kidal, Mali and Algeria are perceived as bloodily digging their talons into the territory of Azawad which is directly associated with the MNLA.⁴¹⁹ Thus, for example, the MNLA condemns the fight against terrorism of both countries in the Sahelian zone as a pretext to intensify the repression of the Azawad's population (see MNLA 3.11.2011a; 21.11.2011). In addition, as the MNLA (14.11.2011) brings forward, government and media have been fuelling a campaign of lies for quite some time presenting MNLA members as terrorists and/or mercenaries without any principles (see MNLA 14.11.2011). Furthermore,

“Growing inequalities and poverty, the exacerbation of identitarian frustrations, a context of violence and generalised suspicion towards the people of Azawad are the basis of Malian power. The people of Azawad is alarmed about the non-consideration of these problems and wonders about the role of human rights organisations, the media, and the reason why the international community stays silent in the face of a disappearing people.” (MNLA 3.11.2011a)

⁴¹⁸ According to the MNLA (14.11.2011), the already elected members of parliament from within the ranks of ethnic groups and tribes in the north do not at all represent the people of Azawad since they do not enough to promote the common goal of self-determination.

⁴¹⁹ Video footage of the November 1 demonstrations in Kidal including the protest posters above can be found on Youtube (under the heading of “Marche Azawad à Kidal 01/11/2011”; see also MNLA 28.11.2011).



Demonstrations in Kidal on November 1, 2011 (see *Le Républicain/Maliweb* 6.11.2011)

And, because the MNLA holds that there are no trustworthy partners, neither in the Malian government nor in the international community, the MNLA directly addresses “the Malian people” in an open letter:

“Why is it that poverty and hunger kills Malian children all day long while the state pours billions in armament which is afterwards deployed on the territory of Azawad? Why is it that the Malian people accepts to get into debt just to buy weapons serving to fill death lists of innocent brothers in Azawad?” (MNLA 3.11.2011g)

In view of the revolution in Libya, the MNLA continues along the lines set earlier by the MNA and declares its full support, solidarity and compassion, especially with the victims. On its own account, the MNLA adds that these victims had fallen “on the field of honour and human dignity in the name of democracy and justice” (MNLA 3.11.2011b). Other statements also make clear that returnees, too, would join the great project of unity in diversity represented in the people Azawad:

“Our compatriots come back home with a package of projects: developing their areas; bringing security to all parts of Azawad’s population: Songhay, Tuareg, Arabs, Peuls, and to their belongings; fighting against banditism, concerning for example car thefts by armed small gangs out of control; huge campaigns to raise awareness in order to fight against any form of indoctrination by AQMI; and the restoration of social network on a local level in order to bring about the unity of the people of Azawad!” (MNLA 28.11.2011)

Broadly speaking, the government, as before in relation to the MNA, does not react to announcements or actions of the MNLA, as, for example, its non-reaction to the massive demonstrations in different places in the north on November 1 shows. Yet, some government releases can be understood as in a sort responding to activities associated with the MNLA. Only a few days after the demonstrations, ATT, for example, prays for peace and unity in all conflicts in the context of his hadj to Mecca (see GovMali 5.11.2011).⁴²⁰ Likewise, ATT's praise of the judges, his commitment to checks and balances and the pointer to ATT's earlier engagement in favour of free media can be seen as reply to MNLA's allegation that Mali, at least for the people in the north, does not represent a functioning democracy (see GovMali 22.11.2011; 24.11.2011).

By the end of November, however, ATT comes to an unprecedented and far-reaching conclusion: Against the background of hundreds of ex-soldiers from Libya, masses of weapons circulating in the region, and an increasing number of attacks and kidnappings, Mali as a whole is under attack and its unity is threatened as it has never been before (see GovMali 21.11.2011; 27.11.2011). As ATT further adds,

“With open arms, we receive all those within a framework of preserving peace and security in our country. [...] Just to clarify matters, we will never accept foreign arms inundating the Sahelo-Saharan strip and attacking our countries. [...] Let us stay united, regardless of our ethnic affinity, the colour of our skin or our convictions, for a united and indivisible Mali, for one goal and one faith. We will not accept to drift into confusion which is part of the bandit's methods. Whatever happens, we always have to close ranks in order to isolate the criminals.” (GovMali 27.11.2011)

In contrast to government statements, media reports in November extensively deal with the MNLA by reporting, commenting and directly addressing MNLA voices. The MNLA-initiated demonstrations in Timbuktu, Gao and Kidal on November 1 are immediately dubbed as “claiming independence” while ex-soldiers from Libya “create a situation of pre-rebellion where the noise of boots and arms can already be heard” (El Watan/Maliweb 1.11.2011a). Moreover, the MNLA is portrayed as nothing else but an alliance of militant groups boasting about their military capabilities (e.g. after having incorporated the “Bani Walid Division” from Libya). Against this background, it should not be suprising that the Malian military deploys troops to the north. In this perspective, the north already became a “no man's land” ruled by Al Qaeda due to Western powers as string-pullers in the background which seek to display their economic interests (see Le Combat/Maliweb 3.11.2011b).⁴²¹ Some media accounts even allow leaders from northern Mali to express their views on MNLA demonstrations as well as on the question of Libyan returnees (the following four quotes are taken from Le Républicain/Maliweb 3.11.2011c):

⁴²⁰ During November, ATT receives exuberant thanks from media's side for having taken requests and concerns of the Malian people to Mecca during his hadj (see e.g. Le Guido/ Maliweb 29.11.2011c).

⁴²¹ The idea that especially European powers would pursue a plan of destabilisation and destruction of northern Mali gets pointedly taken up again by the end of November by Le Potentiel (Maliweb 29.11.2011c): “The Tuareg rebellion and its offsprings, drugs trafficking and AQMI presence, are creations of Western countries policies, especially of European countries. The fireman-pyromaniac policy of Europe today turns against their own innocent nationals who often pay with their lives for the cynism of their governments.”

“Mali is one and indivisible. What actually happens in this part of the country [i.e. the north] is not that massive. However, we should not be so casual about it either.” (*Nock Ag Attia*, representative of Diré, Timbuktu region)

“There has not been any official declaration on the basis of which we could speak about a rebellion. People need to know what really happened [...] The MNLA’s method is peaceful.” (*Attaye Ag Mohamed*, university lecturer)

“Weapons must be handed over, peace has to be achieved by integration. [...] We certainly do not need a war right now.” (*Hamadou Kisso Cissé*, representative of Mopti, Mopti region, neighbouring on the three northern regions)

“These are Malian brothers and sisters. [...] However, they have to be disarmed. [...] Mali is a peaceful country where we have freedom of expression. This march is legitimate as long as it takes place within the framework of our constitution.” (*Hamidi Hama Diallo*, representative of Mopti)

As the analysis of media accounts shows, there are also rather opposite views on how dangerous the situation is as a result of the MNLA demonstrations: On the one hand, there are reports which do not see a rebellion rising because the MNLA could, at best, be considered as a virtual social movement not having enough widespread support (see *Lafia Révélateur/Maliweb* 9.11.2011b). Alike, a contribution in *Le Combat* (*Maliweb* 16.11.2011b) deals with prominent individuals from northern Mali, i.e. high ranking officials in Malian military or administration, who openly distance themselves from the MNLA project. Another article published in *Le Républicain* (*Maliweb* 18.11.2011) emphasises that the vast majority of Tuareg feel closely connected to the Malian nation and thus dismiss the MNLA as a small and irrelevant group of rebels.

On the other hand, in contrast, further media reports describe a “explosive situation in northern Mali” because “separatists do not exclude armed confrontation” (*Le Prétoire/Maliweb* 10.11.2011). The government, too, is subject to criticism because of its glowing welcome to heavily armed Libyan ex-soldiers while the north becomes a war zone where “all ingredients are there to unleash a new rebellion” (*Le Potentiel/Maliweb* 22.11.2011). According to the *Le Républicain* (*Maliweb* 28.11.2011b), attacks and kidnappings by jihadists (and not the MNLA) account for the de facto state of war in northern Mali (see *Le Républicain/Maliweb* 28.11.2011b). In this atmosphere (unmentioned by the government), a parliamentary delegation sets off for the north “to create a framework for dialogue” and finally finds itself encircled by four groups of “elements armed to the teeth”:

“Elements of the National Movement of Azawad (MNA) who recently organised a demonstration in Timbuktu, a group of armed elements from Libya, a group of discontented elements coming from within the ranks of Ibrahim Ag Bahanga and a contingent of elements lead by Colonel Assalat, a deserter from the Malian Army. These four groups merged in order to create the National Movement of Liberation of Azawad” (*L’Indépendent/Maliweb* 24.11.2011b)

As *L’Indépendent* outlines, these four groups understand the Malian state as a forced assimilation of different peoples. After the talks, the leader of the parliamentary delegation, *El Hadj Baba Haïdara* (vice president of the Malian parliament), gets further cited as having upheld legitimate representation as a basic principle. Therefore, it is reported that she insisted on the way of dialogue to further explore the claims of the MNLA and its true support among the

population in the north (see L'Indépendent/Maliweb 24.11.2011b). In sum, as for example ATT's appeal to the military shows, there is a growing concern about a division of Mali and, at the same time, an increasingly militant language. ATT reminds the Malian army of their most important duty which is to defend national unity and territorial integrity. Also, he urges his compatriots "to proof their unity in order to defend their home country" (Le Challenger/Maliweb 28.11.2011c) and calls out:

"People of Mali, wake up! It's high time. Don't accept what becomes apparent: the partition of the national territory. United, towards a common goal, one faith, we will prevail!" (Le 22 Septembre/Maliweb 28.11.2011f)

More cases of desertions from the Malian military being subjects to media reports reinforce an impression of turmoil and fear within the ranks of the government. Above all, this is due to a growing number of desertions in favour of AQMI and new Salafist organisations that are said to be about to be founded in the environments of Ag Ghaly and colonel Ag Moussa ("Bamoussa") (see Le 22 Septembre/Maliweb 28.11.2011f; L'Essor/Maliweb 29.11.2011g).

December 2011 – closing ranks

Many statements, releases, reports, commentaries in December 2011 have in common that they deal with the material and ethical consolidation and self-assurance of certain groups and actors in a situation perceived as being precarious.

Government releases, for example, include a strikingly large number of positive statements on Mali's performance, especially from external third parties: an approval of the Islamic Development Bank for Mali's sustainable investments in infrastructure (see GovMali 2.12.2011b); an appreciation of Mali's policies to promote human rights and its good relations to international organisations by the UN (see GovMali 11.12.2011a); an assessment of "Mali as model democracy" by key bilateral development partners (see president of German parliament, Norbert Lammert; GovMali 8.12.2011); self-congratulatory statements of the government on the ongoing preparation of the 2012 elections (see GovMali 19.12.2011) as well as on promoting art and culture (see GovMali 21.12.2011). Other striking announcement are those documenting loyalty of different groups to the Malian state or government.⁴²² As, for example, ex-soldiers from the Libyan military and Imghad members declare

"We are officers of the Libyan army, we only know how to be soldiers. [...] We make ourselves available for the Malian state, with all our equipment." (GovMali 3.12.2011)

Responding to this, ATT stretches out his helping hand to "all children of Mali", highlights the high degree of trust the peaceful community of the Imghad enjoys in Mali and states

"Mali is united, it belongs to us all. As a democrat and patriot, we can talk to each other and solve our problems." (GovMali 3.12.2011)

⁴²² As, for example, a pro-government demonstration of solidarity organised by young people from the north around the independence monument on November 9 shows, this also resonates in media coverage (see Mali Demain/Maliweb 15.12.2011b): "This is an act of civic engagement and a commitment for peace which has to be appreciated by all people of good will, just as the president, the prime minister and her government are to be appreciated for their fight against terrorism and banditism in the North."

In a similar way, other government releases document expressions of loyalty from an Ifoghas unit under command of colonel Ag Emakadeye in the presence of UN and AU representatives (see GovMali 22.12.2011; see also chapter 6.2/phase III/December 2011) and refer to the concrete example of Amassouss where members of different Tuareg tribes (Imghad and Kel Rela in particular), sedentary ethnic groups (Songhay and Peuls) and Libyan returnees live together peacefully (see GovMali 30.12.2011b). Lastly, ATT uses public speeches to convey the message positive impression of unity: in his Christmas address, he overwhelmingly thanks Malian Christians for being part of a “perfect synergy” between brothers and sisters of all religions in Mali and for always supporting problem solving in a constructive spirit (see GovMali 24.12.2011); in his New Year’s address, ATT once again pictures the vision of Mali which maintains the highest ethical standards but, in the light of a difficult situation and huge challenges, has to mobilise all forces and energy:

“We are still fascinated, beyond the moment and line of the horizon, by the image of a country whose human capital is of high quality, the image of a people living in peace, security and a prosperous environment, a people in accord with the nations of the world, dedicated to democratic values, freedom and justice. The construction of this image and the concern about its preservation have mobilised our forces and our energy in the service of the people of Mali.” (GovMali 31.12.2011)

The fact that mobilising “our forces and our energy” can also stand for a massive deployment of troops to the north, however, goes unmentioned in government information in the first place. As media reports then announce, the redeployment of troops had already started in the beginning of December which brings the newspaper *Nouvelle Libération* (Maliweb 6.12.2011b) to bluntly speak of war preparations.

In MNLA publications, too, the reinforcement of the own ranks is presented in detail, especially when it comes to deserters from the Malian military.⁴²³ In addition, as MNLA arguments are picked up increasingly positive in the conflict discourse, more and more rather unexpected supporters of a free Azawad appear on the scene, for example

- two further high-ranking deserters, colonel *Ibah Ag Mossa* and captain *Mohamed Ag Assagbid*, both members of the Malian military’s special forces in Kidal, one of the very few mixed units in accordance with the Algiers Accord, joining the MNLA (see MNLA 3.12.2011);
- Songhay representatives from Tessit, Gao region, and Gourma, Timbuktu region, coming out in favour of a free Azawad (see MNLA 9.12.2011);
- *Ibrahim Ag Mohamed Assaleh*, member of parliament from Bourem, Gao region: National Pact had never been implemented, a new rebellion can be justified (MNLA 15.12.2011);
- representatives of the younger Songhay generation and even ex-members of the Ganda Koy militia join the MNLA (see MNLA 15.12.2011).

⁴²³ However, according to L’Indicateur du Renouveau (Maliweb 7.12.2011b), analysts of the *Institut Français de Géopolitique* doubt the representation of the MNLA as a united and powerful organisation: “This is a bluff. One cannot take a movement seriously that appears from one day to the next. [There is] a lack of cohesion among Tuareg. Not all agree with MNLA’s actions.”

For the MNLA, it is particularly worth mentioning that *Hama Ag Mahmoud*, a former Malian minister, ranks among its most prominent supporters by the end of the year. This example is also used to illustrate the broad basis of MNLA support in the population:

“With this announcement, the MNLA shows more than ever before that it does not represent a movement of youths or combatants but, instead, a movement made up of the civil society as a whole, with its leaders at its head. So, for example, Hama Ag Mahmoud, well-of intellectually, financially and materially, at the same time shows that joining the MNLA is a question of principle and conception and not a business.” (MNLA 20.12.2011a)

In another statement, Ag Mahmoud, clan chief of the Kel Ansar⁴²⁴, appeals to the unity of the Tuareg in concert with other Azawadian peoples. Furthermore, while the most important goal for the Tuareg has to be Azawad’s self-determination, a war should be prevented under all circumstances (see MNLA 20.12.2011b). In sum, according to further MNLA messages by the end of the year, the signs point to independence. Up to that point, the convention of speech on MNLA’s side had been the narrative of striving for autonomy. Against the background of an international environment shaped by a climate of revolution due to the Arab Spring, the maxim at this point changes to “It’s now or never!” (MNLA 23.12.2011).

As mentioned earlier (see chapter 6.2/phase III/December 2011), media coverage in December mirrors the growing militance of communication, transports war-like rhetorics and thus heats up the relations between the different sides. As, for example, *Le 22 Septembre* (Maliweb 1.12.2011a) reports, participants of a meeting between representatives of Songhay, Peuls, and former members of Ganda Koy⁴²⁵ declare that there is a serious risk of falling back into a 1990s situation of civil war including a confrontation of light and dark-skinned communities:

“In the actual situation, a resort to identitarian, ethnic or communitarian aspects is dangerous. We have to separate the wheat from the chaff. In all circumstances, we must prevent the confrontation of different ethnic groups and communities living on our land.” (*Le 22 Septembre*/Maliweb 1.12.2011a)

In parallel to imminent ethnic confrontation and division, media accounts do also describe a deepening geographical division of the country in north and south which is knowingly pressed ahead or, at least, tolerated by Malian authorities. According to *Nouvelle Libération* (Maliweb 6.12.2011a), for instance, the government is not even able to allocate PSPSDN funds where they are really needed (see *Nouvelle Libération*/Maliweb 6.12.2011a). Furthermore, *Le Progrès* (Maliweb 2.12.2011a) doubts that the government has the capabilities and the will to take action against terrorists who “dictate the law in northern Mali”. Since ATT has no majority for his policy and measures concerning the north, the newspaper *Waati* (Maliweb 8.12.2011b) even

⁴²⁴ Nota bene: The Kel Ansar represent one of biggest Tuareg tribes in Mali. Its members are predominantly located in the Timbuktu region and the Bourem cercle respectively.

⁴²⁵ In contrast to MNLA releases about former Ganda Koy members joining the MNLA mentioned earlier (see MNLA 15.12.2011), some media accounts hold that self-defence militias à la Ganda Koy are again on their way to be established. Moreover, these units would recently call themselves “freedom brigade” fighting against criminal gangs, AQMI and the MNLA (see *Nouvelle Libération*/Maliweb 13.12.2011b). In this context, Tuareg integrated in Malian state functions and representatives of sedentary ethnic groups express their concerns about the resurgence of militias, about the comeback of a militarised Malian state in the north and about a still growing influence of AQMI (see *Le Prétoire*/Maliweb 22.12.11a)

issues the concrete recommendation to change his policy drastically and “to impose peace by war”: towards drug traffickers who “settle their bloody scores on Malian soil” (e.g. concerning Polisario; AFP/ Maliweb 15.12.2011a); towards “Tuareg in war fever” (Le Prétoire/Maliweb 27.12.2011) and towards new Islamist groups like Ag Ghaly’s Ansar ad-Dine and an increasingly aggressive AQMI committing open attacks, for example on PSPSDN sites (see L’Indépendent/Maliweb 30.12.2011).

January 2012 – the tapering

The last phase right up to the first attacks and hostilities initiated by the MNLA can be characterised by government releases that pointedly show an unimpressed and non-responsive attitude with regard to communication from the MNLA. In this spirit, government announcements report about ATT and government officials being part of the celebrations on the occasion of the opening of the second nationwide television channel TM2. Thereby, it is emphasised that ATT’s policy of promoting free media in Mali can be seen as successful (see GovMali 3.01.2012a). In addition, following government sources, the security situation should not be assessed as that bad since tourism in Mali can still take place, as the example of Timbuktu would show (see GovMali 5.01.2012).⁴²⁶ Also, Malian authorities admit that there are indeed new threats by kidnapping, AQMI, and heavily armed returnees from Libya.⁴²⁷ At the same time, however, Mali’s democratic development is considered to be immune to these threats. In particular, the preparations for the 2012 elections are highlighted not only as an important milestone in Mali’s development but also as unthreatened and completely safe date (see GovMali 6.01.2012).

MNLA publications in this very last phase of conflict development read like a compressed compendium of justifications for being engaged in the MNLA, especially complemented by an element of personal testimonies and stories. In this connection, Ag Mohamed Assaleh, member of parliament from Bourem once again gets a say (see also section on December 2011 above) and complains about the Malian democracy being a façade because people from the north cannot participate equally but are exposed to massive discrimination as to language, politics and economy.⁴²⁸ Azawad, a country characterised by openness and hospitality at all times, gets further described as defencelessly confronted to terrorism (see MNLA 3.01.2012a). As Ag Mohamed Assaleh concludes, explaining growing insecurity in the country only by Libyan returnees is not far-reaching enough:

⁴²⁶ Media accounts, too, take up this thread by referring to the Festival au Désert that takes place on January 12-14 despite the difficult security situation. A contribution published by AFP (Maliweb 15.01.2012a) collected voices from the festival, for example the one of a Tuareg student who sees attending the festival as a “duty to say not o AQMI terrorism.” AFP also quotes the festival director, Manny Ansar: “It is very important, despite everything what is going on, that the event takes place” and Alous, a hotel owner: “We have to do everything to bring tourists. If not, there will be no entrance fees, and the youth of Timbuktu wouldn’t have anything to get their teeth into and this is an open door for everything.”

⁴²⁷ On this, for the first time, an article in Le Républicain (Maliweb 3.01.2012b) provides a total number of returnees from Libya of 13.965 (including soldiers, workers, students etc. and family members) while, at the same time, pointing to their poor conditions, e.g. concerning schooling. According to the “Association of Malian Emigrants from Libya and the Maghreb”, more than 600 children, at that time, after 8 months in Mali, had still not been schooled.

⁴²⁸ Referring to this, other statements speak of a “multidimensional division of the country” which gets perpetually substantiated by “pedagogical repetition in the political discourse” (MNLA 10.01.2012).

“The return of ex-soldiers from Libya has only nurtured dissatisfaction that was already there and has been growing over the preceding years. If you content yourself with analysing the returning of the ex-soldiers as point of departure, you’re wrong and you show that you don’t want to understand the things as they are.” (MNLA 3.01.2012a)

The personal testimony of Ag Assarid (see chapter 6.2/phase III/January 2012) declaring his “inevitable commitment to the MNLA” picks up well-known accusations directed at the government: an omnipresent corruption, the militarisation of the north, the violation of peace agreements, a policy of division⁴²⁹, laxism against terror⁴³⁰, and an imminent constitutional coup by ATT. For Ag Assarid, it is particularly important to emphasise the topic of education, especially concerning the de facto exclusion of children in the north from the Malian education system. AG Assarid underlines his motivation by a quote from Victor Hugo,

“Each child you educate represents a man you liberate.” (MNLA 3.01.2012b)

and makes obvious that his commitment is dedicated to the recognition of indigenous people, which means their right to education and cultural development, while this should not be considered as contradictory to the concept of a modern nation state. It is also remarkable that Ag Assarid’s personal story including his condemnation of terrorism and his call to particularly join the political movement of the MNLA gets picked up in media reports in detail:

“The current power holders in Mali are just manipulating and betraying the whole population of Mali in general, particularly in northern Mali. And I think that we don’t have the right to stay passive any more. Before I came to a decision, it was important for me to do an investigation which took me one year and two months. I’m engaged in the cause of the Tuareg people without forgetting all those who share the same suffering.” (Le Prétoire/Maliweb 5.01.2012b)

Another example of a much-cited basic MNLA statement is the one of *Mossa Ag Attaher*, MNLA spokesman, when addressing the younger generation.⁴³¹ According to Ag Attaher, it is eminently important that the younger generation of the population in the north which had not been involved in earlier rebellions says no to a system of institutionalised subjugation. At that point in time, following the MNLA spokesman, a historical opportunity has to be taken:

⁴²⁹ On this, MNLA documents present a recent example concerning a quid pro quo between the government and members of the Arab community: some Arab individuals allegedly involved in drug trafficking had been released from prison and then started to participate in the campaign against the MNLA (see MNLA 7.01.2012).

⁴³⁰ At the very beginning of the year, there are reports about an AQMI attack on the military basis in Inhalil, Kidal region, which resulted in destroy buildings but no human loss (see L’Indicateur du Renouveau/ Maliweb 4.01.2012). In this context, both MNLA documents and media accounts harbour the suspicion that the Malian government somehow cooperates with AQMI or, at least, tolerates its actions due to strategic reasons (see above chapter 6.2; see also e.g. MNLA 30.10.2011; Le Républicain/ Maliweb 31.10.2011d). In January 2012, statements again point out that the MNLA had been confronting AQMI for a long time, which is even true for Bahanga who had been ambushed and assassinated (see MNLA 9.01.2012). Moreover, secretly cooperating with AQMI should be seen as betrayal of neighbouring countries (see MNLA 12.01.2012).

⁴³¹ Nota bene: The Belgian-educated Ag Attaher is a former secretary-general of the syndicate of Malian high school and university students. After 2004, he became an educational and public health activist in northern Mali. Ag Attaher is a cofounder of MNA and MNLA and served as a one of MNLA’s spokesman in Europe (see Thurston and Lebovich 2013: 39).

“Azawad’s youth is invited to burst open chains that impair its action. It is called upon to resist, fight, win, act and develop a vision, to offer a dignified destiny for Azawad’s immense territory, the inventive spirit of its people and the rapid deterioration of the situation. This vision means gaining a free will. This grandiose project is based on political cleverness, a competent economic analysis, an audacious promotion of culture, and a patriotic determination fostering the common good of all communities living on the Azawad’s territory” (MNLA 8.01.2012b)

Further statements again refer to the broad support of the MNLA among the different ethnic groups in the north which, all together, had to accept the many “martyrs for freedom and democracy” in the struggle so far (see MNLA 8.01.2012b) while the Malian political elites had lost sight of people and their problems in northern Mali:

“Azawadians need a leader emanating from their own ranks and asking questions that enrage people. The social issue represents the most dangerous question for the unity of the Republic. The majority of Malian authorities are completely disconnected from reality in the desert zones. [...] The unity of the Republic, idealised to drunkenness in political discourses, in a social dimension, is a myth and a lie.” (MNLA 10.01.2012)

In view of the developments in this very last phase, MNLA releases finally call for rejecting the irresponsible action of the Malian government towards both the Malian people and the people of Azawad, if necessary with the support of international organisations, such as ECOWAS, AU, EU, the Arab League, UN security council, and NATO (see MNLA 12.01.2012). Not only did the government deliberately fail in responding a dialogue offered in the preceeding months, but it also makes an effort to further discredit the MNLA. And, at the same time, the deployment of troops to the north gets accelerated, which is, from an MNLA perspective, perceived as a military invasion and thus a declaration of war that legitimises acts of self-defence (see MNLA 12.01.2012; 14.01.2012), as it happens on January 17 in Ménaka:

“This massive troop deployment which upsets the civil population was understood by the movement as an invitation to war, issued by the Malian authorities.” (MNLA 17.01.2012)

Whereas the MNLA considers its first military strike as a kind of wake-up call for its cause of peace and justice for Azawad directed at the Malian government and the UN, the Malian government immediately assigns responsibility to the “secessionist movement of the MNLA”.⁴³² Also, government sources rejects rumours about the MNLA having gained control as a result of a number of attacks. According to the government, the Malian military powerfully and successfully fended off the attacks and still has the situation under control (see GovMali 19.01.2012a). In media coverage, too, there are contradictory or, at least, inconsistent eyewitness reports. As, for example, one resident of Ménaka puts the following on record,

“The rebels were not successful in invading the town. They fired at us from distance. An the army reacted.” (Le Canard Déchainé/Maliweb 18.01.2012a),

⁴³² It bears mentioning that, prior to the first attacks, the government scarcely ever addressed the MNLA in a direct approach.

and, therefore, confirms the government version, while another resident interviewed by the same newspaper doubts this assessment:

“The Malian army and the assailants combated against each other with mortars in order to gain control of the town.” (Le Canard Déchainé/Maliweb 18.01.2012a)

Remarkably enough, without directly reacting to these dramatic developments, ATT seems to commemorate the 51st anniversary of the Malian military on January 19 without ruffle and excitement. In his speech, ATT refers to the necessary military cooperation between neighbouring countries in order to fight terror and to the imperative adaption of the military to the actual challenges (see GovMali 19.01.2012d).⁴³³ In the days prior to the attacks of Ménaka, media reports once again put forth the urgent challenges in their view: AQMI with its decentralised and mobile units (20-30 soldiers, simple communication via frequencies, separation of hostages to different places⁴³⁴) is difficult to combat, despite latest surveillance technologies at hand. Moreover, according to certain media accounts, neither regional cooperation nor Western countries’ interferences are obviously able to force back terrorists, although sources agree that AQMI comprises only about 500 combatants (see Libération/Maliweb 7.01.2012). According to Le 22 Septembre (Maliweb 12.01.2012b), it is also necessary to prevent new Islamist organisations as, for example, Ansar ad-Dine initiated by Ag Ghaly, from establishing an “Islamic state”, including sharia law and cadis, i.e. Islamic judges (see Le 22 Septembre/Maliweb 12.01.2012b). However, as Le Canard Déchainé (Maliweb 16.01.2012) mentions based on military sources, troop deployment to the north is primarily aimed at fighting secessionist aspirations of MNLA, not fighting AQMI. In the same way, the ICG assessment in the beginning of January does not observe any reinforcement of anti-AQMI measures but, in the light of an incidence with the involvement of Polisario resulting in several deaths, mentions the government’s determination to no longer tolerate violent clashes between competing drug traffickers (see ICG 2.01.2012).

Overlooking the conflict discourse at the end of phase III against the background of what has already been observed in the preceding chapters, it can be stated that the text corpus provides a huge number of characterisations and attributions related to persons, roles, programmes and norms that altogether compose a vis-à-vis of conflict identities. These conflict identities have evolved up to this point and particularly dualised along the major question of whether more autonomy or even independence for the northern regions is supported or not. Thereby, they have been filled with attributions of actorness ranging from individuals to organisations to institutions. Now, the synopsis section complements the picture by relating evolving identities with the conflict system’s escalating moves.

6.5 Synopsis: The Fabric of Escalating Moves

⁴³³ According to ICG (1.12.2011), the command of the Malian military already stated in December 2011 that fighting AQMI would only be effective and thus successful if a close cooperation between neighbouring countries, i.e. Algeria, Mauretania, and Niger, could be made possible. As Mali promotes this kind of cooperation in order to increase security in the whole region, the EU supports this joint action with 62 million Euro.

⁴³⁴ Following an article in Le Canard Déchainé (Maliweb 16.01.2012), AQMI threatens Malian authorities with killing the hostages in case of a continuing troop deployment to the north.

“The fact dimension, the temporal dimension, and the social dimension cannot appear in isolation. They must be combined. They can be analyzed separately, but in every real intended meaning, they appear together.” (Luhmann 1995: 86)

In keeping with the synopsis section of the case study on the Maidan protests (see chapter 5.5), the preceeding chapters presented three paths of preliminarily reading the conflict development within the context of the Malian crisis 2010-2012 according to Luhmann’s dimensions of meaning.⁴³⁵ Now, the many hypotheses of different ranges that have been iteratively gained and condensed during case study research and then cast in form of the chapters above are brought together in a synoptical view. Hence, the following chapters identify critical elements of conflict development, i.e. *escalating moves* (A-C) consisting of *structural couplings* and *normative shifts*, and, linked to that, pursue the gradual formation of firm conflict identities against the background of a world societal grounding of contradictions.⁴³⁶

6.5.1 The Conflict’s Groundwork (Phase I, Nov 2010 – Aug 2011)

As outlined in the preceding chapters, right from the beginning of the Malian crisis in November 2010, “nation” and “development” appear as key references within the analysed communication. During phase I, the whole text corpus shows the quality of both terms as signifiers with high connectivity. In this regard, the two notions compose the discursive focal point of that what is being observed and communicated as appearances of political power in world society. More precisely, one part of communication can be considered as mirroring a political system of world society structured by segmentary differentiation and thus placing the existing Malian nation state (i.e. its unity, territorial integrity and sovereignty of its authorities) as alpha and omega of any reasoning about legitimate political power. At the same time, another part of communication reflects the perception that political power gets also attributed within processes and structures beyond the nation state, in the form of globally shared norms (e.g. concerning principles of self-determination and democratic governance) or stratificatory dynamics of power distribution including the formation of privileged centres and peripheries (e.g. as to developed and left behind regions in the Malian central state). As the analysis of phase I exposes, contradictions emerge from political communication with competing modes of differentiation behind.

In this context, MNA’s founding declaration which repeatedly refers to the term nation can be seen as a twofold piece of political communication. On the one hand, the declaration announces the birth of a *national* movement of Azawadians that intends to politically fight for its aims *within* the Malian state, therefore insinuating the recognition of the Malian state as a legitimate framework for MNA’s political actions:

⁴³⁵ The ideas expressed in these lines as well as the introductory citation to this subsection quite similarly appeared at the beginning of chapter 5.5.

⁴³⁶ Please note: The synopsis chapters of both case studies (5.5/6.5) use a number of tables and charts of contrasting grey colour compared to the main text body. These tables indeed refer to and pick up elements of the continuous text but they do not necessarily contain duplications of it. In other words, they are to be considered as substantial parts of the case study’s analysis.

[The MNA represents the] political organisation of Azawad that defends and approves *a peaceful policy in order to achieve legitimate goals.*" (MNA 1.11.2010; italics added)

On the other hand, the MNA understands itself as a political organisation which legitimately represents the people of Azawad. Based on that, it views itself as being entitled to invoke international law, especially the global human rights regime, in order to put the right to self-determination as a people into play. In sum, as the analysis of phase I in this respect shows, both MNA and government statements fit into the narrative of upholding self-determination as a nation as one of the highest values. However, when pointing to unity, sovereignty, territorial integrity and social cohesion, the former refers to Azawad while the latter refers to Mali as a whole:

"How many human lives, material and amount of money has been sacrificed by the daughters and sons of this country *in order to preserve national unity and social cohesion?*" (GovMali 25.12.2010a; italics added)

Media coverage, for its part, adopts both MNA and government views understanding themselves as political representatives, or, to put it another way, as power holders deriving their legitimacy from different bases. Hence, media communication in phase I does not only include observations of political power which exclusively reflect structures and functions of the Malian political system. It also includes the observation of competing political power resting on ethnic categories and normatively backed up by legal considerations being part of a global political reference frame, i.e. the human rights regime.

The analysis of government statements and partly media reports reveals another mode of observing the political momentum of the conflict discourse in phase I: communication with reference to "development". Therefore, statements dealing with this topic line up in a kind of salvation story promoting the message that, within the context of development policies, everything can be achieved, including an expansion of economic, social and political infrastructure automatically leading to peace and security (see e.g. GovMali 24.11.2010). A second consideration arising from statements dealing with development is a firm belief that the key objective of development consists in enabling states to be equally present in every corner of the country or, in other words, to effectively project central state power without exception as to geography or domain. This can particularly be shown by various passages on PSPSDN, for example:

"[...] ensuring presence and deployability of public administration on all levels. [...] PSPSDN activities have to conduce to an *intelligent organisation of space by state administration.*" (Le 22 Septembre/Maliweb 1.11.2010a; italics added)

Taken together, right from the beginning of the investigation period and then during the whole phase I, patterns of communication show an understanding of development as a process of building up capabilities in order to project power from a developed centre to an underdeveloped periphery. Now, the centre, i.e. democratically elected power holders executing Malian state functions, understands itself, for the sake of its legitimacy, as being committed to develop the periphery, i.e. regions in northern Mali characterised by socioeconomic underdevelopment and insecurity. In this sense, the logic of development corresponds to a logic of political power projection aiming at adjusting deficits of power and state presence in the periphery. Each communication in the discourse that questions this specific differentiation of centre and periphery

is thus described as opposing the categorical claim of the nation's unity and even more so as an open contradiction to a comprehensive claim to power by the Malian authorities in society, economy, culture, education, health, basic infrastructure etc. (see e.g. GovMali 9.02.2011; 27.07.2011).

Beyond this idea of political differentiation into centre and periphery in a domestic state context, communication dealing with development in phase I also shows a global dimension. In this context, the analysis of both discursive working levels makes clear that there is a common feature of self-observation including the perception of Mali as an object to a global power structure of centre and periphery, too. This is particularly obvious in those discursive sequences where European states are referred to as "Westerners" who would only pursue egoistic interests in the region or when Mali gets addressed as a target country for various international development programmes (*italics added*):

"[The French Development Agency] will *accompany the Malian development efforts*, which have top priority within the overall policy of good governance and an optimal management of the resources provided." (GovMali 17.03.2011a)

"The head of state appreciated all actors involved in the execution of PSPSDN. In particular, he gave thanks to *international development partners for their significant contribution*." (see GovMali 27.07.2011)

"*Countries supporting the occupation of Azawad's territory* [i.e. Mali's international development partners, see above] are considered as countries supporting colonisation and directly participating in robbing the riches of a people under oppression, occupation and racism." (MNA 19.02.2011b; brackets added R.B.)

"Azawad turned into an *object of regional and international interventions*, each having its interests and agenda." (Le Républicain/Maliweb 3.11.2010)

"*Western support*, to date, has concentrated on strengthening the capacities of security forces in the countries of central Sahara which has not permitted to resolve the complex security situation. Only an inclusive approach taking the complexity of the conflict system into account and based on *regional and international mechanisms will permit to achieve a truly peaceful situation in northern Mali* and central Sahara." (FES June 2011: 5)

Thus, in view of communication on political power along the topics of nation and development, competing modes of differentiation find their discursive expression. Against this background, contradiction in communication becomes gradually obvious along the conflict system's dimensions of meaning, illustrated as follows (table shows quintessences from chapters 6.2, 6.3, and 6.4):

Dimension	Poles of Contradiction

factual	preserving the Malian central state; national unity, state sovereignty and territorial integrity equally important	versus	insisting on self-determination as a universal democratic value
	promoting and enhancing development efforts as major security policy		underdevelopment, insecurity, and repression as result of (inter-) national power politics
temporal	preserving a rich multicultural Malian heritage		politically recognising the cultural and historical uniqueness of northern populations / of “Azawad”
social	political elites mainly originating from Bambara ethnic group, shaped by a spirit of struggling for independence and nation building		minority (ethnic) groups advocating for self-determination within a federal state; redefining nation as an ethnic category
	political elites promoting a unitary and strong state		categorical division of “northern” and Malian population

Contradictions and conflict identities are two sides of the same coin. As the analysis of phase I shows, conflict identities begin to show up and become manifest on four interconnected layers (based on Luhmann’s understanding of identity, see chapter 4.1). Hence, in communication, persons, roles, programmes and norms emerge as parts of evolving identities. In this sense, in the moment when the founding statement of the MNA appears on the discursive scene, a first setting of dualistic conflict identities begins to develop, kicked off by the question of how the project of “national self-determination” claimed by a new organisation from northern Mali, the MNA, is received. According to the analysis of subsequent communication and taking both discursive working levels into account, the release of MNA’s founding statement constitutes a programmatic act based on normative considerations and coming along with the attribution of roles to persons. The following table presents two key discursive corridors of conflict identities that can be condensed based on the analysis of communication in phase I.⁴³⁷

programmes	promoting development efforts in Mali, especially in northern regions; strengthening the unitary state; militarising the north; neo-colonialism; cultural assimilation	claiming self-determination of population in northern regions; fighting for autonomy of Azawad; questioning the unitary state
roles	loyals to the regime; pro-PSPSDN; supporters of the peace process; collaborators of criminals (kidnappers, drug traffickers, bandits, terrorists)	anti-government activists; activists in the cause of freedom; people in need of help and living in insecurity; marginalised and oppressed people

⁴³⁷ The table below represents a compilation of keywords on identity layers based on self-attributions *and* mutual ascriptions from all source groups. Therefore, for example, the category of roles attributed to one thread contains a broad range of notions some of which also appear in the other thread if attributed so based on the analysed communication.

		potential rebels; collaborators of criminals (kidnappers; drug traffickers; bandits, terrorists);
persons	ATT; government members; majority of population in the country; government officials of neighbouring countries and Western countries; representatives of international development organisations; certain parts of Libyan returnees	MNA members; members of former Tuareg rebel units (e.g. Bahanga faction); major parts of Tuareg population in the north; light-skinned population; “all sons and daughters of Azawad”; certain parts of Libyan returnees
norms	unity and political stability; cultural diversity; development and security; progress and peace; heroism and patriotism	democracy, esp. self-determination and rule of law; justice and peace; solidarity and hospitality; importance of kinship; heroism and patriotism; historic responsibility

Now, against this background, escalating move A can be outlined as follows: First, it consists of a structural coupling of two subsystems of political communication. One circles around an overarching development mission which is presented as an essential trait of Mali’s identity as a sovereign unitary state. The other one deals with the attribution of legitimate power based on a different mode of self-observation, i.e. ethnic and cultural categories.

On one side, communication in the conflict discourse refers to the Malian state as a political centre which produces collectively binding decisions and projects effective state power in terms of development measures, both in a geographical sense and concerning all domains of social life. Thereby, during phase I, peace and security, too, are discursively pinned down to the target corridor of development. This can especially be seen with regard to the Flame of Peace Ceremony on February 7-8, 2011, in Kidal. The ceremony which is closely linked to the peace process (by recalling the peace agreements, i.e. National Pact and Algiers Accord), appears as a ritual event in the context of the 50th anniversary celebrations of Malian independence. Within this framework, communication about the peace process gets enqueued in a narrative of an overall positive political, economic and social development since Malian independence which is, despite some throwbacks, still considered to be able to absorb challenges ahead, especially by means of PSPSDN:

“Only development can constitute an adequate answer to these different threats [...] This programme has to provide urgent solutions to the challenge of reestablishing peace and security in order to resume development measures serenely. This programme is also a project of reconstruction and reactivation of local economy. It is a broad field of investments which will create jobs and prosperity on a local level.” (ATT’s speech in Kidal on February 7, 2011; GovMali 7.02.2011d)

On the other side, however, communication referring to the history of the Malian state since its independence addresses the ongoing disregard of political rights of certain ethnic groups in favour of others. Particularly within the context of communication on MNA congress on April, 15-17, 2011 in Kidal, the analysis of the discourse reveals that political power is not only attributed in terms of defined functions within the Malian state apparatus but also as alternative forms and sources of legitimate political power, such as ethnicity. This is especially obvious

when the MNA gets apostrophised as a “national project” of ethnic groups in Northern Mali and thus as a political entity with ambition to change the long-established basis of power; when the idea of involving a vibrant civil society in forms of direct democracy gets articulated; and when the topic of international recognition by involving international institutions appears.

“We, the National Movement of Azawad, ask the Malian government [...] to organise a referendum in consultation with all structures of Azawad’s civil society and foreign partners.” (MNA 25.05.2011)

Thus, communication around the above-mentioned examples (Flame of Peace ceremony, MNA congress) shows how newly appearing forms and categories from different subsystems of political communication (ethnicity, civil society, international recognition), at some point, get understandable for each other, link up and are attributed political relevance, i.e. a binding and formative effect on what is perceived as political power subsequently. In this sense, referring to ethnic groups as a legitimate basis of political participation and power claims only comes into view as global legal standards and democratic norms are simultaneously addressed in the discourse.⁴³⁸ Though, the very same global norms and values also appear, albeit in a different derivation, in form of the development policies of the Malian central state which are presented as being largely designed according to the guidelines of Western international development partners.

“The head of state appreciated all actors involved in the execution of PSPSDN. In particular, he gave thanks to international development partners for their significant contribution.” (GovMali 27.07.2011)

And, finally, the example of how the situation in Libya appears in the discourse, too, shows a coupling of communication from the above-mentioned two subsystems: When addressing the issue of Libyan returnees (i.e. ex-soldiers from the Libyan army and their families and other refugees with a Malian origin), one part of communication brings forward both patriotic feelings by highlighting the important homecoming of Malian nationals to their mother land while, at the same time, feelings of strong ethnic kinship incite the unconditional reception of these Libyan returnees in their northern Malian homeland (see e.g. MNA 5.03.2011a; GovMali 21.03.2011). Other parts of communication address the issue of Libyan returnees, also associated with “Malian mercenaries” and potential terrorists⁴³⁹, as a threat to national security and stability, not only in Mali:

⁴³⁸ With regard to global legal standards and in particular to the right of a people to self-determination as a cardinal principle of international law, one could also argue that the conflict discourse shows a coupling between a political and a legal subsystem of communication. However, as the analysis reveals, when it comes to the concept of self-determination, communication clearly ranges within a political dimension rather than referring to legal categories. More precisely, self-determination of a people is presented not so much in the sense of a legal right but rather as a constitutive element of reasoning about the seminal political structure of world society. Against this background, the sparse explicit references to a (global) legal system of communication have not been followed up, at least in phase I. In phase II, however, there is growing evidence substantiating legal communication at a different level (see below chapter 6.5.2).

⁴³⁹ Although references to terrorism frequently appear in phase I, from an analytical point of view, they are not followed up as substantial political communication in a strict sense here for two reasons: First, in various passages, the terrorism label rather appears in combination, as when, for example, the security situation in the north is described as being threatened by “drug traffickers and terrorists” (see e.g. GovMali 2.05.2011; Nouvelle Libération/Maliweb 15.04.2011); alternatively, other passages combine terrorism with a banditism and kidnapping

“The situation in Libya is at a crucial moment. [It] is an imminent threat and a huge burden for peace, security and stability in the region as a whole.” (GovMali 23.03.2011)

“When the Libyan revolution turned into a rebellion [...] mercenaries including Malians seized a substantial amount of weapons and ammunition which has already entered Mali, particularly the north. To what purpose? [...] For a new rebellion? For the benefit of AQMI?” (Lafia Révélateur/Maliweb 6.04.2011)

With this, the stability of the Malian nation state again appears as a fixed point of reasoning about and organising political power. On top of this, as discursive sequences deal with the topic of NATO aerial attacks on Libya and, relating thereto, with the Arab Spring, there is also communication mirroring a differentiation pattern of political processes according to a centre and periphery scheme. This becomes clear as, for example, the Western military intervention in Libya gets criticised or as a potential sequel of the Arab Spring in Mali is insinuated:

“The members of the contact group declare to be deeply concerned about the ongoing aerial attacks lead by NATO. They also pointed a finger at the disastrous humanitarian situation created by the conflict.” (AU Libya mediation group with ATT being a member; as cited in GovMali 28.06.2011)

“We are at the outset of a global change for humanity. Following the tragic and painful incidences that stirred up Maghreb countries and the Middle East, we, the National Movement of Azawad, join the painful cries of the children, women and men who denounce oppression and the hunger for power that dominates certain political elites in these countries.” (MNA 5.03.2011b)

To sum up, it can be stated that political communication here, i.e. communication about what and who is attributed the ability to shape political processes in an enduring and binding manner, plays out against the background of more or less implicit and different images of centre and periphery. In other words, there is communication which attributes, for example, coercive capabilities, access to resources, knowledge on development, authority to decide and sovereign status to different centres of power. At the same time, these overlapping threads of communication become increasingly understandable for each other which, in turn, motivates contradictions. If, for example, an ethnic group as such is presented as a legitimate holder of political authority, the idea of assigning political authority and power on the basis of free and fair general elections is indeed understandable and thus communicable. Notwithstanding, it constitutes an open contradiction in relation to the established centre and the existing modes of power distribution.

The structural coupling of communication described above comes along with changing structures of expectation, i.e. with a normative shift of the discourse. Some normative elements appearing in the discourse were already mentioned within the context of conflict identities earlier in this section (see table on identity layers, especially the norms column, above). With regard

business. Thus, these references are not considered as clues to a specific and deeper understanding of terrorism as such and, related to it, competing modes of differentiating political power in world society behind the mere phenomenon. Second, according to the analysis of the text corpus in phase I, these references do in most instances not attribute programmes, roles, persons and norms related to a distinct terrorist identity but are part of an abstract description of limited statehood as a background condition in the Sahelian zone which enables all kinds of criminal phenomena.

to the development of the discourse as a whole, in phase I, the following normative shift can be stated: Passages from different discursive corners mirror a kind of collectively shared insight that the idea of a democratic, multicultural, and prospering Malian society is and had always been a fiction. As the analysis of the text corpus shows, the often-cited process of development is not necessarily seen as being hand in hand with the process of growing democracy. Therefore, the development narrative in large parts exhibits statements on improvable if not insufficient success (see e.g. GovMali 7.02.2011d; 26 Mars/Maliweb 12.04.2011) or even refers to development as a coercive process opposed to true democratic and cultural self-fulfilment, especially from the perspective of an ethnic group in the “problematised north” (see e.g. MNA 19.02.2011b; Le Combat/Maliweb 4.05.2011a). Furthermore, as phase I brings forward, there are descriptions considering the Malian central state as the anchor of Malian politics and setting its authority, sovereignty and integrity as absolute values. However, there is a competing characterisation of the political process referring to the universal democratic principle of self-determination. Moreover, alternative democratic variants, such as decentralised modes of governing like regional autonomy, are put into play. In this context, references to the Arab Spring appear, too. However, it is not only illustrated as a positive effect of a global dynamic of democratisation (e.g. “global wind of change”, “breaking prisons”; see MNA 17.04.2011; see also chapter 6.4/phase I). With regard to the unstable situation in Libya, the Arab Spring is also referred to as a source of insecurity and war which is discursively brought to market as a global political process of democratisation pushed forward by Western military interventions to defend human rights. The Malian policy of development, too, gets occasionally picked up as a facet of political communication about (more or less voluntary) democratisation in world society.

In brief, the normative shift of the discourse during phase I is constituted by the collective insight that development and democratisation/self-determination are *not* necessarily two sides of the same coin. Also, as the analysis suggests, a basic element of the evolving conflict identities seems to be a feeling of being robbed of ambitions: By the end of phase I, there is a growing number of indications showing that both voices attributed to the anti-government side (pro Azawadian autonomy) and those attributed to the pro-government side (pro Malian national unity) do no longer believe in being able to realise their respective unfulfilled plans and expectations with the means that had been applied up to this point in time.

Against the background of escalating move A elaborated above, observations referring to violence in the conflict discourse in phase I affect three points: First, references to violence appear when it comes to reflecting the Malian history since its independence. In this context, there is a number of passages not only mourning for the victims of rebellion and armed conflict (see particularly tables in chapter 6.3) but also claiming accountability for the violence committed, be it by acknowledging “war crimes” of the Malian military or by putting rebel leaders like Bahanga who fled from justice on trial. While this could be seen as part of legal communication at first glance, the analysis demonstrates that, especially when the discourse shows tones of heroism and patriotism, references to past experiences of violence represent a form of time-transcending political communication with a broad impact. Thus, putting heroes or victims into play is linked to discursively transcending the validity of power claims and use of (military) force throughout history up to the conflict’s present.

Secondly, as the text corpus in phase I reveals, there are several observations of violence appearing in the context of terrorist threats and attacks but also, and related to it, drug trafficking

and kidnapping to be retained. However, as mentioned earlier, only a few references to concrete violent incidences show up.⁴⁴⁰ They do so within a rather abstract depiction of a generally deteriorating threat and security situation. In other words, it can be stated that there is a discursive disparity between attributing terrorism by frequently using the label of “AQMI terror” and the rather rare de facto quotation of concrete incidences.⁴⁴¹

Lastly, references to (non-) violence particularly appear within the context of descriptions of the MNA. As illustrated earlier, already in its founding statement, the organisation declares itself to be part of a non-violent political movement (see MNA 1.11.2010). However, the often repeated MNA commitment to non-violence is followed by communication from different discursive sides that expresses a high degree of distrust, especially among media accounts in phase I (see exemplarily *Lafia Révélateur/Maliweb* 27.04.2011f). Yet, the non-violence values attributed to the anti-government side get questioned by MNA statements, too:

“Why shouldn’t Bahanga issue a warning to the Malian state and threaten to resume hostilities? [...] Since a few months, Bahanga and other leaders of the movement implement a reorganisation of military structures in certain zones in the northern regions.” (MNA 6.02.2011a)

Up to his sudden death which marks the beginning of phase II, Bahanga is frequently mentioned as an individual symbolically displaying the propensity to violence and the defiance of the pro autonomy movement as a whole.

6.5.2 Religion, Ethnicity, and Loyalty (Phase II, Aug 2011 – Oct 2011)

With Bahanga’s death at the beginning of phase II, the discourse further substantiates an already existing tendency of religious communication.⁴⁴² The mode of differentiation behind this kind of communication is one that basically operates along the question of how salvation can be achieved or not (see also chapter 3.1). In this context, for example, Bahanga is presented as being both on the right path, as a heroic martyr, and on the wrong path, thus rightly “battered to death by God’s hand” when he dies because of a deadly mine (see *L’Indépendent/Maliweb* 29.08.2011). Likewise, communication involving religious attributes can also be detected on

⁴⁴⁰ Among the rare examples in phase I: In June 2011, media articles refer to joint operations of Algerian, Malian, Mauretanian and Nigerian militaries against organised crime and AQMI in different border areas (see e.g. *AFP/Maliweb* 23.06.2011); a Tunisian responsible for the attempted bomb attack on the French embassy at the end of February 2011 flees from police custody but gets seized later on his way to leave the country (see *GovMali* 2.03.2011); French nationals, kidnapped by AQMI and held in Mali, are considered as victims of both terrorism and organised crime (see *ICG* 1.12.2010; *FES* 2010); besides tourists and foreign employees of multinational companies, civilians in the north are described as everyday victims of both AQMI threats/terror and the war on terror led by the Malian government (see MNA 20.01.2011).

⁴⁴¹ As illustrated above, in phase I, passages including references to AQMI terror and the like do not ground enough material to detect a fundamentally alternative form of political communication in the conflict system analysed here. If at all, one could assume to see rudimentary pieces of communication following an economic logic coupled with political communication when the government gets accused of profiting from drug trafficking and kidnapping (attributed to terrorists) in the northern regions.

⁴⁴² Already in phase I, there are sporadic references to religious communication, for example when the government refers to the annual Muslim pilgrimage *Ziyara* as a precious and common cultural treasure (see *GovMali* 9.05.2011b) or when it is recalled that religious authorities already by the end of French colonial rule pointed towards the cultural autonomy of Azawad (see MNA 28.05.2011).

different sides of the discourse when values attributed to Islam – concord, community, understanding, quality, mutual help – or religious authorities are presented as societally relevant at this point in time (see e.g. Lafia Révéléteur/Maliweb 28.09.2011). Thereby, particularly solidarity and charity are highlighted as guiding religious values and duties. And finally, as AQMI gets increasingly addressed as a serious and relevant actor having a political agenda how to achieve collective salvation, religious considerations definitely become a major point of reference in the discourse.

As mentioned earlier, in contrast to phase I, phase II shows growing evidence substantiating a logic of legal communication in the discourse, too, for example as the Malian legal system is described as being in need of further development. In this context, unity, integrity, and stability of the nation state are presented not just as political but as legal categories while, at the same time, the need for constitutional reform is highlighted from within the legal system itself (e.g. to improve representation in rural areas in elections; see GovMali 6.09.2011). This thread of communication appears in correspondence with other parts of communication addressing the buildup of state structures and functions in the north by the MNA on grounds of legal principles, such as freedom (from neo-colonial structures) and democratic governance (see e.g. MNA 6.08.2011; Le Républicain/Maliweb 16.09.2011). Deceased Bahanga, too, becomes part of this kind of legal communication: On the one hand, he gets characterised as the warrior par excellence who ultimately gave his life for Azawad. Following this discursive thread, the heroic narrative supports the idea of a right cause based on universal legal principles (i.e. particularly self-determination as a people). On the other hand, however, the same Bahanga is presented as a person who repeatedly disregards and threatens peace agreements, in other words, as a renegade deliberately breaching legal frameworks that had been concluded in mutual consent. Beyond that, parts of legal communication can also be seen when the topic of humanitarian aid appears. In this context, humanitarian aid for Libyan returnees, be they considered as Malians (by the government) or as Azawadians (by the MNA), is outlined to be both a moral *and* legal obligation. Related to that, the violation of universal rights in the past and the non-response to humanitarian needs of refugees at this point in time are linked up: in both cases, the international community is attributed a certain part of legal responsibility, especially for not having been supportive enough of those obviously struggling for freedom and democracy in Mali and the region as a whole (see e.g. MNA 29.08.2011; HRW 4.09.2011; AFP 12.10.2011). In sum, when looking at these overlapping discursive references to both the legal qualities of the Malian nation state and the ramification of the global legal framework, phase II shows modes of differentiation carrying contradiction.

Overlooking phase II, legal communication is also closely related to political communication. This can again be seen when the topic of refugees is dealt with. So, the Malian policy of a “helping hand” towards returnees from Libya in need (i.e. a moral and legal obligation, as mentioned above) appears as being linked to a principle of reciprocity including the idea that solidarity has to be earned by political loyalty (see e.g. GovMali 24.10.2011). The same principle again shows up in a different reference frame: When Malian Chamanamas (i.e. one of the Tuarég tribe factions) declare their unconditional support of returning faction members from Libya, the commitment to showing solidarity with refugees appears as an ethno-political obligation (see e.g. Le 22 Septembre/Maliweb 26.09.2011). And finally, once again in a different reference frame, democracy as such is presented as being dependent on conditions. Following this

rationale, the struggle for freedom and democracy, as it could be watched by the example of Libya's precarious situation, is outlined as being accepted only when basic structures of society and state stability are not jeopardised.

Overlooking passages attributed to political communication in the analysis of phase II, it can also be stated, contrary to phase I, that AQMI gets increasingly perceived as a powerful political actor in its own right. In this context, both the government and MNA are presented as more or less open collaborators of terrorism or, at least, as inactive and incapable bystanders of a growing threat by AQMI.⁴⁴³ Following this discursive thread, the problematic history of "the north" associated with notorious insecurity due to tribal competition and "fragile statehood" as a key problem of the Sahelian zone are presented as main reasons enabling AQMI to gain a foothold and absorb political power in northern Mali. Here again, the analysed communication reveals and reinforces an underlying thinking within the framework of centre and periphery. Thereby, political communication referring to a domestic state context overlaps communication drawing on a global dimension, both interconnected when the topic of PSPSDN gets reiterated: PSPSDN is portrayed as a politically motivated development programme aiming at a comeback of control provided by the central state, especially by means of deploying security forces against terrorist threats. The political dimension in communication about PSPSDN gets particularly obvious as power-related measures of the programme are controversially outlined, for example as "returning of administration and affirmation of state presence" (GovMali 21.09.2011) and, at the same time, in terms of an ongoing "militarisation to threaten and intimidate the population" (MNA 2.09.2011).⁴⁴⁴ Furthermore, the way Malian development efforts are dealt with gives another insight into an altering self-observation of the political system of communication in world society. As, for example, Chinese-Malian projects (e.g. the China-Mali Friendship Bridge) and EU-funded activities (e.g. PSPSDN) are frequently mentioned in parallel, this does not only represent a mere documentation of possible alternatives in international development cooperation; rather, the analysed communication suggests that there are discursive elements of a changing reflection on which entities are to be considered global reference points of development. In this perspective, communication shows markers of a reconstitution of the relation between centre and periphery, i.e. the relation between those entities and spaces where decisions on development are made (Western powers vs. China) and others where these decisions are nothing but implemented (Mali resp. its northern regions).

In view of the analysed communication on the topics of religious values, legal obligations, ethnic solidarity versus political loyalty, a growing observation of AQMI as an powerful actor and Mali being object to development, here again, different modes of differentiation see their discursive light: stratificatory (religion, development), segmentary (solidarity, loyalty), and functional (legal obligations, political power, Islamic religious values). Against this background,

⁴⁴³ When, for example, the PSPSDN-related military base in Abeïbara gets attacked on October 2, 2011, the MNA is immediately accused of being responsible even though the evidence points to AQMI. Likewise, more than once, the government gets accused of being laxist or even collaborative towards AQMI (see e.g. *L'Indicateur du Renouveau/Maliweb* 6.10.2011b).

⁴⁴⁴ In phase II, as many passages of both PSPSDN appreciation and critics show, the controversy about the power political dimension of the programme as an instrument to re-establish state presence and fight AQMI in northern Mali repeatedly and broadly appears in the discourse (see e.g. *Lafia Révélateur/Maliweb* 2.09.2011).

contradiction in communication can be exposed along the conflict system's dimensions of meaning (added to the table introduced in chapter 6.5.1 in bold text below):

Dimension	Phase	Poles of Contradiction	
factual	II	promotion of freedom and democracy within existing Malian nation state structures	reform and rebuilding of state and nation from the ground up
		alternative geo-political orientations in development relations	claiming compliance with humanitarian principles from international community
	I	preservation of Malian central state; national unity, state sovereignty and territorial integrity equally important	insisting on self-determination as a universal democratic value
		promoting and enhancing development efforts as major security policy	underdevelopment, insecurity, and repression as result of (inter-) national power politics
temporal	II	great West African empires in history as example	getting rid of colonial structures
	I	preservation of rich multicultural Malian heritage	recognition of cultural and historical uniqueness of northern populations/of "Azawad"
social	II	loyal citizens abiding by nation state's rule of law	loyal tribe members abiding by ethno-political affiliations and obligations
		faithful muslims supporting the country's unity	community based on heroic narratives and models
	I	political elites mainly originating from Bambara ethnic group, shaped by a spirit of struggling for independence and nation building	minority ethnic groups advocating for self-determination within a federal state; redefining nation as an ethnic category
		promotion of a unitary and strong state	categorical division of "northern" and Malian population

As outlined earlier in chapter 6.5.1, there are two main discursive corridors in which conflict identities gradually develop. In phase II, both new elements appear in these corridors and others from phase I continue to be addressed and developed. This process is structured in itself according to a few guiding issues: positions on how the Malian political system can be developed and on development as such; positions on terrorism and AQMI; and positions on deceased Bahanga, his life's work and Libyan returnees as potential sources of danger (added to the table introduced in 6.5.1 in bold text below):

programmes	II	reforming from within: constitutional reform; adapting and reinforcing PSPSDN; highlighting Islamic values as common ground; receiving Libyan returnees as nationals; pretending fight against terrorism; repressing northern populations by militarisation of development	calling on international community to observe; making PSPSDN more just; upholding tribal above national law; receiving Libyan returnees as Azawadians collaboration with terrorists; potential instigation of a new rebellion
	I	promoting development efforts in Mali, especially in northern regions; strengthening the unitary state; militarising the north; neo-colonialism; cultural assimilation	claiming self-determination of population in northern regions; fighting for autonomy of Azawad; questioning the unitary state
roles	II	law-abiding citizens; faithful Muslims; clandestine collaborators of terrorists	activists in the cause of democracy and human rights; open collaborators of terrorists; new and old rebels
	I	loyals to the regime; pro-PSPSDN; supporters of peace process; collaborators of criminals (kidnappers, drug traffickers, bandits, terrorists)	anti-government activists; activists in the cause of freedom; people in need of help and living in insecurity; marginalised and oppressed people potential rebels; collaborators of criminals (kidnappers; drug traffickers; bandits, terrorists)
persons	II	Malian population; international development partners from the West and China; AQMI members	Azawadians; tribe members; international observers; AQMI members
	I	ATT; government members; majority of population in the country; government officials of neighbouring countries and Western countries; representatives of international development organisations; certain parts of Libyan returnees	MNA members; members of former Tuareg rebel units (e.g. Bahanga faction); major parts of Tuareg population in the north; light-skinned population; “all sons and daughters of Azawad”; certain parts of Libyan returnees
norms	II	concord, community, understanding, solidarity as national values with religious connotation	international solidarity among supporters of democracy; solidarity and loyalty with ethnic connotation
	I	unity and political stability; cultural diversity; development and security; progress and peace; heroism and patriotism	democracy, esp. self-determination and rule of law; justice and peace; solidarity and hospitality; importance of kinship; heroism and patriotism; historic responsibility

Taking together the analytical building blocks presented above, escalating move B can be described as follows: It consists of a structural coupling based on the finding that communication from different subsystems, particularly on religious values, political loyalty and ethnic solidarity, joins up, gets understandable from different sides and, yet, produces new reasons for contradiction.

First, there is communication from a religious background suggesting that certain values associated with Islam, especially concord and community, do not only represent guidelines on the right track through life in view of salvation for fellow believers but are also important when it comes to collectively define pillars of national unity. From this perspective, on the one hand, both Bahanga (frequently portrayed as a symbol for a history of rebellions) and AQMI members (representing a new threat for the status quo) are presented as political *and religious* renegades. On the other hand, however, Bahanga is often attributed a quasi religious status of a martyr of freedom.

Therefore, second, the way these topics are referred to does indicate that they are part of political reasoning as well. More precisely, they are addressed within the context of an obligation for Malian nationals not to endanger unity, sovereignty and state integrity in difficult times by hasty ambitions of change. In the same vein, other parts of communication deal with unity as closely related to political loyalty. On this, one understanding is that the nation represents the ultimate reference frame of a citizen's loyalty; the other side considers the ethnic group or cultural affiliations as key reference of an individual's loyalty and solidarity (see remarks on dealing with Libyan returnees).

Third and finally, when referring to certain elements of the developing conflict identities illustrated above, communication dealing with religious values, political loyalty and ethnic solidarity includes a number of legal categories, too. Thus, the discursive topics of constitutional reform, PSPSDN, and autonomy are embedded in explicit legal considerations which draw on different if not contradictory sources (e.g. global standards, national sovereignty and rule of law, culturally passed on norms).

To sum up, it can be stated that the analysis of phase II reveals a structural coupling of religious, political and legal communication appearing within the continued factual threads on development/PSPSDN and democracy/autonomy and the newly articulated perception of AQMI as a powerful actor on its own. This development generates parts of discursive guidelines which show up as binding and enduring obligations for individuals, or, to put it another way, as changed structures of expectation. Nevertheless, these obligations result from different subsystems of communication following competing modes of differentiation as, for example, the multiple contradictions within and between the expressions of "faithful citizen" and "democratic tribe member" show.

Now, the structural coupling outlined above therefore comes along with changing structures of expectations or, in other words, with another normative shift of the discourse. In addition to what has already been said about the discursive corridors in which conflict identities develop, especially concerning the norms part, the normative shift of the discourse as a whole in phase II can be described as follows: As solidarity appears as a key normative concept brought into the discursive field from different sides, it becomes obvious that solidarity is increasingly understood as a value with conditions attached. More precisely, the idea of solidarity as a human

value as such, for example in form of charity and solidarity towards Libyan returnees, fades out from the discourse while solidarity gets increasingly addressed as a value that is not absolute but in real action dependent on religion, citizenship, or kinship.

Together with the identification of escalating move B, there are a number of observations pointing to perceptions of violence in phase II: First, violence or the use of force, respectively, gets addressed as a kind of structural danger or potentiality. In this context, mentioning the re-establishment of former military bases, the installation of new outposts and the deployment of additional brigades of police forces to the north, all of which presented as parts of PSPSDN, reinforces the impression of a viable threat of using violence. Repeatedly, these statements are discursively pinned down within the context of a militarisation of the north (see e.g. GovMali 11.08.2011; MNA 2.09.2011).

Second, when it comes to people of Malian origin in Libya coming back to Mali, described both as “heavily armed Tuareg mercenaries” and “Libyan returnees fleeing with their families”, the situation is characterised as a worsening crisis driven by persecution, ill-treatment and discrimination based on the people’s skin colour, from new Libyan authorities and Malian border officials (see e.g. GovMali 6.09.2011; MNA 12.09.2011; HRW 4.09.2011).

Third, based on the analysis of the text corpus, there is ultimately only one incidence corresponding to a direct military confrontation during phase II. As referred to earlier, the attack on the PSPSDN military base under construction in Abeibara on October 2 is broadly described as an illegitimate act of war. Even though statements refer to evidence pointing to AQMI as being responsible, the MNA gets immediately associated with this incidence.

Finally, the imminence of collective violence especially crystallises when Bahanga is referred to as a major icon of the conflict. Both the perception of Bahanga as a brave warrior and martyr of freedom and as a collaborator of terrorists and saboteur of peace rightly “battered to death” shows that the use of violence may be legitimate in certain conditions that, by the end of phase II, begin to appear on the horizon. As cited earlier, too, in a “last and final call”

“[...] the MNA grants itself the right to use all necessary means to implement the right to self-determination of the people of Azawad.” (MNA 4.10.2011)

At the same time, in contrast, there are reaffirmations from different discursive sides to be willing to find a nonmilitary political solution to existing contradictions (see e.g. L’Indépendent/Maliweb 29.08.2011; MNA 29.08.2011).

6.5.3 A Failing Democracy (Phase III, Oct 2011 – Jan 17, 2012)

As outlined earlier in detail, the beginning of phase III is marked by MNLA’s founding statement on October 16. With this, the conflict discourse once again gathers pace (as to thematic

scope and clocking). When it comes to its world societal framing, the analysis of conflict communication revealed the following main points: (1) a shared characterisation of the complex conflict situation as a market of insecurity and (2) a growing confrontation of two political agendas that are both explicitly legitimised as democratic projects, albeit with different frames of reference.

(1) Already in phase I and II, Mali and its neighbouring countries get frequently referred to in terms of a regional focus that is attributed analytical relevance as such.⁴⁴⁵ In phase III, this kind of regional approach to the conflict situation appears even more often, for example when the imperative to fight arms trade, drug trafficking and terrorism in the Sahelian zone having Mali at its centre is highlighted (see e.g. FES October 2011; GovMali 30.11.2011b). In this context, a number of statements describe a danger of a self-perpetuating regional conflict system including parties acting like market players. Thus, either AQMI or MNLA members are presented as being invested in the business of drug trafficking and kidnapping. Similarly, the Malian government (and others in the region, e.g. the Algerian) is not only portrayed as a clandestine beneficiary of social imbalance and insecurity in northern Mali and the Sahelian zone but also as a driving force deliberately inducing insecurity and chaos in order to hide its illegal businesses and, at the same time, to be able to appear as the only law and order power later on. Following the same logic but on a different level, Western and especially European countries are attributed a strategy of destabilisation both in Libya and Mali in order to present themselves as a stabilising force later on and to ensure access to oil, gas and rare earths.⁴⁴⁶ Finally, in the same vein, intermediaries, mediators, or negotiators from international organisations providing “good offices” are also characterised as having an interest to continue the conflict, offer their service and protect their influential and lucrative business (see pointedly e.g. Le Prétoire/Maliweb 12.01.2012a). Therefore, it can be stated that one key discursive thread in phase III displays the representation of an intensifying conflict system driven by economic motives and perspectives of growing profit. This can be seen as part of economic communication in world society reasoning about markets and stakeholders which operate and become manifest on a regional level.

(2) The analysis of the text corpus in phase III shows a broad support from different discursive angles of the idea that political power has to be based on democratic values and thus on democratic processes. However, the discourse oscillates between two competing democratic projects and the respective rationales stepping forward in conflict communication.

On the one hand, one part of the discourse shows a focusing attention on the government as a democratic actor. In this regard, the positive perception of the Malian government from the outside plays a central role. Besides highlighting the importance of a steady alliance with the US, phase III exhibits a number of accentuations of Mali’s good relations to neighbouring states (in West Africa), international organisations/development partners (e.g. UN, EU, AU) and European countries, especially France and Germany. In this context, Mali’s exemplary

⁴⁴⁵ For explicit references to the region as an analytical category see e.g. Le Matin/Maliweb (9.12.2010), HRW (31.03.2011), GovMali (14.08.2011), and FES (June 2011).

⁴⁴⁶ Both logics and ideas are already sporadically present in earlier phases but most outspoken in phase III (see pointedly Le Combat/Maliweb 19.10.2011a; 3.11.2011b; Le Potentiel/Maliweb 29.11.2011e; MNLA 9.01.2012; 14.01.2012).

development as a “model democracy” is repeatedly emphasised.⁴⁴⁷ The image of a credible, reliable and democratic partner gets further substantiated by presenting the Malian government as a caring problem solver, *inter alia*, in view of measures to strengthen security in close cooperation with riparian countries to protect transportation axis and tourist hotspots; provisions to prevent draughts and food shortages, for example by consolidating transnational water authorities and maintaining close international cooperation in the agricultural sector with India; rhetorics countering the “security psychosis”, for example by disproving the hypothesis of an eminent rebellion.⁴⁴⁸ A second discursive thread to support this image deals with Mali as an active promotor of freedom, human rights and democracy in the world, as presented by the examples of West Sahara, Palestine, and Libya. In correspondence with these external activities, the internal situation gets described as a functioning democratic system which still guarantees the upcoming 2012 elections and the transition of power to be in perfect order and in constitutional time frame, even against the background of an unstable environment.⁴⁴⁹

On the other hand, there is a complementary part of the discourse developing a different kind of democratic project, a project which is presented as being born out of misery and necessity. In this context, the idea of supporting new democratic structures within the framework of northern Mali or Azawad is based on the rationale that the Malian system proved to be a dysfunctional democracy based on decades-long clientelism, political patronage and institutional discrimination. Thus, as conflict communication exhibits, the self-observation of citizens in northern Mali is predominantly characterised by the absence of a democratic state power, even worse, by a perception of being objects to competing undemocratic powers creating northern Mali a “no man’s land” without sustainable security and socio-economic perspectives.⁴⁵⁰ Linked to that, there is a number of references attributing responsibility to the international community, i.e. the UN system, when it comes to the unpunished violation of peace agreements and democratic rights and the continuously deterioration of security in West Africa.⁴⁵¹ Against this background, the idea of two separate people, the Malian and the Azawadian, living in friendship side

⁴⁴⁷ See e.g. *Le Républicain* (Maliweb 31.10.2011d), *GovMali* (15.10.2011a; 28.10.2011; 11.12.2011a).

⁴⁴⁸ For references to the latent interethnic and intra-community conflicts among Azawadians and, as a consequence thereof, for references to the lacking democratic basis of the MNLA in view of Azawad’s entire population see chapter 6.4/phase III or exemplarily *GovMali* (12.12.2011; 6.01.2012), *MNLA* (22.12.2011), *Le 22 Septembre* (Maliweb 1.12.2011a), *L’Indicateur du Renouveau* (Maliweb 7.12.2011a).

⁴⁴⁹ Besides huge parts of the analysed communication representing a rather positive account of the Malian democracy in this phase (see exemplarily *GovMali* 28.10.2011; *Le Pouce/Maliweb* 31.10.2011e; *Lafia Révélateur/Maliweb* 7.12.2011c), the aforementioned unstable environment, ironically enough, is also understood as a long-term consequence of the peace agreements which are considered both a democratic achievement and a political withdrawal leading to a fatal retreat of the state in northern Mali (see e.g. *Le Zénith Balé/Maliweb* 10.12.2011d). On top of that, to handle the unstable political situation, voices attributed to the Malian youth argue in favour of a more democratic, i.e. a more inclusive governance (see *Le Malien/Maliweb* 17.12.2011).

⁴⁵⁰ See particularly *MNLA* (30.10.2011; 3.11.2011f; 10.01.2012), *Le Républicain* (Maliweb 31.10.2011d), *Le Prétoire* (Maliweb 12.01.2012a), and *FES* (October 2011).

⁴⁵¹ In this context, it is remarkable that, for the first time, both the Malian and the Azawadian people are presented as victims of an unjust political system and a perceived disregard of the international community who both deserve true self-determination (see *MNA* 4.10.2011; 3.11.2011g; 1.01.2012).

by side, each based on democratic legitimisation of political power and self-determination gets increasingly pronounced.⁴⁵²

As the prospect of a self-determined political entity of Azawad gradually takes discursive shape in phase III, conflict communication step by step covers some prerequisites. First, concerning structural issues of an eventual state of Azawad, it is mentioned that state-like structures and functions, such as regional administrative facilities or military forces, are already there. At the same time, this assessment is discursively linked to the younger generation of Azawadians which is described as a new democratic basis able and ready to shape the future irrespective of ethnic borders and unburdened by the past (see MNLA 9.12.2011; 8.01.2012a; 9.01.2012). Second, again linked to the younger generation, the Azawadian democratic project is attributed increased prospects of success because the political and legal knowledge of international humanitarian law (e.g. concerning self-determination or self-defence) is not only available as an abstract argumentative resource. By advocacy work of professionalised representatives, it does also materialise as Azawadian concerns in international debates on democracy promotion.⁴⁵³ Third, based on the previous point, actual cases of successful legal struggles for self-determination worldwide become a part of the conflict discourse. Thus, referring to the progressive dynamics of the Arab Spring and, beyond that, to the newly independent states all over the world (with East Timor and South Sudan being the most recent examples at that time) makes Mali and Azawad discursively emerge as further hotspots of international attention (see MNLA 23.12.2011). Finally, the project of a self-determined Azawad is closely linked to the idea of creating a democratic bulwark against AQMI and other newly founded Islamist groups heading towards the establishment of an Islamic state in the Sahelian zone, having Azawad at its centre.⁴⁵⁴ At the same time, the Azawadian bulwark is also discursively associated with a kind of naturally grown resistance towards illegitimate external powers, be they religiously or racially driven or motivated by a (neo-) colonial mission.⁴⁵⁵

Overlooking both political agendas emerging in conflict discourse in phase III, it should be noted that, even though both projects are presented as being deeply rooted in democratic ideas, initiatives drawing on the repertoire of peaceful democratic instruments and methods (e.g. negotiation, mediation, constitutional reform, referendum) ultimately failed. In other words,

⁴⁵² However, as mentioned earlier (see chapter 6.4/phase III/October 2011), the broad support or, more precisely, the democratic legitimisation of an Azawadian project of self-determination including all ethnic groups gets called in question from time to time (see e.g. *Le Combat* 22.10.2011a).

⁴⁵³ As outlined earlier (see chapter 6.2/phase III/January 2012) by the example of Moussa Ag Assarid, this kind of advocacy is closely related to what is understood to be a necessary condition of success for any democratic project: its recognition by the international community (see MNLA 22.12.2011; 12.01.2012; 17.01.2012).

⁴⁵⁴ See particularly *Le Républicain* (Maliweb 13.12.2011a), *Le Prétoire* (Maliweb 27.12.2011), AFP (Maliweb 13.01.2012) and *Le 22 Septembre* (12.01.2012b). In this context, the Festival in the Desert is brought up as a symbolic event representing Azawad's open and diverse culture which per se stands against Islamist ideologies (see e.g. AFP/Maliweb 15.01.2012). Remarkably enough, after the attacks on Ménaka by the MNLA, ATT, too, adopts the same argument and example (i.e. Festival in the Desert) to underline that Mali with its open-minded, welcoming and deeply democratic culture represents this very bulwark and will defend its independence, peace and stability, if necessary, by the use of military force (see GovMali 19.01.2012).

⁴⁵⁵ For a historical perspective on this, see chapter 6.3/50 Years of Colonisation and Invasion of Azawad/phase III. Here again, as statements make clear that the MNLA sees itself in line with the anti-Apartheid movement in South Africa, the discourse gets enriched by a strong historical example (see MNLA 8.01.2012a).

armed conflict represents the destination of a developing relationship between two conflict parties who explicitly found their political action on democratic principles.

In sum, taking a closer look at the world societal framing of communication in phase III reveals additional modes of differentiation simultaneously at work. The market metaphor which prominently appears in descriptions of the conflict situation clearly points to economic communication based on a functional reasoning about stakeholders and profits. Even though woven into the overall flow of conflict communication, this part of the discourse follows a different logic than those parts of communication dealing with the legitimisation of political power through democratic principles. Those parts, in turn, are characterised by a discursive build-up of two political agendas or, in other words, two democratic projects both opposing and correlating with each other. This could also be read as a kind of competition between two ways of legitimising political power. To put it in a short headline: ‘model democracy’ versus democratic freedom fighters. Both agendas show elements of a demonstration of evidence including repeated appeals to democratic principles, proof of democratic processes and calling up reputes and witnesses able to attest democratic qualities (see e.g. recognition by international actors). Therefore, these parts of communication can be considered as largely mirroring a political system of world society structured by segmentary differentiation and thus focused on political power legitimately exercised by democratic procedures of an existing nation state. At the same time, the very same parts of communication reflect different approaches on the principles guiding democratic processes of allocating political power including elements of stratificatory differentiation (e.g. concerning the international recognition of Azawad’s self-determination request). These competing modes of differentiation operating in communication are at the centre stage of newly arising contradictions and thus of a boosting conflict development in the course of phase III. Based on the analysed conflict communication, these contradictions can be exposed along the conflict system’s dimensions of meaning (added to the table introduced in chapter 6.5.1 and expanded in 6.5.2 in bold text below):

Dimension	Phase	Poles of Contradiction		
factual	III	democracy as inclusive society within functioning state	versus	democratic self-determination only within new state structures
		insecurity as manageable Malian policy problem		fighting root causes of lucrative insecurity business
	II	promotion of freedom and democracy within existing Malian nation state structures		reform and rebuilding of state and nation from the ground up
		alternative geo-political orientations in development relations		claiming compliance with humanitarian principles from international community
	I	preservation of Malian central state; national unity, state sovereignty and territorial integrity equally important		insisting on self-determination as a universal democratic value

		promoting and enhancing development efforts as major security policy		underdevelopment, insecurity, and repression as result of (inter-) national power politics
temporal	III	Mali's grown reputation as model democracy since independence		peaceful and successful independence movements worldwide as role models
	II	great West African empires in history as example		getting rid of colonial structures
	I	preservation of rich multicultural Malian heritage		recognition of cultural and historical uniqueness of northern populations/of "Azawad"
social	III	Malian unity endangered by criminals		MNLA acting on behalf of Azawadian people as a whole
		supporters of government of national unity representing "all children of Mali"		supporters of self-determination and democracy for Azawad and Mali
	II	loyal citizens abiding by nation state's rule of law		loyal tribe members abiding by ethno-political affiliations and obligations
		faithful muslims supporting the country's unity		community based on heroic narratives and models
	I	political elites mainly originating from Bambara ethnic group, shaped by a spirit of struggling for independence and nation building		minority ethnic groups advocating for self-determination within a federal state; redefining nation as an ethnic category
		promotion of a unitary and strong state		categorical division of "northern" and Malian population

As the analysis brought forward, between these poles, conflict identities continue to consolidate and become more exclusive within two main discursive corridors. Taking up this development of phase I and II, the process accelerates in phase III and is guided by two competing ideas of how a democratic state and society should essentially look like (added to the table introduced in 6.5.1 and expanded in 6.5.2 in bold text below):

programmes	III	preventing unprecedented and imminent state disintegration/division; holding criminals (drug traffickers, terrorists) accountable; strengthening Mali's democratic development	convincing people of Azawad's autonomy/independence; gaining more supporters; abolishing a system of institutionalised subjugation; preparing self-defence against military invasion
		continuing forced assimilation of different ethnic groups in	representing a minority position among ethnic groups of northern

		Malian state; degradation of democratic principles	Mali; risking ethnic confrontation; invoking Islamist forces
	II	reforming from within: constitutional reform; adapting and reinforcing PSPSDN; highlighting Islamic values as common ground; receiving Libyan returnees as nationals; pretending fight against terrorism; repressing northern populations by militarisation of development	calling on international community to observe; making PSPSDN more just; upholding tribal above national law; receiving Libyan returnees as Azawadians collaboration with terrorists; potential instigation of a new rebellion
	I	promoting development efforts in Mali, especially in northern regions; strengthening the unitary state; militarising the north; neo-colonialism; cultural assimilation	claiming self-determination of population in northern regions; fighting for autonomy of Azawad; questioning the unitary state
roles	III	defenders/keepers of Malian home country, pro government & anti secessionist incompetent & overstrained authorities; betrayed Malian population	proponents of Azawadian democratic self-determination implemented by MNLA criminals without principles; terrorists; militant rebels plunging Mali into chaos
	II	law-abiding citizens; faithful Muslims clandestine collaborators of terrorists	activists in the cause of democracy and human rights open collaborators of terrorists; new and old rebels
	I	loyals to the regime; pro-PSPSDN; supporters of peace process collaborators of criminals (kidnappers, drug traffickers, bandits, terrorists)	anti-government activists; activists in the cause of freedom; people in need of help and living in insecurity; marginalised and oppressed people potential rebels; collaborators of criminals (kidnappers; drug traffickers; bandits, terrorists)
persons	III	ATT/Malian authorities; representatives of international (development) partners; Malian nationals (including northern population); those declaring loyalty to the Malian government among Libyan returnees	MNLA members & supporters; majority of tribe members; those declaring adherence to MNLA among Libyan returnees; deserters from Malian military; defectors from Malian authorities
	II	Malian population; international development partners from the West and China	Azawadians; tribe members; international observers

	I	ATT; government members; majority of population in the country; government officials of neighbouring countries and Western countries; representatives of international development organisations; certain parts of Libyan returnees	MNA members; members of former Tuareg rebel units (e.g. Bahanga faction); major parts of Tuareg population in the north; light-skinned population; “all sons and daughters of Azawad”; certain parts of Libyan returnees
norms	III	defending democratic principles by force (national integrity) and justifying human sacrifice by higher cause (order, stability)	achieving democratic principles by force (self-determination) and justifying human sacrifice by higher cause (dignity, freedom)
	II	concord, community, understanding, solidarity as national values with religious connotation	international solidarity among supporters of democracy; solidarity and loyalty with ethnic connotation
	I	unity and political stability; cultural diversity; development and security; progress and peace; heroism and patriotism	democracy, esp. self-determination and rule of law; justice and peace; solidarity and hospitality; importance of kinship; heroism and patriotism; historic responsibility

Taking together the world societal framing, the poles of contradiction represented in three dimensions of meaning, and the development of two conflict identities outlined above, phase III gives rise to escalating move C which can be described as follows: It consists of a structural coupling of economic communication related to the idea of an insecurity market and political communication reflecting two ideas of legitimising political power within a democratic framework. First, communication on political agendas based on democratic principles appears as a kind of counter-programme vis-à-vis those parts of communication describing a protracted situation of different stakeholders benefitting from insecurity but, at the same time, being locked-in in that very situation. In other words, political communication understands and correlates with economic reasoning insofar as it offers perspectives to break through a perceived deadlock (quotations below see also in chapter 6.4/phase III):

“Azawad’s youth is invited to burst open chains that impair its action. [...] This vision means gaining a free will [...] based on a patriotic determination fostering the common good.” (MNLA 8.01.2012b)

“We are still fascinated, beyond the moment and line of horizon, by the image of a country whose human capital is of high quality, the image of a people living in peace, security and a prosperous environment, a people in accord with the nations of the world, dedicated to democratic values, freedom and justice.” (GovMali 31.12.2011)

Second, as outlined earlier in this section, the two political scenarios pointedly developing in the course of phase III are indeed competing but, at the same time, based on the common idea of democratic representation. Or, to put it in the analytical language of this study, they are discursive representations from two different subsystems of political communication getting structurally coupled. One attributes political power in terms of existing structures and processes,

especially elections, within a democratic constitutional nation state that is observed as a model democracy, both by its political elites and from outside. The other one deals with political power as an expression of self-determination as a people understood as the very core of a democratic community. This part of political communication observes the people of Mali (and Azawad) as still being on its way to fulfill a mission of struggling for freedom and fighting against oppression, a mission observed as being part of a global development towards democracy. It can thus be stated that the analysis of phase III reveals an additional structural coupling of economic and a twofold political communication leading to a further densification of the conflict discourse.

The structural coupling of escalating move C comes along with changing structures of expectation and thus with a final and curial normative shift of the discourse. In addition to what has been indicated about the further development of conflict identities earlier, the normative shift of phase III can be described as follows: The struggle for freedom, justice and self-determination or, in short, for democracy, discursively referred to as a noble cause, can be accompanied by the (not so noble) use of force. Therefore, within the context of both preserving and achieving democracy, the use of force gets increasingly presented as a reasonable and legitimate means of choice, for example relating to self-defence or the maintainance of stability and order.

“A people [i.e. the Malian] dedicated to democratic values, freedom and justice. [...] the concern about its preservation has mobilised our forces and our energy in the service of the people of Mali.” (GovMali 31.12.2011)

“These actions [i.e. the attacks on Ménaka] have only one objective: regaining peace and justice for the Azawad community and stability for our region.” (MNLA 17.01.2012; brackets added R.B.)

To substantiate the identification of escalating move C, particularly concerning its normative shift, the following and last part of this section presents a number of crucial observations pointing to perceptions of violence during phase III.

First, right from the proclamation of MNLA's foundation on, the situation is presented as a simmering conflict full of growing tensions. As, for example, statements on the pro-MNLA demonstrations on November 1, 2011 in Kidal show, these tensions can easily become manifest as violent actions when arresting protesters gets observed as an arbitrary act or even as a deliberate violation of freedom of expression. Such incidences then get discursively put on a par with past experiences of violence, such as “war crimes” during earlier rebellions and an “institutional racism” towards parts of the population in the north which has always experiences the Malian state as a vehicle of forced assimilation (see e.g. MNLA 3.11.2011f; L'Indépendent/Maliweb 24.11.2011b). Beyond that, growing tensions are also associated with the concrete danger of reerupting old conflict between ethnic groups and thus a kind of afghanisation of the north (see El Watan/Maliweb 1.11.2011a). This is reinforced by a growing number of voices applauding the government for demonstrating strength or even claiming a heavy-handed strategy⁴⁵⁶ to restore authority and preserve unity “to the last drop of blood” (L'Indépendent/Maliweb 20.10.2011d; see also Le Prétoire/Maliweb 5.12.2011b; Le 22 Septembre 18.01.2012d). So, the overall impression is that of a tense and violence-prone atmosphere whereby two democratic

⁴⁵⁶ The postponement of a law on the abolition of the death penalty in Mali is a striking example. The death penalty can be applied in cases of high treason or desertion (see AI 11.10.2011).

projects, Azawad's autonomy and Mali's unity, are described as being threatened like never before against the background of a whole region on the brink to be set on fire.

Second, in such an atmosphere, the topic of militarisation plays a crucial role in how the potentiality of violence gets observed. Based on the analysis of the text corpus, militarisation clearly points to the widespread perception of a multiplication of military presence in the north. On the one hand, this is attributed to an increasing troop deployment to the north in previous months (via PSPSDN measures) and even more so to a massive redeployment of Malian military that starts in the beginning of December which is altogether seen either as an intimidation and terrorisation of Azawad⁴⁵⁷ or as a measure to protect transportation axes and tourist hotspots (see GovMali 12.12.2011). On the other hand, discursive observations of militarisation include announcements referring to MNLA's growing military capabilities and efforts to mobilise the population of the north to take part in its liberation (see MNLA 22.12.2011; 28.12.2011). Furthermore, in this context, Libyan returnees are presented as "ex-soldiers armed to the teeth" or, in other words, as an incarnation of an imminent rebellion (see *Le Combat/Maliweb* 26.10.2011; *El Watan/Maliweb* 1.11.2011a). Together with the repeatedly appearing assessment that the availability of illegal weapons in the region reached an unprecedented level and the observation that more and more Tuareg commanders (Imghad and Ifoghas), both from the Malian military and among Libyan returnees, declare their adherence to the MNLA while others are still loyal to the Malian government, this creates a climate of mistrust, fear and insecurity (see FES October 2011a; GovMali 3.12.2011; MNLA 3.12.2011).

Third, crucial observations pointing to perceptions of violence are indeed linked to AQMI which is presented as the predominant and most serious threat to peace and security in Mali and beyond (see *Le Pouce/Maliweb* 31.10.2011e; AFP/Maliweb 13.01.2012). As the analysis of the conflict discourse in phase III shows, terrorist attacks on strategic aims of Malian infrastructure (e.g. military bases or administrative buildings), kidnappings and lootings are presented as growing in numbers and severity, with the attack on November 25 (5 European tourists kidnapped, one shot dead) being the most cited.⁴⁵⁸ As the analysis also shows, the accusation suggesting a toleration of AQMI by the government or even a cooperation with terrorists is in itself perceived as a violent and terrorist act. On top of that, information on newly founded militant Islamist groups (Ansar ad-Dine, MUJAO) in December, on a presumable reinforcement of AQMI by Libyan units, and a growing perception that neither regional cooperation nor Western countries can prevent the Sahelian zone from becoming a safe haven for terrorism, causes an omnipresent feeling of being surrounded by imminent violence within a multiple fronts scenario.⁴⁵⁹

Fourth, and finally, phase III exposes more and more explicitly militant or even war-prone rhetorics suggesting that the use of military force can be understood as an exceptional and

⁴⁵⁷ On this, the permanent patrolling of combat aircrafts and deliberate attacks on civilians by security forces (raids, confiscations etc.) are mentioned (see *Nouvelle Libération/Maliweb* 6.12.2011b; MNLA 14.01.2012).

⁴⁵⁸ See e.g. GovMali (26.11.2011), *Le Combat* (Maliweb 4.11.2011a), and ICG (1.12.2011). See also detailed table in chapter 6.4/phase III/November 2011.

⁴⁵⁹ To get an impression of this feeling see particularly AFP (Maliweb 12.12.2011a), *Le Prétoire* (Maliweb 27.12.2011), *L'Indicateur du Renouveau* (Maliweb 4.01.2012), MNLA (9.01.2012), *Nouvelle Libération* (Maliweb 11.01.2012), *Le Canard Déchainé* (Maliweb 16.01.2012).

necessary evil in order to achieve better and truly democratic conditions, some selected examples from the text corpus:

“There is a serious risk of falling back into civil war.” (former Ganda Koy leader; Le 22 Septembre/Maliweb 1.12.2011a)

“If you want peace, prepare for war.” (Nouvelle Libération/Maliweb 6.12.2011b)

“ATT has to impose peace by war.” (Waati/Maliweb 8.12.2011b)

“There is no half peace and no half war. Some cannot live in peace while others are at war.” (MNLA 3.01.2012b)

“[Troop deployment to the north corresponds to] an invitation to war.” (MNLA 12.01.2012)

“Attacks [on Ménaka] are attacks on Malian culture and history. Mali is prepared to protect and preserve independence, stability, and peace.” (GovMali 19.01.2012d)

In other words, against the background of many sporadic violent incidences attributed to different sides (see e.g. kidnappings, lootings, assaults, attacks), the development of the discourse in the very last episode appears to anticipate war-like conditions or even an outright state of war.

6.6 Summary

As outlined in summary of the case study on the Maidan protests in Ukraine 2013/2014 (see chapter 5.6), the analytical narrative on Mali’s crisis 2010-2012 presented here offers a reconstruction of a process of conflict escalation which builds on three dimensions of meaning in the discourse (factual, temporal, social) and identifies major moments of conflict development (escalating moves). The case study does *not* claim to offer an absolute timeline and a causal explanation of events on Maidan but gives an insight into the collective creation and experiencing of a conflict based on documented text-based communication that had been published within the period of investigation.

Following the multi-step analysis introduced in the work plan (chapter 4.4), the process of conflict escalation was observed along three phases. The golden thread of the conflict discourse is represented by a succession of three escalating moves (A-C). Recapitulating the salient key words, the following figure offers an overview on the results of the case study on Mali’s crisis in terms of phases, escalating moves, the world societal background of communication and observations of violence appearing in the respective context.

		escalating move		

turning point event	pha-se		structural coupling	normative shift	'world societal communication' spelled out in terms of...	key observations of (il)legitimate violence
Nov 1, 2010: foundation of MNA	I	A	two latent narratives get politically outspoken: almighty unitary development state vs. ethno-cultural democracy	realisation of democratic, multicultural, and positively developing Malian society as a political fiction	political power as result of a centre and periphery model, be it in (self-) observation of Azawad-Mali or Mali-world relations	unpunished historic wrongs (war crimes during rebellions) sporadic military operations to counter insecurity indications to military buildup from different sides
Aug 26, 2011: death of former rebel leader Ibrahim Ag Bahanga	II	B	merging of religious values, legal freedom rights and political ideas of loyalty in communication	membership/solidarity (among citizens, towards Libyan returnees) as a conditioned value	religious, legal and political communication producing different frames of reference and thus contradiction as to what substantiates state and society	reinforcing security forces, militarisation of the north persecution, ill-treatment and discrimination of Libyan returnees attacks on PSPSDN (military) bases
Oct 16, 2011: foundation of MNLA	III	C	economic communication (insecurity market) melts with communication on the legitimacy of political power	struggling for the noble cause of democracy can include the use of military force	understanding actors to the conflict as stakeholders motivated by economic incentives; two competing democratic rationales: international recognition and state sovereignty	protests involving violent incidences parallels to past experiences of violence (during earlier rebellions) militarisation (growing military capabilities on all sides) threat of violence as ultima ratio to fight for legitimate aims (both stability/order and self-determination) growing number of attacks on infrastructure, kidnappings, lootings, mainly attributed to Islamist movements

Now, recalling the basic research question of this study – How do conflicts escalate? – this analytical narrative can be understood as a possible answer to the question of how the situation in Mali at that time escalated. Based on the results of the present case study, it escalated as a succession of escalating moves identified while observing the discourse as representation of an evolving conflict system. As demonstrated, this conflict system continuously irritates its environment, incorporates communication and draws on a communicative reservoir that is filled with contradictions ensuing from competing modes of differentiation between and within world society's subsystems. Thereby, new communication gets not only simply added to an existing

spectre of the conflict discourse but, by importing further contradictions, opens up avenues for new ramifications of the discourse. Each conflict phase shows specific observations of (il)legitimate violence (see extreme right column in table above) which can be seen as embedded interim results of the discourse and, at the same time, as constitutive elements of its further progression.

As similarly outlined in summary of the case study on the Maidan protests earlier (see chapter 5.6), in an overall view, the present analytical narrative (including all tables on poles of contradiction and on layers of conflict identities) consists of a multitude of analytical observations derived from the text corpus or, in other words, of iteratively gained hypotheses on the process of conflict escalation in the context of the Mali's crisis from November 2010 to January 2012. The following sections present a most condensed answer to the research question on the basis of this study; they are drastically reduced in case study details and represent the essence of the second-order observation perspective adopted here; and, they are to be understood as a kind of reading aid to go through the table above.

The situation in Mali in 2010-2012 escalates in an environment characterised by a country respectively a region that had already been shaken by armed conflict experienced as pointing beyond Mali (as e.g. concerning the Malian independence struggle or a number of rebellions associated with cross-border ethnic communities since its independence). Against this background, political communication conveys the perception of Mali (in the world) and Azawad (within the Malian and world context) being objects to external power dynamics that operate according to a centre-periphery model (see chapter 6.5.1). This finds its pointed discursive expression in a cluster of communication identified as escalating move A: Therein, communication about power and influence unfolds as a contrast between two ideal type political structures: an almighty unitary development state (backed up by a centralised global structure of aid and development) and an ethno-culturally oriented democracy (based on a global principle of self-determination). As these political alternatives become articulated and thus understandable for each other and able to be contradicted (i.e. structurally coupled), the idea of a democratic, multicultural and developing Malian society gets increasingly labelled as a political fiction (normative shift). Observations referring to violence in phase I are particularly linked to legitimising the use of military force in the past (and in perspective in the future) within the context of upholding legitimate power claims and heroically fighting either for or against the Malian independence and the consolidation of the Malian state respectively.

Building on this, in phase II, the discourse seems to merge communication from different frames of reference. Religious values, legal freedom rights and political loyalty get articulated as alternative and competing sources of that what is considered to be the basis of social coexistence (in a country or society). Referred to as escalating move B, these alternatives encounter, get debated and thus become mutually understandable and able to be contradicted (i.e. structurally coupled) in communication. Moreover, as communication in this context deals with conditions about if and how membership and solidarity should be granted (e.g. towards Libyan returnees or towards those opposing the Malian government), this comes along with a normative shift (see chapter 6.5.2). In this discursive environment which is collectively described as a situation of growing insecurity, the use of violence gets addressed as a legitimate means not only to create physical security but also to underline the validity of the respective religious, ethnic, legal or political criteria of coexistence (as outlined by the observations of “discriminated and illtreated Libyan returnees” or “a increasingly militarised north”).

Finally, in phase III, the conflict discourse gets increasingly consumed by a competition between two democratic rationales: self-determination/international recognition versus model democracy/state sovereignty. This competition plays out against the background of what is observed as a market of insecurity. Escalating move C therefore describes a cluster of communication in which political communication on legitimate power (already inherently contradictory) encounters economic communication on how the actual situation corresponds to a market in which stakeholders instrumentally act according to their expectation of profit (see in detail chapter 6.5.3). As communication in this cluster gets pointedly articulated, mutually understandable and thus able to be contradicted (i.e. structurally coupled), the conflict discourse carries out a further normative shift with an instrumental character. Therefore, achieving or defending democracy is observed as a noble cause that can indeed be accompanied by the use of (military) force as legitimate means of choice. Observations of violence in phase III, as opposed to the very beginning of the investigation period, represent the use of military force against institutions, properties/material things and against people as a deliberate choice, as an ultima ratio to fight for a legitimate aim: realising one's idea of democracy.

PART III: SYNTHESIS

CHAPTER 7. Reviewing the Case Studies

7.1 Summarising Case Study Results or: How to use the Zoom

Being a hobby photographer, as, for example, the author of this study, the functioning of a zoom lens can be fascinating: While the physical distance between the photographer and the subject or scene in question remains the same, by using the zoom, the angle of view can be varied and thus subjects can ‘move’ closer or more distant. Technically, quite a lot happens during this procedure, either manually or automatically. To get a pin sharp result with a high resolution, the photographer is supposed to focus his camera, to define foreground and background, and, if possible, to adjust the length of exposure to light.

In this study, too, the question is how empirical material, i.e. a huge amount of text data⁴⁶⁰, had been “zoomed through” (Vogd 2010: 130) from the researcher’s standpoint and how it had been achieved to focus on that what is referred to as ‘analytical narrative’. Therefore, this study or, to keep the metaphor above, the present photo, which claims to offer a high resolution, is intended to enable its observers to recognise foreground (i.e. conflict systems) and background (other social subsystems); it is also to be regarded as the outcome of a well-considered exposure to light (i.e. be transparent about the methodology); and, finally, it inspires viewers to make sense of the photo in a broader context, for example within the framework of an exhibition (as e.g. concerning the field of PCS; see chapter 8).

Now, how did the Maidan protests in Ukraine in 2013/2014 escalate? And how did the situation in Mali 2010-2012 escalate? On the one hand, based on the presentation in the case studies, the answers to these questions can be given in a quite simple way: By reading the extensive chapters (5/6) above, readers are offered a chance to learn how, step by step, the conflict has been observed as such and chronologically developed within communication. Or, in short, the readers can track how observers observed an escalating conflict. *That is how* the conflict escalated, at least on the basis of this study’s analysis. On the other hand, it is to be assumed that a suchlike answer could appear as all too snippy as measured by the scope and significance of the central research question. At this point, however, this provides the opportunity to recall that how-questions are in stark contrast to why-questions, as set out by the working plan of this study (see chapter 4.4). As how-questions do implicate a strong focus on processes, possible answers to these questions can rather not be given in a condensed way taking the form of ‘if A, than B’, especially when it comes to the complex social phenomenon of conflict. Against this background, getting involved with the broad representation of the case studies here can definitely be seen as a demanding enterprise. At the same time, this study intends to make its approach plausible and transparent within this very framework and thus deliberately offers a both

⁴⁶⁰ Taking both case studies together, the analysed text data consists of 1.264 documents, each between 50 and 2.000 words. 20 weekly and biweekly newspapers (see chapter 5 on the Maidan protests), each between 15 and 20 pages and thus exceeding 2.000 words, are not included here (see also Appendix A.1.1/Media).

rich in detail and structured synopsis of conflict communication on the basis of which conflict escalation in the respective cases can be observed and, in a way, witnessed in retrospect.

Subchapters	Ways of Reading the Case Studies	Content
5.1 / 6.1		case study introductions; basic information on text data corpus
5.2, 5.3, 5.4 / 6.2, 6.3, 6.4		factual, temporal, and social dimension of conflict communication; formulating interpretation, rich in details
5.5 / 6.5		synopsis, reduced in case study details; reflecting interpretation, focus on identification of escalating moves, identity layers, and legitimisation of violence
5.6 / 6.6		summary, drastically reduced in case study details, essence of second-order perspective analysis

As suggested at the beginning of part II, readers of this study, too, are offered to use ‘their zoom’ in approaching the present text. The obvious way is to look at each ‘pixel’ separately and then gradually zoom out to the big picture; this corresponds to read the case studies from beginning to end and thus to track and understand the research process chronologically, as passed through by this author. The other possible way would be ‘from the back to the front’, i.e. to start with the big picture and then zoom in to the details, either to systematically look at each pixel or to just browse according to personal interests. Both ways of reading the case studies are equally appropriate to provide a transparent overview and a full understanding of the case studies as plausibility probes of this study’s approach.

Having said that, it is theoretically appropriate for this study to look at its results in all modesty. As broad and comprehensive the case studies may appear, they represent just a possible reading among others. Even though this chapter bears the headline “Summarising Case Study results”, it does not reproduce the condensed summaries of conflict escalation (see chapters 5.6. and 6.6). Rather, it focuses on those phases and escalating moves during conflict development in both cases that can be seen as key according to the insights gained through the case studies. In other words, the zoom is now used to refocus two particular spots within the results of the case studies.

Spot I: Foundations stones of mutually exclusive conflict identities

Turning to the Maidan protests in Ukraine (2013/2014), the ‘story’ that is told in the case studies presents conflict escalation as a succession of six escalating moves; this is structured according to four phases referring to five turning point events (see table in chapter 5.6). From the perspective of this retrospect here, escalating move C in phase II has a particular importance for

conflict development since the formation of mutually exclusive conflict identities gets a veritable boost during this phase (see chapter 5.5.2; for details see chapter 5.4). The text corpus shows a number of clues that underpin the normative shift of the conflict discourse towards an increasing simplification and a focus on two adversarial positions, all subsumed under the header of pro- vs. anti-government, such as:

post-Soviet elite vs. civil society opposition
 Russophiles vs. Europhiles,
 agents of the east vs. agents of the west,
 Russian-speaking vs. Ukrainian-speaking,
 older vs. younger generation,
 rural vs. urban population

On the one hand, this development builds on communication already identified along the axis (economic) integration vs. (political) emancipation in phase I (see escalating move A; see chapter 5.5.1). On the other hand, however, this development is part of a new cluster of communication in which two ideas of how political power in this very moment of history should be exercised confront each other: Ukraine as a country being either architect of its fortune or at the mercy of global powers. Within this conglomerate of encountering contradictions, “Maidan”, which had been observed as the both positive and negative embodiment of a new form of political negotiation and decision-making in Ukraine, now gets disempowered and dealt with as a great power matter basically being shaped from beyond the country. In this perspective, both the European/EU influence and the Russian influence on the Maidan protests are mutually observed as a certain dispossession of that what is projected on Maidan as a burning glass of political negotiation.⁴⁶¹

In sum, as put on analytical record earlier (see chapter 5.5.2; for details see chapter 5.2/phase II), the brief spot on this part of the conflict discourse gives an impression of how newly articulated contradictions in political communication produce the observation of a “point of no return” and also shows how polarisation becomes more intense in a scenario that is increasingly perceived as a “the-winner-takes-it-all” situation. In this context, for the first time in the investigation period, the use of force against things and people, be it in terms of protest means or reactions to the same, are more and more qualified as, against the background of a unique historical momentum, acceptable or even necessary. Taking up this thread, subsequent escalating moves in the following phases (see increasing elimination of diversity/D; entrenching conflict identities/F) show how the normative shift in phase II continues to shape structures of expectation in the conflict discourse (as to conflict identities and the perception of violence).

Spot II: Merging communication – contradicting values

Turning to the case study on Mali (2010/2012), conflict development is presented as a succession of three escalating moves; this is structured according to four phases referring to five turning point events (see table in chapter 6.6). Here, too, in retrospect, escalating move B in phase II can be seen as a particular spot of conflict escalation. The analysis of this phase reveals a cluster of communication in which religious, political and legal aspects of communication get

⁴⁶¹ In this context, the opening of negotiations about a new economic partnership with Russia on December 11, 2013, becomes a much-cited reference in the conflict discourse.

structurally coupled, i.e. debated, connected, contradicted: references to values of Islam (especially concord and community), ethnic and cultural affiliations (concerning tribal rules and norms of population in the north), and considerations about rights and obligations (humanitarian law/human rights, national sovereignty and rule of law) are observed under the common header of loyalty and solidarity as expression of political power. Thereby, as characterisations like “faithful citizen” and “democratic tribe member” suggest, discursive guidelines begin to step forward in the form of binding and enduring obligations or, in other words, changing structures of expectation. This becomes particularly obvious if one looks at references to “helping hands” towards Libyan returnees: aid and support, be it from the government or ethnic groups, seems to be based on a principle of reciprocity including the idea that solidarity and political loyalty go hand in hand (see chapter 6.5.2; for details 6.4/phase II).

Now, the normative shift of the discourse at this point can be described as follows: As solidarity appears as a key normative concept brought into the discursive field from different sides, it becomes obvious that solidarity is increasingly understood as a value with conditions attached. More precisely, the idea of solidarity as a human value as such, for example in form of charity and unconditioned solidarity towards Libyan returnees fades out of the discourse; also, solidarity in form of an unconditioned development policy in northern Mali, independent from an actual approval or rejection of the government, gets called into question. Rather, solidarity gets increasingly addressed as a value that is not absolute but in real action dependent on religion, citizenship, and kinship.

With this, conflict development takes a formative turn. Since there are different frames of reference of what is to be considered the basis of social coexistence (in a country of society), descriptions of the situation as one of growing insecurity increase. Based on that, the use of violence gets addressed as a legitimate means not only to create physical security but also to underline the validity of the respective religious, ethnic, legal or political criteria of coexistence (as outlined by the observations of “discriminated and illtreated Libyan returnees” or “a increasingly militarised north”). The following escalating move C in phase III links up to this observation when the struggle for “the noble cause of democracy” gets connected to the legitimate use of force (see chapter 6.5.3).

As the two spots suggest, the zoom can be used to focus specific moments of conflict escalation and to highlight points that turn out to be giving a certain direction or to be particularly important for potential comparisons with other case studies. Also, as indicated, escalating moves do not represent analytical snapshots independent of each other; they are connected and build on one another.

7.2 Reflecting Methodology

As already outlined in the working plan of this study, ‘taking communication seriously’ has been an important motto while performing the case studies. Following the basic idea that the discursive construction of conflict happens within communication, the processing of the text data was effected by means of a multi-step analysis drawing on elements of DM and GT. In doing so, the case study chapters portray a myriad of particular analytical elements or, in other words, pixels that are gradually assembled to an overall picture of conflict escalation. In the style of a ‘formulating interpretation’, the case studies, in their first sections (see chapters 5.2/5.3/5.4 and

6.2/6.3/6.4), provide an accurate representation of the factual, temporal and social structure of conflict escalation dispensing with abstract and theorising language.⁴⁶² Based on a ‘reflecting interpretation’ of these structures and the modes of observation behind (by identifying poles of contradiction, identity layers), the synopsis chapters (5.5/6.5) present conflict development as a succession of escalation moves (resp. structural couplings and normative shifts).

Now, keeping the methodology stated within the broader theoretical foundations of this work in mind, the following sections deal with experiences, impressions and problems that were collected while working with the empirical material during the implementation of the case studies. In the following, these points are represented in terms of questions and answers that came up during the research process, be it on issues the author asked himself or issues raised by others being in touch with this work: *chapter 7’s seven questions and answers*.

(1) What was the biggest challenge when implementing this empirical approach?

As already outlined at various times during part I, the approach developed in this contribution does not intend to postulate ‘what actually happened’ in a defined investigation period in terms of conflict escalation; it does not explain why concrete persons performed concrete actions in concrete places and thus may have contributed to conflict escalation in any way. Rather, it investigates a multitude of documented readings understood as discursive representations of what happened. Therefore, while implementing analytical tasks and working steps (reading, coding, comparing, combining, reflecting, reframing etc.), it is a permanent and big challenge to free oneself from more or less subtle essentialist claims. The analysed text corpus itself is a permanent source of irritation⁴⁶³, especially when it comes to first-hand documents like the following from the case study on Ukraine that virtually encourage their readers to take it at face value (quotations taken from chapter 5.2/phase I):

“At 4 a.m. this morning the troops of riot police, Berkut, violently dispersed the peaceful Euromaidan at Independence Square.” (MMIC 30.11.2013b)

“According to eyewitnesses interviewed by Amnesty International, Berkut officers first told the demonstrators to disperse because the demonstration was ‘illegal’, then started to beat those that remained.” (AI 30.11.2013)

Against this background, one should consequently remind oneself that all parts of a diverse text corpus that a researcher approaches represent an extract of a potentially “endless field of relational references” (Nonhoff 2011: 101) which gets linked to on and on since an observation necessarily refers to a prior observation. Taking communication in the Ukrainian case study as an example, there are several observations of the situation referring to “revolution” articulated against different factual, temporal and social backgrounds (catchphrases taken from chapter 5.5.2/5.5.3):

“Revolution: illegal seizure of power” (GovUkr 3.12.2013f)

“Project EuroMaidan: A real revolution” (UkrN 9.12.2013)

⁴⁶² As introduced earlier in chapter 4.3, formulating interpretation and reflecting interpretation are important steps within DM (see Bohnsack 2014: 225-228; Vogd 2010: 121-131).

⁴⁶³ A second source of irritation due to essentialist claims about ‘what actually happened’ in conflict comes from other analytical work, for example when looking at “conflict timelines” (see e.g. Thurston and Lebovich 2013). See also question (4) below.

“Head over heels revolution: radical democracy” (GovUkr 11.12.2013a)
Civilising breakthrough from Eurasia to Europe” (UkrN 12.12.2013)
“Ukraine’s revolution of dignity” (MMIC 27.12.2013c)
“Identity revolution” (MMIC 1.01.2014)

Hence, it was an important guiding principle to constantly put this case study approach and its proceeding into perspective: first and foremost, it is characterised by the openness of its methodology concerning the nature of empirical material; it corresponds to an approximation procedure; it is neither a matter of covering a maximum possible number of ‘events’, ‘facts’ or data nor of reaching representativity in any other respect.

Yet, the implementation of this approach required a great amount of discipline, especially during stages of formulating interpretation, in order to get potential “problems of induction” (Vogd 2010: 122) under control (i.e. a tendency of researchers to carry or project inferences they wish to see into the material). For this reason, while zooming through text data, ‘methodical self-control’ included, for example, waiving the attribution of rational and goal-oriented motives; bracketing of contextual knowledge about the cases external to the text corpus; and, within the context of outlining the factual, temporal and social dimension of communication in different degrees of detail and abstraction, giving priority to the “inherent structuredness of the texts” (Vogd 2010: 130) in order to avoid hasty abstraction and theorising (e.g. by introducing analytical classifications at an early stage).

(2) How could this huge amount of text data be processed?

Indeed, MAXQDA had become an indispensable programme to manage text data, both in the sense of a structured filing of documents and concerning its tools for systematically coding texts (see details on coding procedure in chapter 4.4). However, major analytical steps (large parts of reflecting interpretation, including the identification of poles of contradiction, identity layers and escalating moves) were done in a ‘hybrid’ combination of MAXQDA and ‘paper and pencil’. In any case, treating this huge amount of text data would not have been possible without the support of MAXQDA.

Here are some concrete experiences and questions that came up during the application: First, it should be noted that MAXQDA (at least the version used in this study due to pragmatic reasons, see chapter 4.4) was not primarily designed for sequential analyses which is why there were no supportive tools in this respect available. Therefore, already during text data gathering, it is vital to use filenames for each document that show its exact date of publication in order to make chronological ordering within the system easier. To be able to work with aggregated data in convenient temporal units, weekly and monthly folders, “sets”, were created (see Appendix A.2.1/A.2.3). Second, while reading and coding the text during the phase of initial coding, there was intense reflection about how much of a relevant passage in the text should be coded. Key considerations in this regard included the question of how much context information a code would need to be adequately processed in the following stages. It was a useful experience to learn early that a short code (of a few words), which seems to be fully self-explanatory in the moment of coding, can appear meaningless when coming back to it later on at a different stage of analysis. In this context, third, reflections were also about multi codings, i.e. the attribution of different codes to the very same passage in a text document (see snapshot below: the passage highlighted in black was coded with three different codes during the stage of initial coding).

Dokument-Browser: 16.09.2011 Manœuvres sécessionnistes : Le Nord restera-t-il ma (Seite 1/2)

Manœuvres sécessionnistes / Le Nord restera-t-il malien ?

Le Républicain 16 sept 2011 à 00:00 AM Rubrique: Nord-Mali

Commentaires fermés [-] Texte [+] Email Imprimer Tweeter

Recommander 0

Kidal vit deux tristes réalités : elle voit passer armes – pour quelle destination ? – et anciens soldats de l'armée libyenne. Et puis, la mort de Bahanga semble avoir fauché l'herbe sous les pieds de fauteurs de troubles qui avaient, par force déclarations, dénoncé le non respect par l'Etat de l'accord d'Alger. Au point que la thèse de l'accident de circulation est suspectée. « Tous les gens de Kidal ne peuvent quand même pas mourir de la même façon par un tonneau ! » lance un ressortissant de la région en faisant allusion, aux circonstances de la mort, quelques mois plus tôt, de l'ancien président de l'Assemblée régionale de Kidal. A Menaka dans le Tamesna précisément où sont revenus plusieurs Touareg maliens de l'armée libyenne, les esprits s'échauffent depuis peu.

Tout passe, pêle-mêle dans un argumentaire qui va du faible ratio d'intégration des combattants du cercle à la détresse des Ishoumars. En fait, les récits sont flous. Cependant, ils laissent entrevoir un bouillonnement et une confusion propices aux partisans d'une nouvelle rébellion. Plus loin et en même temps, à Talataye, cercle de Ansongo, région de Gao, depuis la semaine dernière, le drapeau malien ne flotte plus sur le toit de l'aride sous-préfecture. Un petit groupe de jeunes lui a préféré planter les couleurs dites de l'Azawad. Dans la foulée, la gendarmerie de Tarkint, dans le Cercle de Bourem et sur la route de Kidal reçoit, elle aussi, la menace d'une attaque imminente de la part d'un groupe de jeunes Qui ? Impossible d'être catégorique. Car s'il est un habitué des crises, le Nord-Mali, au cœur du Sahara-Sahel, subit de plein fouet les retombées de la crise libyenne. Celle-ci sert à la fois de prétexte, d'amplificateur et de vecteur de ruptures qui constituent autant de menaces à l'intégrité nationale. Le gouvernement l'a si bien compris qu'il a dépêché une mission de sages dans ces vastes contrées de plus de 900 000 km2.

Beyond the question of how reasonable a multi coding might be with respect to its content, this is also a matter of 'internal multiplication of the text corpus': a triple multi coding means that one and the same text snippet gets processed in three different subsequent analytical contexts later on. Fourth and finally, working with MAXQDA does not only offer useful management tools to neatly organise huge text data and to enable a good coordination of analytical steps; it does also provide the conditions for 'translate' the codings into an analytical narrative in order to obtain a high level of transparency (as documented in the chapter on dimension of communication in conflict: 5.2/5.3/5.4 and 6.2/6.3/6.4).

(3) How did the selection of concrete text data sources take place?

To answer this question adequately, a few preliminary remarks have to be made: First, recalling that this study's methodology observes itself as a approximation procedure, concepts related to a quantitative logic of causality, such as validity and reliability of data played no part. Second, all text data being part of the text corpuses and thus representing text-based linguistic communication within the context of a conflict system had already been produced (i.e. they do not represent products of own research activities resulting, for example, from any kind of 'participatory observation') and then made available as "protocols in the form of texts" (Roos 2010: 101). Third, following the remarks on case selection earlier (see chapter 4.2), in text data collection, too, there is an ineluctable moment of contingency since a potentially endless amount of text data gets reduced to a necessarily limited text corpus.

Now, in the present case study design, text data selection is to be understood as part of the exploration of the conflict discourse. The collection of texts and the compilation of the text corpus thus started with a few text pieces including references to 'the conflict'. By asking questions (Which further communicative addressees are labelled? Which events are referred to as important? Which further sources are mentioned?) and following further hints from within the

texts, it was thus possible to literally go back and forth within the conflict discourse while the text corpus got gradually thicker and more structured (see details in chapter 4.3). As it can be illustrated by referring to the following statements, the press release of the Ukrainian government, more precisely, its reference to “opposition politicians” guided the process of text gathering towards other statements attributed to the political opposition parties in Ukraine in the first place. However, after having considered further documents, it became obvious that “political opposition” essentially refers to other statements (apart from traditional Ukrainian parties) seen as politically influential and attributed to ‘civil society’.

“It is pointedly that the participants of EuroMaidan are trying to distance themselves from politicians. We’ve seen as people literally physically ‘bypass’ opposition politicians, leave them aside from their declaration of will. [...] Unfortunately, some opposition politicians do not leave attempts to convert the peaceful demonstration of will into crew-to-crew clashes.” (Prime Minister Mykola Azarov, GovUkr 27.11.2013a)

“Euromaidan, ultimately a people’s convention in its form and essence, [...] had done its best to keep distance from politicians of all colors.” (MMIC 30.11.2013)

To keep an eye on the growing text corpus, the visualisation with the help of the “conflict observation map” and its discursive working levels (see chapter 4.3) was an important structuring tool. Following this, in each case study introduction (see chapters 5.1/6.1), the composition of the analysed text corpus is outlined in detail.

At this point, however, an imminent danger should be mentioned arising from the context of data gathering: there might be a ‘snowball effect’ when, during criss-cross searching within the conflict discourse, coming across particular sources estimated as important (such as a specific press release issued by the Ukrainian government), which are part of a larger stock of data (e.g. an electronical archive including *all* press releases and, beyond that, other potentially important texts, such as speeches, reports etc. published during the investigation period). In this situation, the challenge is to deal with such a ‘self-multiplying’ stock of data, i.e. conduct a time-consuming skim-reading and selection process. To put it differently, collecting text data from sources requires special caution in order not to get tangled up by one’s own systematics but to continuously reflect on an appropriate balance between the amount of text data and its management.

(4) At various points in the case study chapters, there are references to analytical works that are not part of the text corpus. Why?

During the period of text data collection and, later on, during the first steps of the analysis it cannot be entirely avoided to come in touch with this kind of works since the pieces from the text corpus themselves may frequently include cross-references to scientific literature. However, the ‘integrity’ of the analytical approach here, which aims at exclusively working on the basis of a defined text corpus, has never been compromised. Instead, this kind of additional information is meant as a support for readers who are invited to consider this information in order to navigate through a demanding text more easily. In this sense, for example, bringing in information about the common Berber background of Tuareg in the region (from Shoup 2011: 53-58) and looking at a map representing a “simplified spatial distribution of ethnic groups in Mali”, which was both not part of the text corpus and thus did not count for the analysis, can be

helpful in order to get along with the terminology and logic of the analytical narrative based on the text corpus alone (see chapter 6.4/phase I and Appendix A.3.2).

***(5) Conflicts are exclusively produced within and thus by communication –
what would be a translation of this in an everyday language?***

To answer this question, an everyday anecdote may be helpful. It is about a situation in a café observed by this author: A customer, an elderly man, sitting at the next table unmistakably said to the pastry chef, a young woman who waited on him: “Your service is really bad because I had to wait far too long. On top of this, the piece of plum cake I just had was miserable. I can tell you, I consider myself an amateur baker but I could have made it much better!” After he said those words in a patronising way, the waiter friendly apologised, told the man about other customers’ positive feedback, brought the bill, and said goodbye.

Now, following an everyday understanding, one could have observed an incompatibility of positions here, be it framed as a disagreement of interests, values or identities. But could one have observed a conflict here as well?

Indeed, this author turned this situation over and over in his mind thinking about whether it would have been appropriate to articulate his view of this conversation by telling the elderly man that the feedback to the pastry chef could be seen as not only unfriendly but as highly demeaning. Yet, maybe the other customers were not shocked by content and tone of the feedback; maybe the pastry chef herself took note of the feedback as an outlier commentary but does not think twice about it; maybe there was a journalist present as customer who will integrate this experience in his article about patriarchal behaviour among the retired generation; and maybe a PhD student randomly present cites this anecdote in his dissertation in order to illustrate the potential production of a conflict system in communication...

As this example illustrates, an incompatibility of subject positions only then becomes ‘meaningful’ when observed and articulated as such. Only if contradictions give reason to subsequent communication of nonacceptance (i.e. a chain of connected ‘nos’), a social process begins to stabilise in the form of a ‘structure of negative expectations’. In this sense, conflicts are produced within and by communication. This can even happen when the initiating contradiction was not observed as a conflict within this communication itself. Hence, confronting the elderly man would have triggered the articulation of (self-)observations that again would have brought about further communication of contradictions.⁴⁶⁴ Against this background, this study could only look at the Maidan protests (2013/2014) and to Mali’s crisis (2010/2012) as escalating conflicts because there was both a chain of contradictions observed by ‘immediate’ observers and a multitude of other articulated observations in any form referring to the conflict (journalists, scientists, experts in international law etc.) which altogether produce the conflict.

As outlined earlier in introduction to this study, conflicts cannot speak for themselves and they cannot be approached as self-explanatory and material facts to which researchers could have an unfiltered access of any kind whatsoever. Therefore, freely adapted from Rorty (1989: 6), once again one of the major catchphrases of this study:

⁴⁶⁴ Within the framework of reflexive conflict analysis, a suchlike ‘production’ of conflict by observations ‘from afar’ represents an important aspect to consider in the context of interventions (see e.g. Weller 2017: 177; see also chapter 8.2).

“Conflict do not speak. Only we do.”

(6) Which role do ‘actors’ play in this study?

If it’s communication that holds the world together (see chapter 3.1), or, in other words, if communication constitutes the building block of ‘the social’, actors can certainly not be defined by drawing on individual human beings with static features and various social structures developing around them. Indeed, in many works within the field of conflict analysis and beyond as well as in an everyday understanding, many variants of supraindividual social entities and institutions, such as governments, political parties, companies, transnational opposition parties, civil society organizations or ethnic groups may be referred to as ‘actors’. From the perspective of the present study, however, the aforementioned correspond to, in principle, constantly changing projection surfaces in the discourse (see Schrape 2017) or, put another way, discursive addresses. In the communication of (self-)observations, these discursive addresses are attributed features which ‘animate’ their identities. This is especially true for conflict discourses. Based on the analysis of the text corpus in the case study on Mali, the table below shows how the attribution of features was observed in phase II from August 2011 to October 2011 (for reasons of comparison phase I, November 2010 to August 2011; table taken over from chapter 6.5.2).

programmes	II	reforming from within: constitutional reform; adapting and reinforcing PSPSDN; highlighting Islamic values as common ground; receiving Libyan returnees as nationals; pretending fight against terrorism; repressing northern populations by militarisation of development	calling on international community to observe; making PSPSDN more just; upholding tribal above national law; receiving Libyan returnees as Azawadians collaboration with terrorists; potential instigation of a new rebellion
	I	promoting development efforts in Mali, especially in northern regions; strengthening the unitary state; militarising the north; neo-colonialism; cultural assimilation	claiming self-determination of population in northern regions; fighting for autonomy of Azawad; questioning the unitary state
roles	II	law-abiding citizens; faithful Muslims; clandestine collaborators of terrorists	activists in the cause of democracy and human rights; open collaborators of terrorists; new and old rebels
	I	loyal to the regime; pro-PSPSDN; supporters of peace process; collaborators of criminals (kidnappers, drug traffickers, bandits, terrorists)	anti-government activists; activists in the cause of freedom; people in need of help and living in insecurity; marginalised and oppressed people potential rebels; collaborators of criminals (kidnappers; drug traffickers; bandits, terrorists)

persons	II	Malian population; international development partners from the West and China; AQMI members	Azawadians; tribe members; international observers; AQMI members
	I	ATT; government members; majority of population in the country; government officials of neighbouring countries and Western countries; representatives of international development organisations; certain parts of Libyan returnees	MNA members; members of former Tuareg rebel units (e.g. Bahanga faction); major parts of Tuareg population in the north; light-skinned population; “all sons and daughters of Azawad”; certain parts of Libyan returnees
norms	II	concord, community, understanding, solidarity as national values with religious connotation	international solidarity among supporters of democracy; solidarity and loyalty with ethnic connotation
	I	unity and political stability; cultural diversity; development and security; progress and peace; heroism and patriotism	democracy, esp. self-determination and rule of law; justice and peace; solidarity and hospitality; importance of kinship; heroism and patriotism; historic responsibility

This study’s research and case study design is intended to systematically observe how a conflict was observed over time in a ‘discursive cloud’ filled with a myriad of speech acts. In doing so, it was not a predominant concern to present how stable specific discursive addresses might have been or not and to work out the involvement of suchlike ‘actors’ as such in conflict. Rather, it was particularly interested in the production and change of identities in conflict which were understood as conglomerations of persons, roles, programmes and norms (see Luhmann 1984: 426-436).

(7) To what extent can this study be referred to as a ‘systems theoretical’ work?

To recapitulate from the agenda of this work: it developed an empirical research strategy including a constructivist methodology for the study of conflict escalation which is embedded in a Luhmannian systems theoretical world society perspective; it argues that conflicts can be understood as social systems in their own right; it looks at the process of conflict escalation by analysing communication; and it follows a reconstructive approach informed by grounded theory and the documentary method. From the perspective of this author who observed himself as being ‘scientifically socialised’ within Political Science and International Relations, this agenda reflects a certain disposition to get involved with the huge body of Luhmannian systems theory. Here it can be stated that it was particularly important to keep a pragmatic relationship in order not to be – and that is a striking analogy to the understanding of conflict within systems theory – engulfed by this complex theoretical maelstrom (see e.g. the ‘application’ of the concept of structural coupling as a key element of observation during reflecting interpretation; see its introduction in chapter 4.4/”Special observations spots”).

Taken as a whole, the present work shares the assessment that “systems theoretical empirical research does not implicate to take Luhmann’s entire theory and possible advancements as a basis” (John et al. 2010: 324). Therefore, ‘using’ particular parts from system theory was primarily guided by an empirical problem which lies in a moment of fascination: Why is it that communication in certain cases of contradiction connects on and on, differentiates and produces discursive addresses and bundles of expectations enabling violence? To answer this question, indeed, the step to implement an empirical research project that integrates elements from systems theory (e.g. focus on communication, social systems, observation, structural coupling) needs to be deliberately risked. As the implementation of the agenda has demonstrated, at least from the perspective of this author, this has payed off, even though the stringency of this undoubtedly monumental theory might be challenged when wandering through the ‘lowlands’ of empirical data analysis.

CHAPTER 8. Concluding Remarks

“The observer – in drawing a distinction – makes himself visible to others. He betrays his presence – even if a further distinction is required to distinguish him.”
(Luhmann 2000b: 54)

8.1 How do conflicts escalate?

Fully prepared to deliberately ‘betray his presence’, this author, in this very last chapters, intends to pay back his coin and, based on the distinctions and indications showing up in this study, offers an answer to this research question, which rates among the major and overarching questions in conflict research. Further ‘distinctions’ in any sense of the word may be required.

This study followed a tripartite agenda to answer the research question: First, it developed an empirical research strategy including a constructivist methodology for the study of conflict escalation. This strategy is embedded in a Luhmannian systems theoretical world society perspective. Taking up this perspective, it was a key ambition to visualise how conflicts develop within the shades and patterns of differentiation in world society. Reflecting the approach of Holtgreve et al. (2021), the present work shows that competing modes of differentiation at different speeds and qualities can be observed in specific ‘local’ discourses and practices of observation, more precisely, in form of conflict systems understood as social systems in their own right. In order to empirically investigate the development of conflict systems and discursive representations of their ‘world societal footprint’ in a process perspective, the study presented a reconstructive approach informed by grounded theory and the documentary method (see chapter 4.3). By means of a systematic analysis of communication, the conflict discourse’s development over time could be mapped. Thereby, a special focus rested on how the conflict system processed the difference between the inside and the outside, which, of course, changes during the course of conflict escalation (i.e. concerning issues, positions, identities). Both the working definition,

“capturing social system, i.e. an evolving discursive space where contradicting communication from various social subsystems gets structurally coupled and stabilised” (see also Bösch 2017),

and a number of metaphors (as e.g. the ‘maelstrom’ urging its discursive environment to take a stance) served to make the concept of conflict systems and their scientific observation transparent and accessible and to lay the ground to conduct comprehensible plausibility probes.

Second, against this theoretical background, the concrete plausibilisation of the empirical research strategy was performed by two case studies that analysed two processes of conflict escalation prior to armed conflict (Maidan protests/Ukraine 2013-2014; Mali’s crisis 2010-2012). As presented in chapter 5, the Maidan protests from late November 2013 to February 2014 developed from a peacefully expressed contestation of a foreign policy decision (not to sign the Association Agreement with the EU) into a situation where the legitimate use of force is claimed by different sides and degrading the other (being either anti-government/”Europhile”

or pro-government/'Russophile') had become a widespread phenomenon. Now, based on the systematic analysis of the text corpus, i.e. a compilation of observations referring to 'the conflict', it can be stated that the development of conflict escalation shows a few milestones. The identification of escalating moves reveals how the conflict steadily grows through new contradictions that are produced when aspects of political, economic, legal, and medial communication encounter and couple, as to, for example: the role of civil society as a political force; the pros and cons of economic integration; the poles of international law and national sovereignty; change in the global balance of power; the political role of the media (see chapter 5.6). Chapter 6 addresses the antecedent of the armed conflict in Mali from October 2010 to February 2012. This case study, too, traces the development of a situation that is, at the beginning of the investigation period, observed as a peaceful articulation of a political programme but then successively evolves into a conflict in which the use of force had become a generalised and legitimate means to achieve or defend democracy. Likewise, based on what the analysis of the text corpus revealed, conflict escalation can be structured according to escalating moves showing up in the conflict discourse. Here, too, the accumulation and chaining of contradictions shows up in encountering and coupling aspects of political, religious, legal and economic communication, as to: the perception of political power according to a global model of centre and periphery; the poles between religiously, ethnically and politically imagined society; economic interests played out in a (world) market; the interplay between international recognition and national sovereignty (see chapter 6.6). In sum, it can be stated for both case studies, in the course of escalating moves (i.e. structural couplings and normative shifts) of the discourse, the attribution of features to conflict identities gets accelerated and intensified towards mutually exclusive conflict identities. Against the background of this synergy the perception of that what is referred to as legitimate use of force changes.⁴⁶⁵

Third, and thus the last point of this study's tripartite agenda: After having recapitulated some of the case study results (chapter 7.1) and reflected issues of methodology (chapter 7.2), this very last chapter intends to extract some impulses and ideas from the systems theoretical research outlined here that can further on be beneficial, for example within the context of PCS. Now, although the present project came along with fairly concrete plausibility probes including deep diving into empirical material, this endeavour cannot be thought of as one that is done by opening up an actual state-of-the-art in conflict studies or neighbouring disciplines; identifying gaps between theoretical building blocks; hinting at missing empirical tools; and, finally, making clear how the present approach may or may not be 'connectable' or helpful in treating a whole number of desiderata. Rather, this is about highlighting an additional value on a 'meta level', by providing impulses for the reflection of scientifically observing conflicts in world society. Against this background, the double meaning of title should once again be emphasised:

⁴⁶⁵ Since the case studies were conducted within the framework of plausibility probes, there is certainly much room left in view of approaching these (and other) cases by means of other types of case studies, for example by including comparative designs. Following the documentary method, which informed significant parts of the empirical research strategy in this study, the next step would be to continue this work by performing comparative analyses aiming at systematically relating contexts within the existing case studies, generating typologies, doing new case studies and thus bringing new case contrasts in (see e.g. Vogt 2010: 126).

Observing Conflict Escalation in World Society

On the one hand, the title points to the aspect that readers, by the approach developed here, are offered to observe how conflict escalation in world society was observed within the two case study contexts presented (analysing observing *in* conflicts). On the other hand, having this contribution at hand, readers may take this as an example of how conflict escalation in world society can be scientifically observed (analysing observing *of* conflicts).

So, what are the beneficial implications, for example for PCS, of this ‘double approach’ which is ultimately only based on the analysis of communication, observes conflict escalation as development of a capturing social system, as a communicative maelstrom, as an evolving discursive space, as a cascade of communicative events or as a succession of escalating moves (structural couplings and normative shifts) of a conflict discourse? To offer an answer to this question, the following chapter will now highlight some connections to the field of PCS.

8.2 Some Implications for Peace and Conflict Studies

Taking a prominent voice in the field as an example, PCS is attributed the following orientation and, based on that, area of practical work (DSF 2013; cited in introducing chapter 4):

“Peace and Conflict Studies shall generate research-based knowledge about the conditions contributing to the escalation of social conflicts into violence and about the possibilities and means to prevent such dynamics with peaceful measures.”

This quotation expresses a quite ambitious attitude on that what PCS should be able to contribute with a view to conflict escalation. At this point, it thus defies this author to explicitly address the above-mentioned impulses that may inspire the observation of conflict in world society from a scientific point of view. In the following sections, these impulses are linked to considerations on reflexive conflict analysis in peace research (see particularly Weller 2017).

As quoted at the very beginning of this contribution, stating that there are “sets of assumptions behind every analysis of violent conflict” is a very obvious thing to do. What implications follow from this assessment, form the “lack of grounded and critical analysis of violence and war” and, as a consequence thereof, from “misreading and inaccurate strategies and interventions” (Demmers 2012: 1)? And to what extent does a ‘reflexive turn’ in conflict research advance answers to these questions and, at the same time, helps to elaborate on evident desiderata in conflict analysis, such as the underrepresentation of pre-violent conflict escalation phases (see chapter 2.4)? In this context, according to Weller (2017: 177-178) conflict research particularly faces three challenges when engaging in empirically analysing (and resp. intervening in) concrete conflicts: (1) Conflict analysis takes side, at least implicitly, for a “civilising” conflict management; (2) conflict analysis may have consequences for the course of conflict; and (3) conflict analysis may often be irritated by different or even opposing perspectives and ‘truths’ about conflict emerging from the information available. Implications for PCS from the present work are now substantiated with reference to these challenges:

(1) Scientific conflict analyses can often have an implicit preference for a kind of “civilising conflict management” (Gulowski and Weller 2017) which is, in the political and scientific discourse, frequently also linked to the expectation of implementing ‘non-violent’ strategies.

Apart from further inquiries that a suchlike normative orientation⁴⁶⁶ in the (self-)observation of researchers may involve as to their understanding of roles in conflict (see Weller 2017: 177), a further aspect seems to be crucial from this work's standpoint: To understand violent in conflict, it could be expedient to look out for what is observed and articulated as (il)legitimate violence in specific conflict settings. A systematic analysis of communication in developing emerging conflict discourse, just as presented in the case studies, thus provides an orientation about how discursive representations of violence change over time. The case study on the Maidan protests is a striking example: Whereas in phase I, the use of force (i.e. physical violence against protesters and security forces, but also violence against material things) was observed as an extremely restricted phenomenon (politically, legally) and almost a social taboo, in phase IV, the observation drastically changed to understanding the use of force as a generalised everybody's resource (see chapter 5.6). According to Jabri (1996: 1) PCS "must incorporate the discursive and institutional continuities which render violent conflict a legitimate and widely accepted mode of human conduct". This is what the 'analysing of observations (of violence) *in* conflict' perspective of this work can train for.

(2) Concrete scientific conflict analyses, once labelled and published as such, may have consequences in the further course of the conflict. This can already be seen as part of an intervention (see Weller 2017: 177; see also 2014: 23). In other words, the very fact that a researcher produces a conflict analysis and articulates this publicly documents another successful dragging in by the 'maelstrom of conflict' (see chapter 4.2 on "Researchers select cases or cases select researchers?"). No matter how looked at, conflict analyses do represent (scientific) communication that observes a conflict discourse and thus becomes part of the conflict system. Yet, observing and earmarking a social interaction as a 'conflict' may be controversial or even not relevant among participants; labeling the observed interaction as such can thus literally let a conflict emerge (see chapter 7.2/(5) 'Café scene'). Also, observations of conflict by mass media (see Weller 2014: 20-21) or by "transnational observers" (Beck and Werron 2013) who write reports and thus attract attention may even trigger the use of violence in conflict (see also chapter 4.3). Now, again, what follows from this in the light of the present contribution?

Coming from the 'analysing observations *of* conflict' perspective of this study and taking the possible consequences of (scientific) conflict observation into account, the question of the extent to which this work might offer an additional 'practical' value to civilian conflict management (and other much-cited concepts in the field, such as "conflict transformation" or "conflict resolution" see chapter 2.3) now gets in the focus of attention. If conflicts correspond to 'capturing social systems' swallowing up their communicative environment, then the intuitive impulse of the present approach would be to ask for a kind of 'stop mechanism'. In other words, how would intervening communication (resp. an "intervening system"; see Albert 2008: 69) have to be knitted in order to inhibit the conflict discourse from carrying out escalating moves that come along, for example, with mutually exclusive conflict identities? Now, without overrating the capacity to steer of certain systems towards others (see Simsa 2002: 166-168; see also chapter 3.2), a suchlike communication would have to understand conflict management as an approach that, first and foremost, recognises working on the conflict as a task in which

⁴⁶⁶ Another substantial part of PCS's normative orientation can certainly be found in its positive understanding of conflicts highlighting their socialising effects (see Gulowski and Weller 2017: 404; see also chapter 2.1).

researchers and other participants are commonly involved (see Gulowski and Weller 2017: 405); would be able to set impulses to make confronting constructions of reality, such as entrenching conflict identities, more flexible by introducing other perspectives and possible distinctions (see Troja 2013: 152); would prevent the legitimisation and normalisation of physical violence as a form of communication; would ‘immunise’ other social systems in order to observe conflicts as means of positive social change that can be achieved without using and legitimising (physical) violence in conflict discourses; would provide incentives to work on disappointed expectations and to collective learning (see Troja 2013: 154-155); would facilitate the formation of institutions of conflict management (see Gulowski and Weller 2017: 406); and, finally, would might be thought of as organised within the concept of “participatory conflict research” (Weller 2020b), aiming at creating frameworks in which collective conflict observation (in the form of conflict management) can be explicitly shared among scientific and other observers of conflict (participants/‘conflict parties’).

(3) Scientific conflict analysis may often be irritated by different or even opposing perspectives and ‘truths’ about conflict emerging from the information available (see Weller 2017: 177-178). From the perspective of the present study, this challenge once again offers an opportunity to point to the revolutionary character of the ‘communicative turn’. *It’s communication that holds the world together*. Indeed, placing communication in the centre of empirical research changes a lot. Most obviously, it helps to free oneself from essentialising ‘actors’ and from naturalising specific levels of analysis. This fundamental attitude, as demonstrated in the present study, can then be translated into an open methodology that allows research to observe itself as an exploration process in which zooming through communication has its place (e.g. during case selection, data gathering, coding etc.). Also, a suchlike approach makes it easier to stay teetotal towards attributing rational and goal-oriented motives at any given opportunity (although this could require a great amount of discipline; see (1) in chapter 7.2) or, for example, to appreciate certain text genres that may be included in a text corpus, such as ‘propaganda’, as what they are: discursive representations of conflict in communication. In this sense and without any intention to sound pretentious, this study invites scientific and other observers to see and consider *more* of a conflict than just the most obvious ‘truths’ referring to conflict.

Finally, again coming back to the ‘analysing observations *of* conflict’ perspective, the lenses offered here do also encourage to look at some blind spots of observation in conflict research. As Gulowski and Weller (2017: 391) pointed out, for example, civilian conflict management has a certain built-in orientation towards non-Western conflict situations that are observed to be in need of conflict management whereas conflicts in the global north are rarely approached with this attitude. In this sense, scientific observations from postcolonial research were a key impulse to reflect distinctions and indications behind the self-attributed role of those intervening for the sake of violence prevention and those observing themselves as objects to intervention that may not have been necessary at all.

In sum, these brief considerations are intended to open up avenues for empirical research on conflicts in world society inspired by systems theory within the interdisciplinary field of PCS. Beyond that, the approach of the present study does also invite readers from diverse (scientific) backgrounds to play with the following thought that may seem a bit sentimental at this point: If communication is global in its actual and potential scope and if the totality of communications able to reach each other constitutes society, then there is no communication

and thus no society outside world society. In other words, our observations (of conflict), both in the systems theoretical and the everyday sense of the expression, *make a difference*. We are all in!

8.3 A Snapshot of Critical (Self-)Observation

In a last effort to carry out this study in a reflexive way, the time has come to bring forward a fundamental critique touching the major foundation of this study, of Luhmannian systems theory. In doing so, the critical impetus of a systems theoretical approach, “visibilising the invisibilised”, as pointedly framed by Amstutz and Fischer-Lescano (2013: 9), gets turned on itself:

“Dualism fails to recognize that reality consists of intermediate degrees, flexible borders, and ever-changing vistas. It is a socially constructed belief system that nonetheless remains the bedrock upon which much human social reality is grounded.” (Del Collins 2005: 264)

Now, the question that obviously arises: Is there a deeply rooted dualism in Luhmannian systems theory that has notable and potentially negative consequences limiting systems theoretical approaches to look at the world? Indeed, Luhmann’s world is a binary world in which a basic distinction between marked and unmarked space is permanently reified (see Brown 1972; Luhmann 1995: 166-167). Based on that, any observations processes in the same way. In this sense, Luhmannian systems theory is obviously steeped in binary thinking, thus leaving little space for the ‘in-between’. Nevertheless, since an observer cannot be part of the phenomenon observed, it does indeed reflect on the ‘blind spots’ that are inherent to any observation. So, at least, there is a kind of built-in incentive of reflection. But, what is the problem with this inherent dualism in the first place? At this point, one might recall an argument from postcolonial thinking:

“The problem with such binary systems is that they suppress ambiguous or interstitial spaces between the opposed categories, so that any overlapping region that may appear, say, between the categories man/woman, child/adult or friend/alien, becomes impossible according to binary logic, and a region of taboo in social experience.” (Ashcroft et al. 2007: 18)

Of course, one could argue that the problem with binary systems presented above refers to a different ‘level’ than the metatheoretical dualism in Luhmann’s work. Still, the questions remains open whether it is exactly this fundamental idea of a (social) world made up of binary codings that ultimately declines itself throughout the landscape of theories and concepts, in conflict studies, too.

Thus, it could be envisaged to think about conditions under which Luhmannian systems theory, based on its (self-)observing impetus, would be able to transcend dualistic thinking in order to advance thinking beyond the either/or, to realise the role metatheoretical dualism maybe plays in creating conflict and to become familiar with dynamical systems of interpretation (see Del Collins 2005: 278). But would it still be Luhmannian systems theory then? To be continued...

Appendix

A.1 Register of Analysed Documents

A.1.1 Ukraine

Government/Administration

documents available at <http://www.kmu.gov.ua/control/en>,
accessed in Oct/Nov 2015

- GovUkr (18.11.2013) *S. Arbutov urges MPs for cooperation to hold reforms needed for European integration.*
- GovUkr (21.11.2013a) *Government adopted resolution on suspension of preparation process to conclude Association Agreement with EU.*
- GovUkr (21.11.2013b) *Government to consider National strategy of regional development up to 2020.*
- GovUkr (21.11.2013c) *M. Azarov commissions profile departments to prepare documents on free trade in CIS.*
- GovUkr (21.11.2013d) *M. Azarov instructs S. Arbutov to discuss requirements imposed by IMF to Ukraine with MPs.*
- GovUkr (21.11.2013e) *Mykola Azarov hopes to remove all barriers in mutual trade with Russia in 2014.*
- GovUkr (21.11.2013f) *Opening Statement of Prime Minister of Ukraine Mykola Azarov during Government's meeting on November 21, 2013.*
- GovUkr (22.11.2013a) *80-th anniversary of Holodomor to be marked in Kyiv yesterday.*
- GovUkr (22.11.2013b) *Government adopted State Strategy of Regional Development up to 2020.*
- GovUkr (22.11.2013c) *M. Azarov: Decision to suspend association is tactical, the strategy remains invariable – Eurointegration.*
- GovUkr (22.11.2013d) *Government and European Commission to sign joint statement on extending EGNOS coverage to the territory of Ukraine.*
- GovUkr (22.11.2013e) *Mykola Azarov: Conduct of Ukraine-EU-Russia negotiations will remove trade and economic contradictions.*
- GovUkr (22.11.2013f) *Oleg Proskuryakov meets with European Commissioner for Climate Action.*
- GovUkr (23.11.2013a) *Leadership of the state honor memory of victims of Holodomor 1932-1933.*
- GovUkr (23.11.2013b) *Mykola Azarov: Prospect of Ukraine's EU membership is absent in the Agreement.*
- GovUkr (23.11.2013c) *Mykola Azarov: Ukraine to continue course of European integration.*
- GovUkr (23.11.2013d) *Mykola Azarov: You shouldn't oppose suspension in association with EU to Customs Union.*
- GovUkr (25.11.2013a) *I. Prasolov: Approved by the Government Strategy of Regional Development is an efficacious system of planning of territory development.*
- GovUkr (25.11.2013b) *Ministry of Economic Development and Trade: Government is actively working to form state support of business.*
- GovUkr (25.11.2013c) *Nataliya Korolevska: Government allocated additional UAH 771 million to local budgets to pay salaries.*
- GovUkr (25.11.2013d) *Relevant government decisions were approved in order to prevent arrears of wages.*
- GovUkr (25.11.2013e) *Ukraine will continue defending interests of domestic producers in negotiations with the EU and the CU.*
- GovUkr (25.11.2013f) *Ukrainian Foreign Ministry's Statement.*
- GovUkr (26.11.2013a) *Government is working to improve mechanism of public-private partnership.*

GovUkr (26.11.2013b) *M. Azarov: People support Government's decision on normalization of relations with the RF and continuing of preparation of Association Agreement.*

GovUkr (26.11.2013c) *MLA and Independent Association of Banks of Ukraine sign memorandum of cooperation.*

GovUkr (26.11.2013d) *Mykola Azarov: President to discuss mechanism of further consultations with the EU in Vilnius.*

GovUkr (26.11.2013e) *Mykola Azarov: Situation in the country is stable - we have non-alternative European prospect.*

GovUkr (26.11.2013f) *Prime Minister of Ukraine talked to foreign mass media.*

GovUkr (26.11.2013g) *Prime Minister: Ukraine to begin negotiations with Russia to restore economic relations in December.*

GovUkr (26.11.2013h) *Ukraine strives to become powerful partner for both EU and CU.*

GovUkr (27.11.2013a) *Opening statement of Prime Minister of Ukraine Mykola Azarov during Government's meeting on November 27, 2013.*

GovUkr (27.11.2013b) *Government prolongs adaptation of national legislation with EU norms.*

GovUkr (27.11.2013c) *Mykola Azarov addresses citizens who got out to the streets: destabilization of the situation is working against European choice.*

GovUkr (27.11.2013d) *Mykola Azarov: Ukraine remains in the Eastern Partnership project.*

GovUkr (27.11.2013e) *Mykola Azarov: We cannot make a sacrifice of economic sovereignty.*

GovUkr (27.11.2013f) *Mykola Azarov: We have a settlement plan on the way to Association with the EU.*

GovUkr (27.11.2013g) *Production Sharing Agreement to develop Black Sea shelf was signed.*

GovUkr (27.11.2013h) *Serhiy Arbutov assures future economists in Eurointegration course of Ukraine.*

GovUkr (28.11.2013a) *Government receives letters of support regarding the chosen course.*

GovUkr (28.11.2013b) *O. Vilkul: Ukraine initialed an Agreement with the EU on Common Aviation Area.*

GovUkr (28.11.2013c) *Serhiy Arbutov: Ukraine holds true to European integration course.*

GovUkr (29.11.2013a) *Mykola Azarov: Citizens support government's decision to suspend the signing of the AA with the EU, do not forget it.*

GovUkr (2.12.2013a) *Mykola Azarov: Regional councils support Government's decision to prolong Eurointegration course.*

GovUkr (2.12.2013b) *Mykola Azarov: Ukraine insists on trilateral consultations on Eurointegration.*

GovUkr (2.12.2013c) *Mykola Azarov: Within nearest time Ukrainian delegation to attend Brussels to continue negotiations on association.*

GovUkr (3.12.2013a) *Ukrainian and Russian governmental delegations discuss sectoral and industrial cooperation issues.*

GovUkr (3.12.2013b) *Prime Minister promises to draw serious cadre conclusions.*

GovUkr (3.12.2013c) *Mykola Azarov: EU agrees to consider financial compensations to Ukraine.*

GovUkr (3.12.2013d) *Mykola Azarov apologizes for the events, which took place on Maidan and stresses that guilty will be punished.*

GovUkr (3.12.2013e) *Mykola Azarov calls on citizens to a peaceful resolution of the situation and to remain unprovoked.*

GovUkr (3.12.2013f) *Mykola Azarov: It is not an European way to block government's activity.*

GovUkr (3.12.2013g) *Statement of Prime Minister of Ukraine Mykola Azarov.*

GovUkr (4.12.2013a) *Opening statement of Prime Minister of Ukraine Mykola Azarov during Government's meeting on December 4, 2013.*

GovUkr (4.12.2013b) *Serhiy Arbutov and Jan Tombinski talked forming of an implementation schedule of the initialed Association Agreement with EU.*

GovUkr (4.12.2013c) *Mykola Azarov: Government not to afford delays in social payments.*

GovUkr (4.12.2013d) *Prime Minister urges to stop escalation of political tension.*

GovUkr (4.12.2013e) *Mykola Azarov: Budget 2014 must be a budget of regional development.*

GovUkr (4.12.2013f) *Mykola Azarov: All acute issues and difficult problems which occurred will be definitely settled by us.*

GovUkr (4.12.2013g) *Mykola Azarov: Requirements to the work of ministers are high, and the responsibility for achieving results - personal.*

GovUkr (4.12.2013h) *Leonid Kozhara hopes for a fruitful work of the OSCE meeting in Ukraine.*

GovUkr (4.12.2013i) *Governmental delegation to begin negotiations regarding implementation plan of the AA in Brussels.*

GovUkr (5.12.2013a) *Talks on Ukrainian-Russian trade and economic cooperation were held in Moscow.*

GovUkr (5.12.2013b) *Statement by the OSCE Chairperson-in-Office, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine Leonid Kozhara.*

GovUkr (5.12.2013c) *Mykola Azarov: We stand for an issue of power to be solved exceptionally through elections.*

GovUkr (5.12.2013d) *Mykola Azarov: Ukraine implements European reforms.*

GovUkr (5.12.2013e) *Mykola Azarov: Blocking of the Government and Parliament impedes implementation of European integration aspirations.*

GovUkr (5.12.2013f) *Serhiy Arbutov orders to set up commission on the implementation of the Association Agreement with the EU.*

GovUkr (5.12.2013g) *Serhiy Arbutov: Authorities are ready for dialogue with community.*

GovUkr (5.12.2013i) *Mykola Azarov: We are ready to create a joint workgroup with the opposition but only after unblocking the Government.*

GovUkr (5.12.2013j) *Serhiy Arbutov urges students to come back in lecture halls to continue studies.*

GovUkr (5.12.2013k) *Leonid Kozhara and Sergey Lavrov tackle development of bilateral relations.*

GovUkr (5.12.2013l) *Public activists announce that the nationalists beat participants of peaceful protests.*

GovUkr (6.12.2013a) *Congratulation of Prime Minister Mykola Azarov on the Day of the Armed Forces of Ukraine.*

GovUkr (6.12.2013b) *Serhiy Arbutov assured European and American diplomats on strategic way of Ukraine.*

GovUkr (6.12.2013c) *The society supports Government's decision on Eurointegration.*

GovUkr (6.12.2013d) *Government expects EC to increase the financial support of regional development policy in Ukraine.*

GovUkr (6.12.2013e) *Yuriy Boyko: We must consider interests of every citizen of the country and society as a whole.*

GovUkr (6.12.2013f) *Blocking of governmental structures means blocking of European way of development. It is a European shame.*

GovUkr (7.12.2013a) *The Prime Minister Mykola Azarov delivers a statement.*

GovUkr (7.12.2013b) *Blocking of the Government and Verkhovna Rada is blocking of signing the agreement on FTA with EU.*

GovUkr (7.12.2013c) *Transcript of an interview by Prime Minister of Ukraine Azarov M. Y. with foreign media on December 6, 2013.*

GovUkr (9.12.2013a) *Ministry of Economic Development and Trade to support an active dialogue with trade unions in the process of building of efficient economics.*

GovUkr (9.12.2013b) *Work on preparing national agro-industrial complex to European integration goes on in Ukraine.*

GovUkr (9.12.2013c) *O. Vilkul: We provide the functioning of systems of life support, but day by day it's getting harder to do.*

GovUkr (9.12.2013d) *Governmental delegation led by Serhiy Arbutov to visit Brussels.*

GovUkr (10.12.2013a) *Ministry of Foreign Affairs establishes a hotline for international observers during re-election.*

GovUkr (10.12.2013b) *Ukraine strengthens trade and economic ties with EU states.*

GovUkr (11.12.2013a) *Opening statement of Prime Minister of Ukraine Mykola Azarov during Government's meeting on December 11, 2013.*

GovUkr (11.12.2013b) *O. Vilkul: Power supply in 47 settlements that faced blackouts as a result of worsening the weather have been restored completely.*

GovUkr (11.12.2013c) *Mykola Azarov commissions to timely organize improved social payments.*

GovUkr (11.12.2013d) *M. Azarov: The authorities stand for faster signing the Association Agreement with the EU. But the risks must be mitigated.*

GovUkr (11.12.2013e) *M. Azarov: A violent conflict is not to the good of the country. The authorities advocate objective investigation.*

GovUkr (11.12.2013f) *Mykola Azarov: As of today, the most important thing is to restore smooth operation of state administration and economy.*

GovUkr (11.12.2013g) *Mykola Azarov: No force will be used against peaceful protests.*

GovUkr (11.12.2013h) *Head of Government refutes speculations concerning entering the Customs Union.*

GovUkr (11.12.2013i) *Government readies documents for meeting of Ukrainian-Russian Interstate Commission.*

GovUkr (12.12.2013a) *Mykola Azarov: Political instability reduces a chance of Ukraine to host 2022 Winter Olympiad.*

GovUkr (12.12.2013b) *Prime Minister hopes that opposition will begin to work next week.*

GovUkr (12.12.2013c) *Network of NCPs in the framework of Horizon-2020 European scientific program created.*

GovUkr (12.12.2013d) *About 1300 sport facilities have been built and reconstructed in Ukraine.*

GovUkr (12.12.2013e) *Serhiy Arbutov meets with Commissioner for Enlargement and European Neighborhood Policy Stefan Fule.*

GovUkr (13.12.2013a) *Ukrainian delegation led by Yuriy Boyko to participate in session of CIS Economic Council.*

GovUkr (13.12.2013b) *Council members address Prime Minister with request to pay efforts to preserve stability in the country.*

GovUkr (13.12.2013c) *Mykola Azarov: Ukrainian entrepreneurs must be included into working group for negotiations with the EU.*

GovUkr (13.12.2013d) *Mykola Azarov: In the current year Ukraine will have used by 40% Russian gas less than in 2010.*

GovUkr (13.12.2013e) *M. Azarov: Signing of the Association Agreement would cause a negative balance up to USD 15 bln with the CU states.*

GovUkr (16.12.2013a) *Prime Minister: Yanukovich and Putin not to sign documents on CU during a meeting in Moscow.*

GovUkr (16.12.2013b) *Mykola Azarov hopes that a fair gas price to be established at a meeting of Ukraine and Russia presidents.*

GovUkr (16.12.2013c) *Ministry of Education and Science in cooperation with the ETF works to improve CTE system.*

GovUkr (16.12.2013d) *Yuriy Boyko stays on working trip to Moscow.*

GovUkr (16.12.2013e) *Peaceful public dialogue is the path to European integration.*

GovUkr (16.12.2013f) *S. Arbutov: Government does everything possible to avoid economic recession.*

GovUkr (17.12.2013a) *Grain export reached 16.4 million tons.*

GovUkr (17.12.2013b) *Hennadiy Temnyk: The heating season is carried out stably in general in the country.*

GovUkr (17.12.2013c) *Building of Kerch transport route to facilitate improvement of logistic potential of Ukraine.*

GovUkr (17.12.2013d) *Ukraine and China to continue work directed to avoiding trade contradictions in bilateral trade.*

GovUkr (18.12.2013a) *Opening statement of Prime Minister of Ukraine Mykola Azarov during Government's meeting on December 18, 2013.*

GovUkr (18.12.2013b) *Mykola Azarov: Presidents of Ukraine and Russia reached arrangements of historical significance.*

GovUkr (18.12.2013c) *Prime Minister: President of Ukraine agreed to advantageous conditions of crediting Ukrainian economy.*

GovUkr (18.12.2013d) *Government suggests cutting income tax by 1% in 2014.*

GovUkr (18.12.2013e) *Mykola Azarov: We are obliged to seek compromise for the sake of Ukraine.*

GovUkr (18.12.2013f) *Agreements of presidents of Ukraine and Russia on mutual cooperation of the countries to ensure new projects and new jobs.*

GovUkr (18.12.2013g) *Mykola Azarov: In the following year the healthcare system will be developing.*

GovUkr (18.12.2013h) *Mykola Azarov: In the State Budget of 2014 considerable attention is paid to the development of the regions.*

GovUkr (19.12.2013a) *Mykola Azarov: Ukraine is interested to settle all the problems with EU and Russia as soon as possible.*

GovUkr (19.12.2013b) *National part of measures to implement the CIS Member States innovation development program until 2020 approved.*

GovUkr (20.12.2013a) *Prospects of cooperation between Ukraine and the Council of Europe discussed.*

GovUkr (20.12.2013b) *Mykola Azarov: Ukraine has practically fulfilled all obligations to PACE.*

GovUkr (20.12.2013c) *Serhiy Arbutov: Ukraine is not bargaining with the EU, but we would like to know what will happen tomorrow.*

GovUkr (21.12.2013a) *Mykola Azarov: Agreements with RF are to increase investments into economy of Ukraine by USD 1 bln.*

GovUkr (21.12.2013b) *Mykola Azarov: Moscow agreements strengthen independence of Ukraine.*

GovUkr (21.12.2013c) *Mykola Azarov: Ukraine has acquired a strong position in negotiations with IMF.*

GovUkr (21.12.2013d) *Mykola Azarov: The first tranche of the loan from the Russian Federation will go to securing social stability.*

GovUkr (21.12.2013e) *Mykola Azarov: Ukraine must sign the association on favourable terms.*

GovUkr (21.12.2013f) *Yuriy Boyko: Conditions of obtaining the Russian loan are advantageous for Ukraine.*

GovUkr (23.12.2013a) *Yuriy Boyko: Negotiations on accedence the Customs Union were not held during the meeting in Moscow.*

GovUkr (23.12.2013b) *Y. Boyko: Settlement of gas price issue is the result of understanding the need to move towards each other.*

GovUkr (24.12.2013a) *Statement on signing 60 agreements by Prime Minister in Moscow - outright misinformation.*

GovUkr (24.12.2013b) *Mykola Azarov: Ukraine has received the first tranche of the Russian loan.*

GovUkr (24.12.2013c) *Mykola Azarov: In 2014 Ukraine intends to completely resume trade and economic relations with RF.*

GovUkr (25.12.2013a) *Opening statement of Prime Minister of Ukraine Mykola Azarov during Government's meeting on December 25, 2013.*

GovUkr (25.12.2013b) *Prime Minister: Tariffs for population will remain stable.*

GovUkr (25.12.2013c) *Prime Minister: Government will fulfill President's order to implement all budget social benefits until December 30.*

GovUkr (25.12.2013d) *Prime Minister: Moscow agreements of Heads of States keep for Ukraine favorable terms of trade with Russia and the CU.*

GovUkr (25.12.2013e) *Mykola Azarov names principal achievements of the Government in 2013.*

GovUkr (25.12.2013f) *Prime Minister and representatives of enterprises discuss development prospects of national economy.*

GovUkr (25.12.2013g) *M. Azarov: Ukraine seeks to settle terms of implementation of the agreement with the EU as soon as possible.*

GovUkr (25.12.2013h) *Mykola Azarov: 2014 will be the year of development for us.*

GovUkr (25.12.2013i) *Prime Minister: New Russian gas price is satisfactory for Ukraine.*

GovUkr (26.12.2013a) *International rating agencies increase Ukraine's ratings.*

GovUkr (26.12.2013b) *O. Vilkul: Almost 9 thousand regional development projects are realized due to Government's support.*

GovUkr (26.12.2013c) *Ukraine is in top ten countries where international peacekeeping personnel is prepared.*

GovUkr (27.12.2013a) *Mykola Azarov: European Union has not suggested membership prospects to Ukraine.*

GovUkr (27.12.2013b) *Mykola Azarov: First tranche from Russia was directed to payment of social benefits.*

GovUkr (27.12.2013c) *Mykola Azarov: Budget deficit in 2014 fits into European norms.*

GovUkr (27.12.2013d) *Mykola Azarov: The most important for the opposition is not the European integration but the fight for power.*

GovUkr (27.12.2013e) *Mykola Azarov: Economy to obtain the path of growth in 2014.*

GovUkr (27.12.2013f) *Mykola Azarov: All social payments will be made until December 30.*

GovUkr (30.12.2013a) *Prime Minister orders members of the Government to continuously coordinate the work in their areas of responsibility on holidays.*

GovUkr (30.12.2013b) *Government adopted a decision to reduce gas price for consumers.*

GovUkr (30.12.2013c) *Mykola Azarov: 2013 was difficult, but ends optimistically.*

GovUkr (31.12.2013a) *Congratulation of Prime Minister Mykola Azarov on the occasion of the New 2014 Year.*

GovUkr (31.12.2013b) *Funding of January's pensions is begun.*

GovUkr (8.01.014a) *Mykola Azarov: By erecting barricades it is impossible to ensure economic development of the country.*

GovUkr (8.01.2014b) *Prime Minister: Public should take part in local budgeting.*

GovUkr (8.01.2014c) *Import operations of natural gas into Ukraine are planed to exempt from taxation.*

GovUkr (8.01.2014d) *MFA: Ukraine takes note of the U.S. Senate resolution on Ukraine.*

GovUkr (9.01.2014a) *Opening statement of Prime Minister of Ukraine Mykola Azarov during Government's meeting on January 9, 2014.*

GovUkr (9.01.2014b) *Mykola Azarov: Pensions are reimbursed in planned mode.*

GovUkr (9.01.2014c) *Government to ensure adaptation of electric power market with EU standards.*

GovUkr (9.01.2014d) *Prime Minister: We continue improving social standards.*

GovUkr (9.01.2014e) *Mykola Azarov: We bear everything to make 2014 a year of stability and development.*

GovUkr (9.01.2014f) *Government plans to restructure debts of population for communal services.*

GovUkr (9.01.2014g) *Government to determine measures to prevent illegal coal extraction.*

GovUkr (9.01.2014h) *Prime Minister: Elaborated by the Government budget is the pledge of financial stability and economic development in 2014.*

GovUkr (10.01.2014a) *Gennadiy Temnyk: The Government resumed debt restructuring mechanism of population for public utility services.*

GovUkr (10.01.2014b) *Mykola Azarov: We will ensure stability of prices, currency and tariffs.*

GovUkr (10.01.2014c) *Mykola Azarov: Government to continue work on deregulation.*

GovUkr (10.01.2014d) *Government is going to construct and repair many roadways this year.*

GovUkr (11.01.2014) *State Service for Regulatory Policies and Business Development begins "round tables" to explain the priority of European integration course.*

GovUkr (13.01.2014a) *O.Vilkul: Voting for the logo of Lviv's application to host the Winter Olympics 2022 starts.*

GovUkr (13.01.2014b) *Mykola Azarov forecasts stable gas prices throughout the year.*

GovUkr (13.01.2014c) *Mykola Azarov: Reliable activity of the economy ensures stable and timely social payments.*

GovUkr (13.01.2014d) *MLA of Ukraine informed ambassadors on events on January 10 in Kyiv.*

GovUkr (13.01.2014e) *US Ambassador expresses respect to Ukrainian militiamen for their restraint.*

GovUkr (13.01.2014f) *Government takes measures to stir up creating of serial production of national grain harvesters.*

GovUkr (14.01.2014a) *In 2013, there was registered the largest number of news agencies in the last 4 year.*

GovUkr (14.01.2014b) *Hotline concerning European integration operates in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.*

GovUkr (14.01.2014c) *Grain export increased by about 5 million tons for 6 month of 2013/14 marketing year.*

GovUkr (14.01.2014d) *O.Vilkul: Last year 6742 Ukrainian families purchased flats owing to the Government's support.*

GovUkr (14.01.2014e) *Statement of the MFA on the 20th anniversary of Ukraine as a non-nuclear state.*

GovUkr (15.01.2014a) *Opening statement of Prime Minister of Ukraine Mykola Azarov during Government's meeting on January 15, 2014.*

GovUkr (15.01.2014b) *Prime Minister: Those who are blocking the work of Verkhovna Rada work against Ukraine.*

GovUkr (15.01.2014c) *M. Azarov commissions interdepartmental panel to elaborate negotiating capacities of Ukraine for the talks with the EU.*

GovUkr (15.01.2014d) *Mykola Azarov: There is no social conflict in Ukraine, there is artificial political confrontation.*

GovUkr (15.01.2014e) *Government intends to stir up implementation of the National Program for Corruption Prevention up to 2015.*

GovUkr (15.01.2014f) *Competitive conditions in free trade with EU must be created for machinery manufacturing.*

GovUkr (15.01.2014g) *Mykola Azarov: Agricultural production develops rapidly - it should be protected under the free trade conditions.*

GovUkr (15.01.2014h) *Mykola Azarov: We must envisage criteria of protection of national metallurgic engineering.*

GovUkr (15.01.2014i) *President emphasizes necessity of adopting budget for 2014 as soon as possible first of all in order to ensure timely social payments.*

GovUkr (15.01.2014j) *Ukraine to increase bilateral trade turnover and volumes of mutual investments with Customs Union.*

GovUkr (16.01.2014a) *Annual national program of cooperation between Ukraine and NATO for 2014 is approved.*

GovUkr (16.01.2014b) *V. Semynozhenko: Horizon 2020 is an example of successful scientific and technical integration of Ukraine to EU.*

GovUkr (16.01.2014c) *Ukraine to present its agrarian production at one of the largest world exhibitions.*

GovUkr (16.01.2014d) *Press office of the CMU: Media spread misinformation on reduction of expenditures to treat children with cancer.*

GovUkr (16.01.2014e) *Leonid Kozhara holds meeting with ambassadors of CIS member states.*

GovUkr (16.01.2014f) *O. Vilkul orders to ensure work of social patrols and warm-up facilities during cold weather.*

GovUkr (16.01.2014g) *Ukrainian delegation led by Yuriy Boyko to tackle industrial cooperation development in Moscow.*

GovUkr (16.01.2014h) *Prime Minister delivers speech to people who gathered to support adoption of the State Budget.*

GovUkr (17.01.2014a) *O. Vilkul: We have to act proactively in difficult weather conditions.*

GovUkr (17.01.2014b) *Ukrainian delegation attended a meeting of the Ukraine-NATO Joint Working Group.*

GovUkr (17.01.2014c) *Mykola Azarov: In 2013 the Government managed to avoid GDP decline.*

GovUkr (17.01.2014d) *Mykola Azarov: In 2014 salaries are to increase, inflation - to decrease.*

GovUkr (20.01.2014a) *Mykola Azarov: Now we are talking about Ukraine's joining neither to the EU nor to the CU.*

GovUkr (20.01.2014b) *The Organizing Committee is set to ensure Ukraine's chairmanship in the CIS.*

GovUkr (20.01.2014c) *Central and local executive authorities are recommended to revise tariffs for gas.*

GovUkr (20.01.2014d) *Ukraine successfully represented at the Green Week international agro-industrial fair in Berlin.*

GovUkr (20.01.2014e) *Prime Minister: Orphans need to be provided with housing and jobs as soon as possible.*

GovUkr (21.01.2014a) *I. Prasolov: Understandings between Ukraine and PRC to facilitate maintaining balance in trade between the states.*

GovUkr (21.01.2014b) *MFA: Ukrainian Government is configured to exert maximum efforts for the peaceful settlement of the situation.*

GovUkr (21.01.2014c) *Mykola Azarov: The Government supports the development of high-tech industries.*

GovUkr (21.01.2014d) *Mykola Azarov: National producers should be attracted to upgrade the rolling stock.*

GovUkr (22.01.2014a) *Opening statement of Prime Minister of Ukraine Mykola Azarov during Government's meeting on January 22, 2014.*

GovUkr (22.01.2014b) *M. Azarov: All life support systems of the country must function in normal mode in frosty weather and in snowstorm.*

GovUkr (22.01.2014c) *Prime Minister: Victims are on the conscience and within responsibility of the organizers and certain participants of mass unrest.*

GovUkr (22.01.2014d) *Prime Minister: People understand that the authorities defending the rule of law are acting in their interest.*

GovUkr (22.01.2014e) *Prime Minister: The President and the Government are ready to cooperate with political forces for the normal development of the country.*

GovUkr (22.01.2014f) *Mykola Azarov: The Government has not given law enforcement any additional orders on the use of force.*

GovUkr (22.01.2014g) *Mykola Azarov: We stand for the constructive dialog with the opposition but we won't afford any ultimatums.*

GovUkr (23.01.2014a) *Mykola Azarov thanked the Secretary General of the Council of Europe for the weighted estimate of the situation in Kyiv.*

GovUkr (23.01.2014b) *M. Azarov and T. Jagland discuss ways of settlement of the crisis in Kyiv.*

GovUkr (23.01.2014c) *Olexandr Vilkul holds a meeting with the WTO Country Director for Ukraine.*

GovUkr (23.01.2014d) *Mykola Azarov: The early elections are just unreal.*

GovUkr (23.01.2014e) *Mykola Azarov: There is a coup d'etat attempt in Ukraine.*

GovUkr (23.01.2014f) *M. Azarov: It's too bad that during the mass unrest people suffered.*

GovUkr (24.01.2014a) *Mykola Azarov: European politicians have real leverage to normalize the situation in Ukraine.*

GovUkr (24.01.2014b) *Mykola Azarov: OSCE assistance would be useful for Ukraine.*

GovUkr (24.01.2014c) *President of Switzerland: Swiss companies ready to invest considerable sums into Ukraine.*

GovUkr (27.01.2014a) *E. Stavytsky: Cessation of operation of at least one energy enterprise can have irreversible consequences for the whole country.*

GovUkr (27.01.2014b) *World Bank to increase portfolio of projects for Ukraine.*

GovUkr (27.01.2014c) *Ministry of Justice considers release of its building is a positive step that will further the dialogue.*

GovUkr (28.01.2014) *Mykola Azarov resigns from the position of the Prime Minister of Ukraine.*

GovUkr (29.01.2014a) *Opening statement of First Vice Prime of Ukraine Serhiy Arbutov during Government's meeting on January 29, 2014.*

GovUkr (29.01.2014b) *Mykola Azarov takes leave of the leadership of the Secretariat of the CMU and staff of the Prime Minister' Office.*

GovUkr (29.01.2014c) *Serhiy Arbutov determines acute tasks for the Government.*

GovUkr (29.01.2014d) *Serhiy Arbutov: The Government retains control of Ukraine's economy.*

GovUkr (29.01.2014e) *Serhiy Arbutov: Government is ready to provide conditions to achieve national stability.*

GovUkr (30.01.2014a) *H. Temnyk commissions to resume heating supplies in Crimea as fast as possible.*

GovUkr (30.01.2014b) *Government approved an agreement with Russia on the construction of transport crossing through the Kerch Strait.*

GovUkr (30.01.2014c) *Leonid Kozhara meets with the special envoy of the UN Secretary-General.*

GovUkr (30.01.2014d) *L. Kozhara meets with mission of European Parliament.*

GovUkr (30.01.2014e) *Reimbursement for low-income families with children grows in 2014.*

GovUkr (30.01.2014f) *Ukrainians selected logo of Lviv's application for the Winter Olympics 2022.*

GovUkr (30.01.2014g) *V. Muntian: Route over the Kerch Strait is a promising infrastructure project of Ukraine and the RF.*

GovUkr (1.02.2014a) *Activation of Ukrainian-Russian cooperation in energy discussed.*

GovUkr (1.02.2014b) *Leonid Kozhara met with the OSCE-Secretary General and the UN Secretary-General.*

GovUkr (3.01.2014a) *Yuriy Boyko discusses with Dmitry Rogozin current issues of cooperation between Ukraine and Russia.*

GovUkr (3.02.2014b) *Yuriy Boyko holds working meeting with Alexei Miller.*

GovUkr (3.02.2014c) *S. Arbutov calls on local executive authorities to activate budget process.*

GovUkr (4.02.2014a) *Treasury opens allocations to Pension Fund and undertakes expenditures to pay February's pensions.*

GovUkr (4.02.2014b) *O.Vilkul: Electricity restored in more than 1503 settlements from the beginning of severe frosts.*

GovUkr (4.02.2014c) *MFA: US Ambassador was informed about measures directed to peaceful settlement of the situation in Ukraine.*

GovUkr (4.02.2014d) *Leonid Kozhara discusses cooperation issues with Secretary General of the Council of Europe by phone.*

GovUkr (5.02.2014a) *Opening statement of First Vice Prime of Ukraine Serhiy Arbutov during Government's meeting on February 5, 2014.*

GovUkr (5.02.2014b) *MFA calls on foreign politicians to avoid spreading false information.*

GovUkr (5.02.2014c) *S. Arbutov: Every day of confrontations weakens the economy of Ukraine.*

GovUkr (5.02.2014d) *Serhiy Arbutov: Ukraine continues fruitful cooperation with EBRD.*

GovUkr (6.02.2014a) *V. Muntian: The situation on Ukrainian-Russian customs border is settled.*

GovUkr (6.02.2014b) *Comment of MFA of Ukraine concerning European Parliament Resolution on the Situation in Ukraine.*

GovUkr (7.02.2014) *Address of the Minister of Internal Affairs of Ukraine Vitaliy Zakharchenko.*

GovUkr (8.02.2014) *Ukraine and Russia sign cooperation agreement on physical training and sports.*

GovUkr (9.02.2014) *Serhiy Arbutov: Vita Semerenko has managed to instill optimism to all Ukrainians.*

GovUkr (10.02.2014a) *Ukraine presented its Olympic Bid - Lviv 2022 - in Sochi.*

GovUkr (10.02.2014b) *Transport link with all inhabited localities resumed.*

GovUkr (11.02.2014a) *MLA hosts meeting of Minister with Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights.*

GovUkr (11.02.2014b) *N. Korolevska: UAH 3 billion 362 million are sent to finance February's state social assistances.*

GovUkr (11.02.2014c) *Comment of MFA regarding Conclusions of the EU Foreign Affairs Council on Ukraine of February 10, 2014.*

GovUkr (12.02.2014a) *Opening statement of the acting Prime Minister of Ukraine Serhiy Arbutov at the meeting of the Government on February 12, 2014.*

GovUkr (12.02.2014b) *K. Gryshenko: Ukraine is on the final stage of preparations for the celebration of the 200th anniversary of the Great Kobzar's birthday.*

GovUkr (12.02.2014c) *S. Arbutov urges citizens to keep their savings in national currency.*

GovUkr (12.02.2014d) *S. Arbutov: Rights of investors to be protected regardless of the political situation.*

GovUkr (12.02.2014e) *Mykola Azarov: Crisis recovery is seriously challenged because of escalation of tension.*

GovUkr (12.02.2014f) *IBRD to provide Ukraine funds to implement energy-saving technologies.*

GovUkr (12.02.2014g) *Development of constructive partnership of Ukraine with NATO discussed.*

GovUkr (12.02.2014h) *K. Gryshchenko: Internet infrastructure of higher educational institutions of Ukraine has to correspond to the best world standards.*

GovUkr (13.02.2014a) *Stefan Fule visits central hospital of the Interior Ministry.*

GovUkr (13.02.2014b) *O. Vilkul: In February Crimea will host a sitting of BSEC working group for tourism.*

GovUkr (13.02.2014c) *Serhiy Arbutov: Agrarian sector to preserve leading positions in filling the State Budget.*

GovUkr (14.02.2014a) *S. Arbutov: Ukraine remains attractive to investors despite the political confrontation.*

GovUkr (14.02.2014b) *S. Arbutov: New procedure for raising loans under sovereign guarantees will strengthen export potential of Ukraine.*

GovUkr (15.02.2014) *Congratulation of the acting Prime Minister S. Arbutov on the Day of commemoration of participants of war activities on the territories of other states.*

GovUkr (17.02.2014a) *Agricultural Policy and Food Ministry develops a unique action plan of rural development.*

GovUkr (17.02.2014b) *Ukrainian farmer - successful producer.*

GovUkr (17.02.2014c) *Pavlo Lebedev: Defence Ministry continued to work on Armed Forces reform and development in 2013.*

GovUkr (17.02.2014d) *Task on staffing the Armed Forces exceptionally under contract sees its final stage.*

GovUkr (17.02.2014e) *O. Vilkul: Power supply resumed in all 1.605 localities affected by blackouts through rough weather.*

GovUkr (18.02.2014a) *Statement by the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine Leonid Kozhara.*

GovUkr (18.02.2014b) *Joint statement by Chief of Security Service of Ukraine Olexandr Yakymenko and Minister of Internal Affairs Vitaliy Zakharchenko.*

GovUkr (18.02.2014c) *Serhiy Arbutov has a phone conversation with Stefan Fule.*

GovUkr (19.02.2014a) *Opening statement of the acting Prime Minister of Ukraine Serhiy Arbutov at the meeting of the Government on February 19, 2014.*

GovUkr (19.02.2014b) *MLA: Militia did not use firearms during the liquidation of riots.*

GovUkr (19.02.2014c) *S. Arbutov expresses his condolences to those who died in yesterday's confrontation.*

GovUkr (19.02.2014d) *S. Arbutov: Ukraine intends to gain USD 20 bln from agriculture production export.*

GovUkr (19.02.2014e) *Ministry of Defense enhances the protection of military facilities.*

GovUkr (19.02.2014f) *Statement by the Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Ukraine.*

GovUkr (20.02.2014) *Ministries and departments are operating to ensure life support of the country in the complex political situation.*

“Civil Society Opposition”

Maidan Monitoring Information Center (MMIC)

documents available at <http://world.maidan.org.ua>;
 accessed in Oct/Nov 2015; eventual original sources from which the texts were adopted
 and republished by MMIC are indicated

MMIC (22.11.2013a) *From Facebook and Twitter to the streets: Ukrainians protest of ceased EU deal.*
 Post by Vitaliy Moroz, at grassglobal.com.

MMIC (22.11.2013b) *Ukrainian President tells President Grybauskaitė about Russia's Blackmail.*

MMIC (25.11.2013) *During Euromaidan city mayor of Kharkiv unlawfully bans all public assemblies.*

MMIC (30.11.2013a) *Maidan monitoring analysts: Maidan crackdown in Kyiv last night was a deliberate act.*

- MMIC (30.11.2013b) *International Renaissance Foundation: Statement deploring the violent police attack on the peaceful assembly of Euromaidan.*
- MMIC (2.12.2013a) *Ukrainian American Bar Association statement upon learning of the unlawful use of force to subdue the Euro-Maidan demonstration.*
- MMIC (2.12.2013b) *Ukrainian World Congress strongly condemns the brutal beatings of protesters on Kyiv's Euromaidan.*
- MMIC (4.12.2013a) *US calls on Ukraine to listen to its people.*
- MMIC (4.12.2013b) *How to defuse Ukraine's crisis.*
- MMIC (5.12.2013a) *NATO Foreign Ministers' statement on Ukraine.*
- MMIC (5.12.2013b) *Ukrainian World Congress supports the Ukrainian nation in its struggle for Euro-integration and democratization.*
- MMIC (6.12.2013a) *Ukrainian World Congress calls upon Ukrainian diaspora to support humanitarian aid for people in need throughout Ukraine.*
- MMIC (6.12.2013b) *Ukraine's Revolution – Day 4-5 – Stand-off.*
- MMIC (9.12.2013) *Ukraine's Revolution – Sunday December 8, 2013.*
- MMIC (10.12.2013a) *Ukraine President should resign; sanctions warranted if more violence against protesters, press.*
- MMIC (10.12.2013b) *European citizens, thinkers, artists and scientists to the people in the streets of Kyiv and other cities.*
- MMIC (10.12.2013c) *Ukrainian World Congress statement on International Human Rights Day.*
- MMIC (10.12.2013d) *Only 5% are on Euromaidan due to appeals of opposition leaders.*
- MMIC (10.12.2013e) *Appeal of civil society representatives to president, government and political forces of Ukraine.*
- MMIC (11.12.2013) *Declaration of the Permanent Synod of the Ukrainian Greek-Catholic Church.*
- MMIC (12.12.2013a) *Trying to get into Yanukovich's head....*
- MMIC (12.12.2013b) *Ukrainian World Congress is deeply troubled by the use of force on peaceful demonstrators on Kyiv's EuroMaidan.*
- MMIC (12.12.2013c) *Ihor Dlaboha: US Helsinki Commission Cardin urges immediate action by Ukrainian officials to respect human rights.*
- MMIC (12.12.2013d) *Open statement to the International Democratic Community from Ukraine.*
- MMIC (13.12.2013) *It's not about the EU, it's about freedom from the Ukrainian mafia.*
- MMIC (14.12.2013a) *Ukrainian World Congress troubled by latest reports of possible threats to Euro-Maidan and undue pressure on citizens of Ukraine.*
- MMIC (14.12.2013b) *As pro-European protests seize Ukraine, Jewish oligarch Victor Pinchuk is a bridge to the West.*
- MMIC (14.12.2013c) *Humanitarian aid to those in need at the Euromaidans.*
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**Mouvement National de l'Azawad (MNA) /
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nota bene: in October 2011, the MNA changed into the MNLA;
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A.2 Insights Into the Coding Procedure (MAXQDA)

A.2.1 Management of Documents in Weekly Folders/January 2014/Week 4 (Ukraine 2013-2014)

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Gov 2014 Jan W4\23.01.2014 b Government portal : M. Azarov and T. Jagland ...		2
Gov 2014 Jan W4\23.01.2014 c Government portal : Olexandr Vilkul holds a m...		1
Gov 2014 Jan W4\23.01.2014 d Government portal : Mykola Azarov: The early ...		1
Gov 2014 Jan W4\23.01.2014 f Government portal : Mykola Azarov: There is a ...		1
Gov 2014 Jan W4\23.01.2014 g Government portal : M. Azarov: It's too bad tha...		2
Opp 2014 Jan\UN 40 23.01.2014 3864_offener-brief-von-jurij-andruchowytsch		11
Opp 2014 Jan\UN 55 23.01.2014 889_berkut-leute-schlugen-knueppeln-unters...		1
Opp 2014 Jan\MF 111 23.01.2014 Cease-Fire in Kiev as Opposition Leaders Meet		7
Opp 2014 Jan\Zusatzinfo MF 144 23.02.2014 News Release: Manitoba Announ...		1
Gov 2014 Jan W4\24.01.2014 b Government portal : Mykola Azarov: European ...		1
Gov 2014 Jan W4\24.01.2014 c Government portal : Mykola Azarov: OSCE assi...		1
Gov 2014 Jan W4\24.01.2014 d Government portal : President of Switzerland: ...		2
Opp 2014 Jan\UN 42 24.01.2014 3865_was-der-westen-ueber-die-extreme-r...		4
Opp 2014 Jan\MF 112 24.01.2014 The time is ripe to consider sending UN Peace		5
Opp 2014 Jan\UN 70 25.01.2014 906_jurij-andruchowytsch-janukowytsch-wir...		7
Opp 2014 Jan\UN 44 26.01.2014 3868_zukunft-ukraine		7
Opp 2014 Jan\UN 46 27.01.2014 3871_spalterische-nationalistische-aktionen-...		6
INGOs 2014 Jan\24.01.2014 Human rights activists call on to end violence : hel		4
INGOs 2014 Jan\24.01.2014 Der Wille der Opposition ist ungebrochen, Publika...		3
INGOs 2014 Jan\AI 24.01.2014 eur500032014en		1
INGOs 2014 Jan\AI 24.01.2014 eur500042014en		1
Media 2014 Jan\24.01.2014 KyivPost_4_full_pdf		48
Opp 2014 Jan\MF 113 25.01.2014 Statement of Commissioner for Enlargement...		3
Opp 2014 Jan\MF 114 25.01.2014 Ukrainian Police Counter-Offensive - Maidan		9
INGOs 2014 Jan\25.01.2014 Executive Director of UHHRU demands that the a...		1
Opp 2014 Jan\UN 45 26.01.2014 3869_erklärung-scm-gruppe-rinat-achmetow		5
Opp 2014 Jan\UN 43 26.01.2014 3867_eine-stimme-schlachtfeld-dem-imitati...		13

A.2.2 Initial Coding/Topographic Map “EuroMaidan” (Ukraine 2013-2014)

Liste der Codes	
- Euromaidan: pro-European protests 49 - good demonstrations - bad demonstrations 15 - major (historical) examples 16 - third countries as examples 8 - Orange Revolution as historical example 50 - hero & victim cult 8 - fundraising/solidarity 28 - role of social media 29 - motivations: surveys, quotes, reports 8 - role of political parties/opposition 43 ...as a revolution/transformation/historic event 40 ...as a place of art 7 ...as a mass movement 20 ...as a whole society phenomenon 22 ...as a civil society phenomenon 39 ...as a country-wide phenomenon 16 - protest strategies 31 - satire 1 - self-defense 8 - use of force 13 - boycott 5 - auto maidan 8 - civil rights education 1 - barricades 10 - winning hearts and minds 8 - internationalisation 40 - ceasing any cooperation 1 - claim: investigate & prosecute 33 - monitoring, professionalising, PR 27 - occupations, civil disobedience 23 - restrictions/repression 70 - human rights violations 16 - violation of right to peaceful assembly 7 - indignation about government/police 13 - government warnings/intimidation 41 - incidences of physical violence 37 - deliberate acts 19 - unprecedented 3	

A.2.3 Management of Documents in Monthly Folders/September 2011 (Mali 2010-2012)

Liste der Dokumente		
- November 2010 - Dezember 2010 - Januar 2011 - Februar 2011 - März 2011 - April 2011 - Mai 2011 - Juni 2011 - Juli 2011 - August 2011 September 2011 - Oktober 2011 - November 2011 - Dezember 2011 - Januar 2012 - Februar 2012		
Sets		0
November 2010		0
Dezember 2010		0
Januar 2011		0
Februar 2011		0
März 2011		0
April 2011		0
Mai 2011		0
Juni 2011		0
Juli 2011		0
August 2011		0
September 2011		0
Regierung 2011\C 18 02.09.2011		4
MNLA\02.09.2011 Communiqué du Mouvement National de l'Azawad		14
Medien 2011 September\02.09.2011 Le PSPSDN : L'amateurisme de K...		16
INGOs\04.09.2011 Libya: Stop Arbitrary Arrests of Black Africans Hu		3
Regierung 2011\A 105 05.09.2011		3
Regierung 2011\A 106 06.09.2011		10
Regierung 2011\A 107 12.09.2011		4
MNLA\12.09.2011 L'exaspération du peuple de l'Azawad		15
MNLA\13.09.2011 Mouvement National de l'Azawad		16
Medien 2011 September\14.09.2011 c Les pays du sahel :Le temps de...		5
Medien 2011 September\14.09.2011 b Communiqué du Mouvement N...		15
Regierung 2011\A 109 15.09.2011		3
Medien 2011 September\15.09.2011 Mali-Algérie-Niger-Sahara-drogu...		5
Medien 2011 September\16.09.2011 "Réseau Polisario" : AQMI recrut...		6
Medien 2011 September\16.09.2011 « Le trafic de drogue menace les...		5
Medien 2011 September\16.09.2011 Manœuvres sécessionnistes : Le ...		16
Regierung 2011\A 110 19.09.2011		2
Medien 2011 September\19.09.2011 Instabilité au Nord Mali - Le dépu...		13
Regierung 2011\D 15 21.09.2011		5
Regierung 2011\C 19 21.09.2011		1
Regierung 2011\A 111 22.09.2011		6
Medien 2011 September\23.09.2011 Insécurité au Nord Mali : La chas...		5
Regierung 2011\A 112 26.09.2011		5
Medien 2011 September\26.09.2011 Lutte contre l'insécurité au Nord ...		10
Medien 2011 September\28.09.2011 L'insécurité résiduelle au Nord M...		10
Medien 2011 September\29.09.2011 Agence de Développement du N...		11
Oktober 2011		0
November 2011		0
Dezember 2011		0
Januar 2012		0
Februar 2012		0

A.2.4 Codings/Factual Dimension (Mali 2010-2012)

Liste der Codes		
▼ Factual		0
▼ Fortschritt & Modernisierung		25
▼ Strategie der Entwicklungspolitik		50
Religion(en) als Entwicklungsakteur		3
Militär als Entwicklungsakteur		6
▼ kulturelle Entwicklung als Kampf um Identität		4
durch Erziehung und (Aus-)Bildung insb. Jugend		4
Verkehrs- bzw. Basisinfrastruktur		21
▼ Ausbau der Infrastruktur (Prävention & Intervention)		12
betreff Medien/Presse		4
im Bereich des Rechtsstaats/der Gerichte		2
im Sicherheitsbereich/Militär		2
▼ wirtschaftliche Entwicklung		9
Landwirtschaft		5
Bodenschätze (Uran, Öl...)		4
Tourismus als Wirtschaftsfaktor		18
Entwicklungspartnerschaft		6
▼ Nexus Sicherheit, Entwicklung & Frieden		53
PSPSDN		47
Beteiligung Zivilgesellschaft		6
Entwicklungsperspektiven für benachteiligte Regionen		7
Sicherheits- UND Entwicklungsstrategie		13
▼ transnationale Dimension		29
▼ Mali, die Touareg & die internat. Gemeinschaft		20
Bezug zum Völkerrecht		21
Kooperationsangebot an TNUen		3
Bezug auf internat. Gemeinschaft/Weltöffentlichkeit		31
Dimension universeller Werte		44
▼ regionale Dimension		87
gemeinsame regionale Geschichte		3
regionale Kooperation und Stabilität		45
▼ regionale Interessen		3
wirtschaftliche Interessen		6
Auseinandersetzungen im Kontext Drogenhandel		20
Handel mit/ Rolle von Kleinwaffen		6
Rolle der EU		6
Rolle Deutschlands		2
Rolle der USA		16
Rolle Frankreichs		32
Rolle Chinas		9
▼ Fokus "Sicherheit"		297
kriegerische Aktivitäten		22
interethnisch/inner-touareg		22
▼ Krisenbeschreibungen		121
ad Konflikt in Libyen & Folgen		149
▼ Handlungsstrategien		50
Herzen und Köpfe		7
polizeilich-juristisch, z.B. Verhaftungen & Verbote		11
militärisch		76
geheimdienstlich		4
▼ Rolle der Religionen/ religiöser Sprache		28
Bekenntnis zur multietnischen/ -religiösen Nation		7
Einheit/Nation, Souveränität, Autonomie, Selbstbestimmung		158

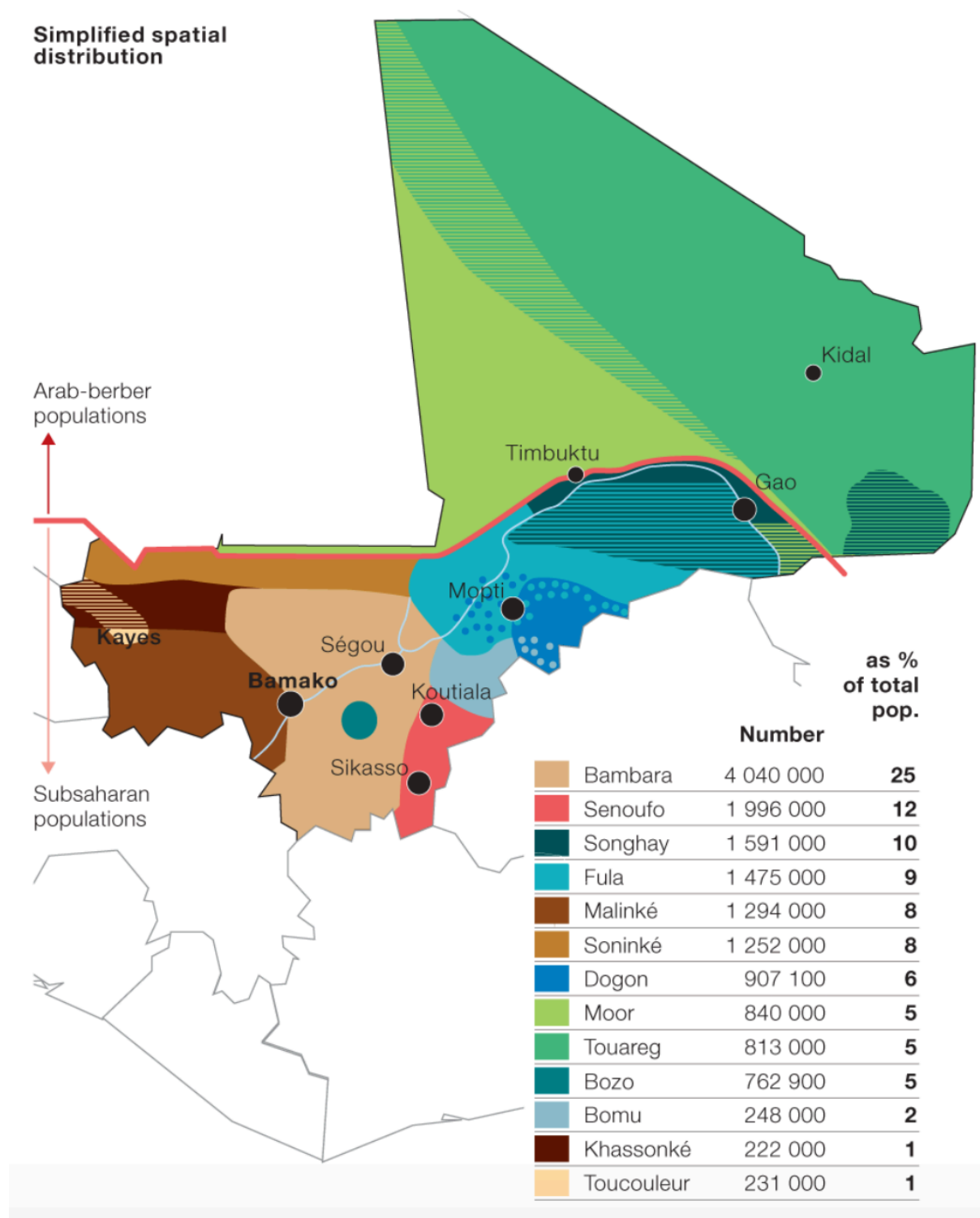
A.3 Additional Material

A.3.1 General Map: Mali



United Nations Geospatial Section (2021) *General Maps: Mali*. At <https://www.un.org/Depts/Cartographic/map/profile/mali.pdf> , accessed August 15, 2021

A.3.2 Ethnic Groups in Mali



Atlas Jeune Afrique (2010) *Simplified Spatial Distribution of Ethnic Groups in Mali*. At <https://www.oecd.org/swac/maps>, accessed July 17, 2021

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Epilogue

“What do we have here?” says the librarian to her colleague sitting at the next table in the university library office while looking at the book on top of the pile on her desk. “These are the incoming new books this month. I’ve skim-readed them in recent days. The book on top is about conflict escalation.” her colleague answers.” Okay, thank you. Unfortunately, I can’t spare the time to browse into the book before we put in on our system. Could you please tell me what it’s all about? Which conflicts? International conflicts, I mean, wars? Or, as it’s not possible to escape the topic in the media, maybe conflicts between the police and those opposing anti-corona measures? Or conflicts in relationships of couples?”

The colleague goes over and picks up the book again. “Well, there are two case studies on periods prior to a violent conflict. One is about, um..., the time before the war in northern Mali in 2011-2012, which is still ongoing, by the way.” then he pages up. “And the other ... is about the protests on Maidan, Kiev’s independence square, which ended in deadly clashes. You remember? This took place by the turn of the year 2013/2014. And, here, too, it has continued to this day. I only mention Crimea, Eastern Ukraine...”

“Oh yes, I remember the images of Maidan. It really looked like a war scene, in the middle of the capital. Horrible!” The book is handed over again. “Let’s see, this is a dissertation, right? Which discipline? Political Science? Okay, then let’s settle this quickly and file it there.” Her colleague shakes his head. “But wait, it does not really match up with the International Relations shelf in Political Science since it’s not about true global conflicts, or is it?” “Well, as we stated a minute ago”, she returns, “both cases are still active, they are global matters. Think about ongoing hostilities in Eastern Ukraine and the military intervention in Mali.”

“Let’s try it with sociology”, her colleague interrupts the silence, “as I browsed through the book, I repeatedly got caught by the name of Luhmann and his systems theory. The book develops an approach to conflict research based on the analysis of communication. But I’m not sure how the broad representation of case studies with their somehow global background would be appropriate for the sociology shelf.” While thinking about his suggestion, she takes the book and looks at the front cover. “Do you understand what this world society thing is about? That’s not a very common term, right?”

“Likewise. I’m not familiar with this notion. However, as far as I understood, the author tries to make the point that communication is nowadays capable to reach every corner of the world. In this sense, although there are many competing developments processing at different speeds around the globe, we can’t escape communicating in this very same world and, in this sense, live in one world society that, by the way, continuously produces conflicts.” he responds while partly reading out from the book. “Wow, that sounds quite straight! But how are we going to deal with it then?”

While the meeting of the two librarians continues, they exchange views on the other books on the pile waiting to be put into the library system. Yet, the discussion about ‘Observing Conflict Escalation in World Society’ has inspired them to think about further questions. *Who makes decisions on the ordering principles in our library? Should we follow a filing system which is organised according to disciplines or topics? Or are there other models in-between? Do we need this kind of differentiation in a digital age at all? Who may be interested in reading this book?*

On her way home, the librarian thinks about her work day. Spontaneously, the quotation from Goethe she picked up while browsing through the book this morning crosses her mind:

... whatever holds the world together in its inmost folds...