

**EU PEACE MEDIATION IN THE 2020s**  
FROM INTERVENTION TO INVESTMENT

**Tyyne Karjalainen**

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The European Union is renewing its Concept on Strengthening EU Mediation and Dialogue Capacities after more than a decade. The new concept is being launched at a time when international peace mediation is at risk of lagging behind in the face of accelerating power politics. The United Nations Security Council seems to be paralysed, and many peace processes frozen solid. Regional actors, such as the EU, now have a window of opportunity to strengthen their role, albeit amid difficult circumstances, as learnt, for example, in Ukraine and Syria.

This Working Paper suggests that the EU has special abilities to build on in peace mediation, including exceptional resources for capacity-building and mediation support. Capable of harnessing the resources of the member states, civil society and private mediation actors alike, the EU can build tailor-made, multi-level processes for resolving conflicts, and make the essential change-makers pull together. However, there is still room for improvement in EU action, for example in the evaluation of mediation, to which end this research sheds light on several concrete steps that the EU can take in order to optimize its efforts.



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# EU PEACE MEDIATION IN THE 2020s

## FROM INTERVENTION TO INVESTMENT

### INTRODUCTION: EU MEDIATION DEVELOPS AFTER A DIFFICULT DECADE

The European Union (EU) adopted its first political document on mediation in 2009, adding to the enthusiasm that was inherent in the field of international peace mediation at that time. The previous decade, starting from the mid-1990s, had turned out to be successful for the mediation community, with an increasing number of violent conflicts having ended with a negotiated agreement instead of a military victory.<sup>1</sup> The 2000s had been characterized by remarkable growth in international capabilities and professionalism in mediation, with an emerging group of private mediators and increasingly competent civil society actors joining a mediation field previously occupied by state diplomats.

During the 2000s, the EU also engaged in mediation efforts, for example in respect of the Ohrid Agreement (2001), in Ukraine's Orange Revolution (2004), and in the Aceh (2005) and Middle East peace processes.<sup>2</sup> Based on these experiences, the 2009 Concept on Strengthening EU Mediation and Dialogue Capacities set a goal for the EU to become more actively involved in mediation and mediation support, with the objective being reiterated in the Council Conclusions on Conflict Prevention two years later.<sup>3</sup> Defining five types of EU mediation involvement – promoting, leveraging, supporting and funding mediation, and acting as a mediator itself – the concept also outlined that the EU should promote mediation as the first tool to use in emerging and ongoing crisis situations.<sup>4</sup> In the years that followed, EU mediation met with modest acclaim: its capabilities were acknowledged to be increasing, although the Union was regarded as not having realized its full potential in this field.<sup>5</sup>

More difficult times for peace mediation were just around the corner, however. It was not long after the launch of the 2009 concept that 'the golden age' of peace mediation was considered to have come to an

end. Conflicts – at a historically low level at that time<sup>6</sup> – started to appear more difficult to resolve.<sup>7</sup> By many indicators, traditional peace diplomacy proved toothless in the face of the conflicts of the 2010s, with the conflicts in Ukraine and Syria exemplifying some of the difficulties. At the same time, the trend of increasing geopolitical dynamics and power politics<sup>8</sup> had the effect of curtailing the space for peace mediation in the international arena. Eventually, the number of armed conflicts also started to rise again, reverting to the level of the early 1990s by the mid-2010s.<sup>9</sup>

Peace and conflict researchers soon came to the conclusion that it was the inherent complexity of conflicts that was making their resolution more difficult. Some criticized the overconfident peacebuilding community for having overlooked the complexity of conflicts,<sup>10</sup> while others were concerned that the complexity was increasing, with conflicts becoming multilayered and interlinked, and parties blurred and ambiguous. The complexity-informed researchers concluded that peace should be understood more as situation emerging from unique contexts and unpredictable processes, and less as a solution that could be pre-planned or forced through peace interventions.<sup>11</sup>

The 2009 EU mediation concept was well written and remained relevant in many respects through the difficult decade of the 2010s, but in light of all of the major changes that had occurred in the field, revising it eventually became topical. Having been mooted for some time, it was during the Finnish presidency of the EU Council in 2019 that the process of creating a new concept took off.<sup>12</sup> To this end, the new EU concept on mediation is expected to be launched this autumn, under the German presidency of the Council. The new concept should adapt EU practice to the state of the art in the field of international peace mediation, and to the

1 Lehti & Lepomäki 2017, pp. 4–5.

2 Cases exclusively cited as examples of EU mediation, Herrberg 2008, pp. 6, 13–14; see also Bergmann 2017.

3 Tamminen 2012, p. 10.

4 Council of the EU 2009, pp. 4, 6.

5 E.g. Tamminen 2012.

6 The Uppsala Conflict Data Program.

7 E.g. Petterson et al. 2019; Lehti & Lepomäki 2017.

8 "Increasing geopolitical dynamics and power politics" refers to the phenomenon of great-power competition (in contrast to the post-Cold War tranquility) in economic, military and ideological spheres that has materialized, for example, in the re-emerging trade wars, the use of economic sanctions, the less functional multilateral cooperation formats, the stalled peace processes and the disarmament agenda, and in the increasing violations of international law.

9 Petterson et al. 2019.

10 De Coning 2020, p. 2.

11 E.g. de Coning 2020; Lehti & Lepomäki 2017.

12 Interview data; also Järvinen & Leinonen 2020, p. 199.

character of conflict and peace in the 2020s. Furthermore, it should apply the latest strategic objectives of the Union to mediation practice, taking into account the structural developments and new tools at the disposal of the EU's external action.

This Working Paper presents a snapshot of international peace mediation at the advent of the new EU mediation concept and sheds light on the EU's opportunities. Based on a literature review and six semi-structured expert interviews conducted with EU officials, European mediation professionals, a university researcher and a Finnish Ministry for Foreign Affairs official, the following sections map out the capabilities, advantages and challenges of EU mediation and EU mediation support at the beginning of the new decade.<sup>13</sup>

## BACKGROUND: EU MEDIATION IN BRIEF

It was during Javier Solana's term as the High Representative of the EU in 1999–2009 that peace mediation emerged as a relevant part of EU foreign policy.<sup>14</sup> Since then, the EU has evolved from good offices into a legal character in peace negotiations, and from a payer into a player in peace processes, cherishing its special ability in mediation support at the same time. The cases of EU engagement have multiplied and the EU's roles in international peace mediation have diversified. Today, the EU plays the roles of a guarantor of peace agreements, an observer of implementation, and a provider of technical expertise, among others.<sup>15</sup> According to the EU External Action Service (EEAS), "it is hard to find a region of the world today where the EU is not active in promoting peace and security through dialogue and mediation at different levels, in some form or another".<sup>16</sup>

At the same time, on a global scale, the EU has remained in the margins of international peace mediation, with the UN and individual states maintaining their leading role as peace brokers.<sup>17</sup> The EU's mediation efforts are also relatively unknown within the Union, where other mediation actors include active member states, private mediators and civil society

organizations.<sup>18</sup> Within the category of regional actors, the EU's performance is distinctive: whereas regional organizations usually mediate between their member states, the EU mostly mediates in conflicts outside of its own area.<sup>19</sup> In recent times, regional actors have in general become more relevant in international peace mediation, partly because of the difficulties of institutions like the United Nations Security Council (UN SC) to function in an environment of increasing power politics.<sup>20</sup>

To mention some examples of EU engagement, the current conflicts in Syria and Libya are examples of indirect engagement of the EU in mediation through supporting other actors' mediation efforts, whereas the EU acted as an official facilitator during disputes over Iran's nuclear deal (2015). Relatively successful cases of EU engagement are often deemed to include mediation in Ukraine's Orange Revolution (2004) and facilitation of the Pristina–Belgrade dialogue since 2011.<sup>21</sup> The EU's engagement in supporting the peace processes in Colombia and Aceh was also viewed in rather positive terms.<sup>22</sup> On the other hand, the EU's mediation efforts have been considered less successful in Bosnia and Herzegovina, in the Israeli–Palestinian conflict, and in the latest Ukraine crisis.<sup>23</sup>

To break down the different types of EU engagement, 'EU mediation' specifically refers to direct efforts by EU representatives to assist peace negotiations between parties to a conflict,<sup>24</sup> and also implies an intervention that constitutes a part of EU external action and the EU's conflict prevention and crisis management processes.<sup>25</sup> 'EU mediation support', instead, refers to EU activities that aim to support efforts by other actors to mediate a conflict.<sup>26</sup> EU mediation and mediation support comprise 'international peace mediation', which in general signifies third-party involvement in a voluntary and peaceful mediation process, non-binding in nature,<sup>27</sup> with 'peace' referring to a sustainable resolution to a conflict,<sup>28</sup> and 'inter-

13 In order to ensure anonymity for the interviewees, individual interviews are not referenced.

14 Bergmann 2017.

15 Interview data; on the development of the EU framework, see e.g. Herrberg 2012a; Bergmann et al. 2018.

16 EEAS d.

17 Bergmann 2018, p. 239; Bergmann & Niemann 2015, p. 957.

18 Interview data.

19 Mirimanova 2020, pp. 4–5; see also Pinfari 2018, pp. 200–201.

20 On UN SC, see Gowan 2018; on regional mediators, see e.g. McCulloch & McEvoy 2018 and OSCE 2016 (this view was supported in the interviews); on regional initiatives, see also Wigell et al. 2020.

21 See e.g. Niemann et al. 2018, p. 324; Bergmann 2017.

22 On Aceh, see e.g. Higgins 2012, p. 50; on Colombia, see e.g. Peral 2012, p. 73; interview data.

23 Niemann et al. 2018, p. 324; on Ukraine, see also Chaban et al. 2019.

24 Based on Bergmann & Niemann 2015, p. 959.

25 Davis 2018, p. 180.

26 Based on Bergmann et al. 2018, pp. 161–163; for more on mediation support, see e.g. Lanz et al. 2017.

27 Bergmann et al. 2018, pp. 161–163.

28 Herrberg 2008, p. 9.

national' indicating either that the mediator or one of the conflict parties has a nationality different from the rest,<sup>29</sup> or that the conflict has significance for international peace and security.<sup>30</sup>

The most relevant institutional framework for EU peace mediation consists of the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) and the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) structure. The Political and Security Committee (PSC) defines the mediation mandates and strategic direction, whereas the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy (HR/VP), the Special Representatives (EUSRs), and the EEAS and EU delegations conduct the EU mediation.<sup>31</sup> Within the EEAS structure, the Integrated Approach for Security and Peace Directorate (ISP) replaced the Division for the Prevention of Conflicts, Rule of Law and SSR, Integrated Approach, Stabilisation and Mediation (PRISM), and the Crisis Management and Planning Directorate (CMPD) in March 2019,<sup>32</sup> previously responsible for developing EU policies on conflict situations. The new directorate was greeted with hopes that the implementation of the integrated approach in the Union's external action would be strengthened further.<sup>33</sup> In June 2020, a new internal pool of mediators was established within the EEAS.<sup>34</sup> Finally, the European Parliament also has a Mediation Support Unit that performs specific tasks in relation to mediation support.<sup>35</sup>

The EU funds mediation through long-term programmes such as the European Development Fund (EDF, total budget for 2014–2020: €30.5 billion from the member states, outside the EU Budget<sup>36</sup>) and mid- and short-term funding instruments like the Instrument contributing to Stability and Peace (IcSP, total budget for 2014–2020: €2.3 billion<sup>37</sup>), managed by the Service for Foreign Policy Instruments (FPI, within the European Commission). The IcSP is the key funding mechanism for mediation support activities, such as European Resources for Mediation Support (ERMES), which provides support, assistance and capacity-building for peace processes.<sup>38</sup> IcSP projects,

which also include other conflict prevention, crisis response and peace-building activities in addition to mediation, are implemented by civil society actors, other international or regional organizations, and member state agencies.<sup>39</sup>

Peace mediation is one of the most cost-effective tools for achieving foreign policy objectives.<sup>40</sup> However, with years of traditional diplomacy behind it, the EU political leadership does not always see conflicts through a peace mediation prism, or regard peace mediation as a potential response to a conflict. Some EU leaders have endorsed mediation more than others: for example, Federica Mogherini, who served as the High Representative from 2014 to 2019, took an active role in involving the EU in several peace processes and developed its proactive role on a global scale.<sup>41</sup> Whether or not the EU is represented in a particular peace process also fundamentally depends on member states' political will. All decisions on EU mediation go through the PSC, which sometimes makes flexible action difficult. Mediation support typically allows less political or visible and more flexible involvement by the EU in a peace process, through funding, training, technical assistance or capacity-building, for example.<sup>42</sup>

Finally, EU engagements in peace mediation also need to be understood in the context of EU foreign policy and security interests.<sup>43</sup> Some have viewed the EU's motivation to mediate from the perspective of executing normative power while, for others, mediation is all about security, following the perception that creating security outside of the EU adds to security within it.<sup>44</sup> One aim at the present time for resolving violent conflicts through mediation is to ease the migration pressure on Europe.<sup>45</sup>

29 Bergmann et al. 2018, p. 161.

30 Davis 2018, p. 180.

31 EEAS a; EEAS b; Council of the European Union 2009 pp. 4–5; Bergmann et al. 2018, pp. 163–165.

32 EEAS a; EPLO 2020.

33 See e.g. Debuysere & Blockmans 2019.

34 Interview data; see also Järvinen & Leinonen 2020, p. 199.

35 EPLO 2020.

36 European Commission a.

37 European Commission b.

38 College of Europe; see also Bergmann et al. 2018, p. 165.

39 EEAS c; European Commission c; see also the Regulation (EU) No 230/2014 of 11 March 2014.

40 Herrberg 2012b, pp. 56–57.

41 Interview data; on the role of HR/VPs, see Koops & Tercovich 2020, esp. p. 294.

42 Interview data; on mediation support, see European Peacebuilding Liaison Office 2017, p. 7; on MSs' role, see Herrberg 2008, p. 17.

43 See Niemann et al. 2018, p. 327.

44 Interview data; on motivations to mediate, see also Bergmann et al. 2018, pp. 167–168.

45 Interview data.

## CONFLICTS IN THE 2020s AND THE NEW PEACEMAKERS

The nature of conflicts is constantly changing. Based on the interviews for this research, the trend whereby the number of intrastate conflicts is increasing and interstate conflicts becoming rarer is still relevant for peace mediators at the start of the 2020s. The number of armed conflicts in general is on the rise again, with the peak in the number of conflicts after 2014 corresponding to the peak of the early 1990s.<sup>46</sup> Furthermore, conflicts are increasingly multi-levelled, with geopolitical power relations entangling with local levels of conflict, and all of these levels nonlinearly impacting each other. Once again, proxy wars are a denominator of international relations, now encompassing a new layer of influential actors. Conflict parties are increasingly numerous, blurred, and in constant flux. Furthermore, conflicts have become more interlinked than before.<sup>47</sup>

Pettersson et al. (2019) shared an interesting finding concerning the two similar conflict peaks that occurred in the early 1990s and the mid-2010s. Whereas the peak in the 1990s was followed by an increase in the number of signed peace agreements, the 2010s seemed to lack that characteristic, with the number of subsequent peace agreements not following a similar trajectory. Clearly, conflict contexts have become more complex for mediators to operate within; for example, the current conflicts in Ukraine and Syria reveal how today's conflicts are impossible to resolve if all levels of the conflict are not systematically addressed and parties from grassroots to the macro level involved.

The root causes and effects of conflicts have barely changed, but some of them have only recently gained more attention in international peace mediation. Climate change, migration and social movements are some of the phenomena that pose new requirements for peace processes in the 2020s. Climate change-related conflicts, for example, seem to require international mediators to have an ability to engage local actors even more inclusively. Dealing with social movements, instead, is found to require investments in capacity-building that advances conflict transformation and helps to avoid an escalation of the social movements into armed movements.<sup>48</sup>

The rapid development of technology is another vector for peace mediators to follow: there are concerns that it will increase the complexity and unpredictability of conflicts, fuel hybrid warfare, including information warfare, and enable weaponized artificial intelligence. It was even pointed out in the interviews that the rapid development of technology raises the question of whether the fundamental assumptions about peacemaking still hold true, in that information and ideas now spread fast and freely in social media, for example. Yet the development of information technology also provides opportunities for peacemakers, along with great pressure to adapt. Mediators need to be proactive in adopting new IT tools, in communication for example, in order to turn them to their advantage.<sup>49</sup> To some extent, the Covid-19 crisis served as an opportunity for a technological leap in peace mediation: because of the travel restrictions, virtual tools were launched and technologies for peace mediation were also developed in the EU framework.<sup>50</sup>

The Covid-19 crisis is also having an effect on conflict dynamics. The global pandemic could have served as an opportunity to advance peace processes worldwide, but this opportunity has not been seized. Ten days after the UN Secretary-General's call for a global ceasefire, conflict parties in only eleven countries had accepted it, with implementation of the declarations turning out even feebler.<sup>51</sup> As one interviewee for this study pointed out, there was invariably someone who did not want to advance peace, but to use the situation for their own benefit. Another effect of the pandemic was that it shifted the attention of the international community away from conflicts and peace processes, which could have a fuelling effect in certain cases.<sup>52</sup>

The reason why the crisis did not provide the impetus for a global ceasefire has been associated with the current state of 'geopolitics'. At the macro level, it seems that the international arena in general has become more competitive and 'geopolitical' – a challenging trend for peace processes as a whole. With realpolitik dominating, the space for peace mediation has become narrower. Less emphasis is put on achieving sustainable peace, with the continuation of a conflict sometimes being in the interests of the great powers.

46 Pettersson et al. 2019.

47 Interview data; for more on the implications of complexity for peace-building, see e.g. de Coning 2020.

48 Interview data; on climate change, see Swain and Öjendal 2018; on migration, see Perrinet et al. 2018; on social movements, see da Rocha 2019.

49 Examples were given about new social media applications, among other things, that the mediators should be aware of and skilled at using if willing to control or guide communication about the peace process.

50 Interview data; see also Deneckere 2019, p. 4 on social media and mediation.

51 The countries included Cameroon, the Central African Republic, Colombia, Libya, Myanmar, the Philippines, South Sudan, Sudan, Syria, Ukraine and Yemen (United Nations Secretary-General, 03 April 2020); Mustasilta 2020.

52 Interview data; see also the UN SC 2 July 2020 and Mustasilta 2020.

Furthermore, the situation whereby multilateralism is waning has an effect on the institutions where peace mediation processes are initiated and mandated; for example, the UN Security Council has been less able to establish a common agenda.<sup>53</sup>

Changes in the ‘geopolitical’ framework have also given rise to new actors with an interest in peace mediation. For some time now, Russia, Turkey and China have been increasing their activities in peace processes worldwide. For example, both China and Russia have demonstrated their interest in conflict resolution in the Central African Republic. What seems characteristic of the new state actors is that their approach is closer to power mediation or political conflict resolution than the ideals of peace mediation per se. Naturally, this characteristic is not confined to the new actors: for example, the US has long taken the lead in power mediation, achieving several successes in brokering peace agreements based on its military clout and inducements.<sup>54</sup> It is worth noting that, in some cases, the use of such coercive means has been seen as useful for getting conflict parties engaged in a peace process but, in general, peace researchers are doubtful about the durability of peace deals brokered by means of coercive influence.<sup>55</sup>

The EU has shown less interest and ability in power mediation, its successes in pushing peace agreements having diminished year after year. From a capacity-based mediation perspective, according to which mediation success derives from economic and military capabilities,<sup>56</sup> the EU does not have powerful enough ‘sticks’ to force peace deals between conflicting parties, despite the fact that the Union’s economic sticks, namely economic sanctions, have also received some positive assessments.<sup>57</sup> With regard to its ‘carrots’, the EU seems much stronger: economic support, trade deals and the prospect of Union membership constitute positive leverage for EU mediation.<sup>58</sup> Being the largest donor internationally, and a desirable trade partner, it has the clout to get conflict parties engaged in peace processes.<sup>59</sup> Yet concerns about the durability of such agreements remain.

53 Interview data; on UN SC, see Gowan 2018.

54 Interview data; on US power mediation, and new actors, see also Lehti & Lepomäki 2017, pp. 13, 61.

55 Herrberg 2008, p. 15.

56 Duursma 2020, p. 7; see also the ‘power-based approach’ versus the ‘facilitative and interest-based approach’ to mediation, Herrberg 2012a, p. 12.

57 Interview data; on sanctions, see also Ćwiek-Karpowicz and Secrieru, 2015, p. 7, and on lacking ‘sticks’, see e.g. Pinfari 2018.

58 E.g. Herrberg 2008, p. 15; for a critical view, see Pinfari 2018.

59 Mirimanova 2020, pp. 9–10, 5; Moreno et al. 2018.

Some other new actors in the peace mediation field are less frequently associated with the problems of forced agreements. The small, private and civil society mediators that emerged in the field ten years ago have been regarded as providing a possible solution to the difficulties of power diplomacy during the past decade. The trend is that these atypical mediators have continued to increase in number and strengthen their foothold in peace mediation worldwide. While not homogeneous as a group but, rather, distinct in nature, private and civil society actors provide the mediation field with diverse capabilities and resources. Both of these groups form a crucial partner for the EU in international peace mediation.<sup>60</sup>

Since their emergence in the field, first and third sector mediators have challenged the old norms of mediation, created innovations, and provided alternatives to traditional, state-led mediation activities. They have demonstrated the ability to connect with conflict parties that used to prove unreachable, engaging with non-state actors, unrecognized actors, and national oppositions more flexibly and inclusively than official mediators before them. Along with the rise of these first and third sector actors, the field of peace mediation has become more professionalized. Traditionally occupied by diplomats who gained their expertise through diplomacy, many mediators today have specialized in peace mediation as a career. More training and research on mediation is now available. On the other hand, not all new mediators act responsibly and some even operate on behalf of ‘geopolitical’ players. This, again, has imposed new requirements for the mediation community in general and for the EU in particular as a major donor supporting peace mediation worldwide.<sup>61</sup>

## MEDIATORS’ CONTEMPORARY PRECEPTS

To sum up the findings of this research, the key advice for today’s mediators stems from the notion of complexity, inasmuch as sustainable peace can only be achieved through a change that originates from below, from the local context, while a third party mediator needs to confine their role to assistance and support in that process. In order to build peace in the long run, peace agreements need to be based on the perspective

60 Interview data.

61 Interview data; for more on private peacemakers, see Lehti & Lepomäki 2017.

of the people involved in the particular conflict and cannot be imposed by external parties.<sup>62</sup> Another key piece of advice informed by complexity is that mediation needs to be tailor-made and adapted: different mediation actors and instruments are needed at different levels and phases of a peace process (a ‘multi-track approach’), delivering a peaceful change piecemeal.<sup>63</sup>

Assessing the EU’s performance in the light of this advice, this research brings both good and bad news. In terms of good news, one of the greatest advantages of the EU in peace mediation is its capability to engage and leverage local actors, civil society actors, women and young people in peace processes through funding, coaching, training, and providing technical assistance. Examples of such engagement include recent EU projects in Libya<sup>64</sup> and Ukraine,<sup>65</sup> and many past efforts in Colombia,<sup>66</sup> Asia and Africa.<sup>67</sup> By recognizing the relevance of building local capacities and by avoiding an interventionist approach, the EU increases the sustainability of peace processes and comes across as a reassuring and legitimate partner to the conflict parties.<sup>68</sup> Some of these activities fall under mediation support, but other EU functions, such as the CSDP missions, can also work for the same purpose.

Mediation support in particular enables the participation of diverse mediation actors in peace processes. In addition to leveraging local actors, EU mediation support benefits other international and regional organizations, as well as European civil society and private mediation agencies. On a global scale, the EU is more active in mediation support than most other international actors and is one of the major donors. On the one hand, mediation support is often about outsourcing EU mediation, whereby an external contractor participates in a peace process instead of the EU, but is funded or trained by it. This is also known as partnering, as the cooperation is believed to offer mutual benefits. Motivations for the EU to provide mediation support are manifold. The EU is limited with regard to the type of change it is able to deliver alone, and the types of conflict in which it can engage directly. Through outsourcing and partnering, the EU can recruit capabilities from a wide range of official,

private and civil society actors, selected based on the needs of a particular phase of a specific peace process. In contexts where the EU is seen as being particularly partial, partnering is sometimes the only option for EU engagement.<sup>69</sup>

The integrated approach is another advantage of the EU in the light of the contemporary understanding of sustainable peace. The integrated approach combines the EU’s and partners’ resources, capabilities and activities vertically and horizontally and forms a coordinated response to a crisis or conflict, with EU peace mediation and mediation support being a possible part of the whole. The other parts such as crisis management and monitoring missions support the mediation, and vice versa. Due to this approach, the EU typically remains in the conflict area longer than any other actors.<sup>70</sup> It is hoped that the new Directorate ISP within the EEAS will further strengthen implementation of the integrated approach to EU practice.<sup>71</sup>

Moving on to the bad news about EU performance, despite being portrayed as an advocate of women’s participation worldwide, the EU’s performance in engaging women in peace processes has received mixed assessments. Some interviewees praised the EU for advancing women’s role in several peace processes, but others believed that the EU is part of a global trend of failure in acknowledging gender and taking practical steps towards inclusivity.<sup>72</sup>

The second criticism concerns a perception of normative excellence that is believed to prevent the EU from succeeding in the local approach to peace mediation. In respect of European values and norms, namely those central to Enlightenment thinking, the EU faces difficulties in engaging with conflict parties at eye level and treating their cultural systems as equal. The tendency of ‘knowing better’ restricts the EU’s opportunities to facilitate a peaceful change when its values and norms are challenged by the content of a ‘particular peace’ initiated by the conflict parties.<sup>73</sup>

Many scholars long perceived neutrality as a necessary characteristic of a peace mediator, but more recently the understanding has shifted towards questioning that necessity.<sup>74</sup> Yet the lack of neutrality has

62 Many recent studies have come to a similar conclusion and provide more comprehensive justifications: see e.g. de Coning 2020 and Duursma 2020.

63 Interview data; see also Davis 2018.

64 Mueller & Cornago 2018.

65 EEAS d.

66 Peral 2012, p. 73; Mirimanova 2020, p. 10.

67 Sherriff 2012, p. 24.

68 Interview data.

69 Interview data; see also e.g. Eplo 2017.

70 Interview data; see also Davis 2018; Mirimanova 2020, p. 5.

71 Debuysere & Blockmans 2019.

72 This is in line with Haastруп (2018, pp. 232–233), who criticized the EU for its inability to implement its official commitment on women’s engagement in peace mediation.

73 Interview data; see also Mirimanova 2020, pp. 5–6; Herrberg 2012a, p. 23; Herrberg 2008, p. 16.

74 Elgström et al. 2018, pp. 301–302.

turned out to be a challenging issue for the EU in peace mediation.<sup>75</sup> For example, the conflict in Ukraine has been interpreted as a case where EU involvement in peace mediation was problematic because of its partiality.<sup>76</sup> The EU's colonial history is also of relevance in this respect: some colonized countries expect former hosts to be involved in their peace processes, and to share the responsibility for violent conflicts. Neutrality is, however, often impossible to achieve in those circumstances.<sup>77</sup>

To overcome these dilemmas, the best option remaining for the EU is to pursue *honesty* about its interests and political objectives. As an honest, partial mediator, the EU should openly communicate its interests in respect of immigration and economic relations, for example. The EU does not need to compromise its normativity, but it should show its hand when it comes to the norms and values over which it cannot compromise in peace mediation. For instance, the EU could openly state that it will not mediate at the expense of human rights.<sup>78</sup>

Finally, yet another critique of EU performance relates to the funding of peace mediation through EU instruments. According to this research, too great a share of EU mediation funding remains inside the Union, caught up in the projects of European contractors, experts and mediation consultants, whereas a major share of the funding should be allocated to the conflict areas. In practice, the problem emerges when the EU directs its mediation support to conflict areas through major European mediation consortiums instead of directly funding local mediation organizations in the conflict areas. European consortiums that are granted most of the funding do not adequately redirect the funding to their partners in the conflict areas, but procure services from other European organizations, for example.<sup>79</sup>

To correct this distortion, and given that EU mediation continues to operate through major European consortiums, the EU should base its funding decisions more on the contracted organizations' number of local partners and the degree of local (non-European) expertise utilized. One interviewee pointed out that the Covid-19 crisis, with its related travel restrictions, could have been an opportunity to pilot the

reallocation of EU-staff travel budgets to local actors who did not have the option of leaving the conflict areas when the crisis started, but this opportunity was not taken.

## **THE WAY FORWARD: THE NEW CONCEPT SHOULD REFLECT THE EU'S UNIQUE CAPABILITIES**

To recap on the findings of the research, the general perception seems to be that the EU should have a visible role – albeit not an interventionist one – in supporting peace in its neighbourhood and even beyond. On the other hand, the analysis indicates that there is increasing fatigue amongst European political leaders vis-à-vis European money being wasted on foreign soil, a perception that is not limited to the populist camp only. The Covid-19 crisis further increased the need for savings in the Union, which could mean cutting the budget for EU external action. Peace mediation, however, should be interpreted as a tempting policy option in these circumstances: it is much cheaper to resolve conflicts through peace mediation than through crisis management or peace operations.

Well on point, Haastrup (2018) has noted that for a political actor that bases its identity on the claim of being a peace project, mediation is a natural tool to use.<sup>80</sup> However, whether peace mediation is advocated through the EU framework or as a national capacity also depends on the general trends in the EU political integration process. Adopting a new EU concept on mediation is a step towards strengthening the EU framework, simultaneously expanding the EU's global role in peace mediation. The concept signals that peace mediation is a relevant tool for the CSDP, and that the EU still has something more to give – a signal that many hope will resonate both inside and outside the Union.

The launch of the new concept is expected to take place this autumn, under the German presidency of the EU Council. Like the previous concept, the 2020 concept may be accompanied by Council conclusions, emphasizing the member states' role in the process. According to this research, the process of creating the concept has been rather inclusive, with a broad set of civil society and private sector actors having been consulted in addition to the member states, and with the EEAS being the main actor in the process. Indeed, the

75 Interview data; see also e.g. Deneckere 2019; Chaban et al. 2019.

76 For a thorough analysis, see Chaban et al. 2019.

77 Interview data; Herrberg 2008, pp. 14–15.

78 Interview data; see also Herrberg 2008, pp. 14–15; Davis 2018, p. 182.

79 Interview data.

80 Haastrup 2018, p. 219.

The EU's special abilities in mediation	How to develop them
<b>Practised in partnering</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Recognize partners' special capabilities in order to maximize the effectiveness of cooperation.</li> <li>Continue to build systematic cooperation with private and civil society mediators, and explore opportunities to partner with insider mediators.</li> </ul>
<b>Smart mediation support functions</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Develop a system for evaluating EU mediation, including outsourced mediation, and increase the accountability of mediators.</li> <li>Ensure that a decent share of EU funding for mediation reaches the local actors and conflict areas; increase the level of local expertise utilized.</li> </ul>
<b>Decent resources for capacity-building</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Continue to develop the EU approach to building capacities in peace mediation in particular, learning from other areas of EU capacity-building.</li> </ul>
<b>Unique Integrated Approach</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Continue to develop the best practices of coordination and comprehensive conflict response, including peace mediation as the first tool to use whenever possible.</li> <li>Strengthen a tailor-made, multi-level approach to peace mediation, empowering the right actors at each phase of the peace process, aiming for a coordinated response at all levels of the conflict.</li> </ul>
<b>A reserve of capabilities in the member states</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ensure cooperation rather than competition with member states' mediation capabilities.</li> <li>Invest in coordination and mediation support when a member state is preferred as an official mediator in a peace process.</li> </ul>

Table 1. The EU's special abilities in mediation, and how to develop them for greater impact.

process has served as an opportunity for all actors to comment on the successes and challenges of EU mediation thus far, and to assess its needs. Furthermore, it is hoped that the process will have increased the interest in EU peace mediation amongst the member states. Although the latter differ in their level of activity and resources for mediation, the EU concept has not been controversialized, and the process is expected to be finalized smoothly.

The precise content of the new concept is still unclear. However, the interviews for this study revealed some expectations. The level of rigour – broad guidelines rather than details – is expected to remain, with the life span of the concept also remaining similar. What differs from the previous concept is that the new concept will be based on the Lisbon Treaty and will refer to organizational structures developed thereafter. In applying the EU Global Strategy and the Integrated Approach to the peace mediation context, the concept is expected to concretize objectives outlined in those policies. Some shifts in emphasis are anticipated, such as a more strategic approach to mediation support and capacity-building. Most importantly, the new concept is expected to boost the EU's confidence as an actor in peace mediation, and to highlight the strategic advantages of the EU in the field. The EU's values are expected to be communicated more clearly,

and its limitations in being involved due to its partiality better acknowledged.<sup>81</sup>

It would appear from this research that the new concept will be actively applied by the EU. Peace-building activities are not easily aborted without inflicting considerable harm on the communities that lean on such external support. Views differ among peace-building scholars as to whether the EU should have engaged so deeply in any conflict-ridden societies to begin with,<sup>82</sup> but since it has, the general consensus is that there is no quick way out. At the same time, peace mediation can serve as a shortcut out of conflicts that draw the EU into engagement in the first place – albeit leaving the Union with concerns about implementation and the monitoring of peace agreements. At the beginning of the 2020s, and with the new concept at hand, the question facing the EU is not about whether to engage in peace mediation, but rather how to achieve sustainable results in the most effective way.

Some practical recommendations can be made based on this research. To begin with, there is more that the EU could do in building capacities in situations where mediation fails not because of a lack of will but

81 Interview data; see also Deneckere 2019 on needs and expectations of the new concept.

82 For a deep dive into this discourse, see e.g. Chandler & Reid 2016, *The Neoliberal Subject: Resilience, Adaptation and Vulnerability* (Rowman & Littlefield International), and Richmond 2011, *A Post-Liberal Peace* (Routledge).

because of a lack of capacity among the conflict parties to engage in a peace process. As one interviewee put it, it is like having a helicopter but being unable to land it anywhere to unload. The EU is already experienced in institution-building, and it would be a good next step to develop a more strategic EU approach to building mediation infrastructures, namely the capacities of local and national actors, governments, parliaments, presidencies and civil societies to engage in peace mediation.<sup>83</sup>

Building local capacities could also include exploring opportunities to cooperate with insider mediators. International organizations have long hesitated to support insider mediators because of perceived risks. However, for example, Duursma's recent research (2020) suggests that insider mediators might be more effective and better able to achieve lasting results in peace negotiations due to their legitimacy.<sup>84</sup> Insider mediators – insiders within the particular country of conflict – work at the grassroots level, and may have better access to relevant peace process actors, such as national political actors, opposition actors and non-recognized actors. Yet the international community largely lacks a policy framework for contacting insider mediators, and hence private diplomatic actors are used instead.

At the same time, the EU should continue developing cooperation with other first and third sector actors in peace mediation. It was noted by the interviewees that a typical fault of the EU is its inability to customize partnerships with different private and civil society organizations. Instead, it has forced too many different actors into one grand project. It would be essential for the EU to recognize its partners' different strengths, capabilities and tools, and to carefully consider the right use for them, taking into account the type of change a particular actor can deliver. To some degree, mediation researchers are still unclear about the kind of results that should be expected from the increasing use of private mediators in peace processes. However, when traditional mediation efforts fail, alternative types of mediators – private, civil society and insider, for example – should be allowed to step in.

Outsourcing mediation, however, poses increasing needs for monitoring and evaluating the results of EU mediation and mediation support. The EU should

demand high standards of expertise from the external experts used and the local actors supported, and hold them accountable for the results achieved. More self-reflection and impact assessment were already demanded in Tamminen's 2012 report (see Peral's chapter in particular), which suggested that an institution close to the EU, such as the then yet to be established European Institute of Peace (EIP), could take a role in assessing the EU's mediation impact on peace and conflicts.<sup>85</sup> Similarly, the European Peacebuilding Liaison Office (EPLO), for example, has recommended developing systems of accountability and evaluation for EU mediation.<sup>86</sup> However, still today, the EU lacks a systemic approach to evaluating mediation – even given that such evaluation would be the first step in addressing why EU mediation has not produced the desired results in the past ten years.

However, the reason why the 2009 concept did not feature any specific mechanisms for accountability and evaluation also reflects the difficulty of such exercises.<sup>87</sup> Effectiveness in peace mediation is different from effectiveness in international negotiations in general.<sup>88</sup> Success in brokering agreements does not equate with effectiveness in peace mediation: agreements are not necessarily implemented and sometimes even disrupt the peace process. The timespan for assessing effectiveness in peace mediation should be ten to twenty years, and should take into account the most subtle details. A positive change in a conflict context often consists of small streams and, at the same time, it is difficult to assess which streams will lead to peace.<sup>89</sup>

In order to develop evaluation, assessing mediator education could be a good way to begin, but rather than merely checking certificates, the EU approach should entail continuous assessment of the way in which the expertise of mediators develops. At the same time, certification should be required, and to further professionalize EU mediation, only trained mediators should be funded. The destination of EU funding for mediation should be another indicator to keep an eye on, starting from mapping who is ultimately in receipt of EU funding and for which purpose – children, women, men, European or local actors – as well as the way in which gender is taken into account.

Despite developing monitoring and evaluation, not

83 Such capacity-building activities are also sometimes referred to as 'mediation support', when this is understood in a broad sense, such as in the 2017 UN Secretary-General report on mediation. For more on capacity-building, see also Lanz et al. 2017.

84 Duursma 2020, pp. 2, 11–12.

85 Peral 2012; Tamminen 2012, p. 120.

86 EPLO 2017, p. 13.

87 EPLO 2017, p. 12.

88 Bergmann & Niemann 2015, p. 958.

89 Interview data; for more on assessing mediation effectiveness, see e.g. Chaban et al. 2019; Bergmann 2018; Elgström et al. 2018.

all funding should be tied to strictly defined projects, and basic funding for supported partners should also be ensured to increase their capability to lead, improve and take responsibility for the mediation processes. The EU could learn from Finland, for example, which has had a ‘trust-based’ approach to partnering in peacemaking.<sup>90</sup> At the same time, however, EU funding for mediation should remain as flexible as possible, so that the EU could react in a timely manner when support or facilitation is needed – or adapt its functions in situations such as a global pandemic.

Finally, for the EU, ‘developing cooperation’ should also signify investing in harmonized action with the member states. As mentioned, there is a risk of EU and member state mediation initiatives competing with each other, whereas the approach should be one whereby the EU harvests and coordinates the capabilities of its member states, with the trend seemingly being that they will continue to grow.<sup>91</sup> Mutually, the member states benefit from the ability of the Union to provide support, including training and assistance. A systematic approach to EU-level cooperation on mediation could also include the member states networking in a more formal manner.<sup>92</sup>

## CONCLUSION

It is difficult to make the grade as an international actor in peace mediation in the 2020s. With conflicts having become more complex, multilayered and interlinked than before, and conflict parties obscured, the international mediation community, for its part, has become more diverse, professionalized and geopolitical. Despite the increased mediation capabilities, and the number of conflicts awaiting resolution, peace agreements have become difficult to achieve and even more difficult to maintain.

Today, neutral actors are believed to be a rare breed in the international arena, and hence actors like the EU are now asked to communicate their interests and objectives if engaging in peace mediation. At the same time, the local turn in peacebuilding is driving a downscaling of the role of international mediators. Their responsibility for outcomes has not diminished, however. Instead, the research and professional

understanding that have developed vis-à-vis peace mediation suggest several new precepts for international actors providing mediation and mediation support. As a Nobel Peace Prize winner itself, the EU cannot afford to ignore them.

The EU has not always succeeded in designing multi-track approaches in conflict contexts.<sup>93</sup> When it has utilized multiple levels and instruments to engage, namely the integrated approach, this has turned out to be an advantage.<sup>94</sup> Both political and societal dialogues are needed, but the EU cannot always facilitate both. The member states, local actors, private actors, European civil society actors and international partners are all needed to supplement the EU’s limited capability in delivering peace.

The EU also has special abilities to contribute. By refining them, it would be possible for the EU to develop from an unknown and marginal mediator into a world-beater in its specific area of expertise, namely in empowering the right actors at the right time in locally driven peace processes. The EU has access to ample resources and capabilities possessed by its member states, European civil society and private actors, and it has advanced partnerships with other regional and international organizations engaged in peace mediation. In addition to being in a good position to coordinate their efforts, the EU is at its best when building the necessary capacities and supporting mediation initiatives at the local level. /

90 See e.g. Lehti & Lepomäki 2017, p. 66.

91 For example, the Finnish Ministry for Foreign Affairs recently announced it is establishing a new Centre for Mediation that started to operate as a part of the ministry on 1 October 2020.

92 Interview data; see also Chaban et al. 2019.

93 Herrberg 2008, pp. 6-7.

94 Niemann et al. 2018, p. 326.

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