



Civil Society Dialogue Network Policy Meeting

Strengthening the EU's Role in Mediation:

Gathering Civil Society Input

Thursday 20 February 2020

Brussels

Key findings

- The EU Concept was published in 2009. Since then, new challenges have emerged more prominently (e.g. climate change, hybrid warfare, digitalisation, etc.), while the EU's policy framework and set of tools on external conflict and crisis has also evolved considerably (e.g. the European External Action Service (EEAS) was created, the EU Global Strategy was published, etc.).
- The EU has significantly increased its engagement in peace processes all over the world, using a wide range of tools at its disposal, from engaging senior diplomats in talks to supporting long-term grass-roots processes indirectly. EU bodies such as the EU Delegations and the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) missions have showed greater interest in being involved in mediation activities.
- The world of mediation has changed and new international actors (the Gulf countries, Turkey, regional powers...) have gained relevance in the mediation world, taking more directive approaches.
- There is no universal understanding of 'mediation' among officials from the European External Action Service (EEAS), the European Commission (EC) and Member States (MS). This represents a challenge for coherence in policy-making and in the implementation of existing mediation frameworks, but also an opportunity in terms of flexibility of approaches.
- The EU Concept is generally seen by officials from the EU and MS as a valuable policy document, but mediation has failed to gain prominence among the different EU external action tools. The EU does not have a specific mandate for mediation and the political impetus for mediation still depends largely on the political will of MS. Mediation is rarely discussed at Political and Security Committee (PSC) level, yet MS expect the EEAS to take a stronger role in peace processes.
- Due to its geopolitical and economic interests, as well as historical and colonial heritage, the EU is not always perceived as a neutral or impartial actor in mediation. In order not to compromise its legitimacy and credibility as a mediation actor/supporter, the EU should become more aware of how it is perceived in the given context by different actors, so that misinterpretations and misunderstandings are minimised. It is more useful to think of the EU as a 'value-driven actor' than 'impartial' or 'neutral'.

- Despite its strong political clout and the availability of a diverse set of mediation tools, the EU's activities on mediation are sometimes ineffective and not accurately tailored to specific contexts. The bureaucratic structure of the institutions and the slow decision-making process deprive the EU of the necessary 'agility' to act quickly and effectively on the ground, and positive experiences sometimes depend on the personality of individual officials rather than on institutionalised processes. Some positive examples (such as the EU's role in the Central African Republic and Venezuela) show that the EU could contribute more positively to specific peace processes by recognising its own limits, and therefore acting as a coordinator of the different mediation actors active on the ground instead of undertaking mediation activities itself.
- The EU could better adapt to specific contexts and exploit its diverse range of mediation instruments. For example, the EU can work on track 1 mediation with senior diplomats, while supporting track 2 and 3 with implementing partners backed by the EU's funding instruments. It is very important the EU is aware of its perception in contexts where its political and economic interests are clear (e.g. the Neighbourhood and Western Balkans). In such cases, coherence between activities carried out at different track levels is important in order not to compromise the EU's legitimacy in the eyes of the other actors.
- More visibility on the work the EU is carrying out on mediation may encourage more efforts and funding for mediation activities. However, increased visibility should be carefully weighted to ensure confidentiality – which allows mediation practices to be flexible – is not compromised.
- Despite improvements, peace processes are generally not inclusive enough. Commitments on paper tend to stress the need for more participation of women, instead of addressing gender and inclusivity in a more comprehensive way. Also, policy commitments on women and youth participation are often only implemented as a 'tick the box' exercise. As peace processes are negotiated and implemented over multiple phases and levels, it is important that they are inclusive at all stages and not only in the final phase.
- Inconsistent lists of proscribed actors by MS, the EU and third countries make it difficult for mediation practitioners to engage with specific actors on the ground and ensure peace processes are as inclusive as possible. MS and third countries have increasingly stricter rules on funding – which subject peacebuilding NGOs to fear of prosecution for financing terrorism – while the EU keeps relatively looser criteria. In this sense, EU funding has allowed practitioners to engage a wider group of actors, filling some spaces for inclusivity that MS funding have closed. The EU needs to provide a safe space for NGOs to work with proscribed actors without fear of unreasonable prosecution.
- There is a need to increase the mediation capacities of EU officials. This can be done both internally by supporting capacity-building activities for EU staff and externally by resorting to the help of civil society experts more systematically. In addition to a stronger mediation expertise, there is also a need to improve knowledge on technical skills which are essential to support peace processes (e.g. constitutional writing,



decentralisation, Security Sector Reform, etc.) and to provide structural incentives for EU officials to identify and support mediation opportunities.

- It is extremely difficult to design quantifiable indicators in the field of mediation and therefore assess the effectiveness of programmes. In order to respond to donors' requirements, practitioners tend to conceptualise their projects around the reporting criteria, with the risk of tweaking the original purpose of a mediation programme. More flexible approaches, reporting methods and criteria, as well as more interaction and communication between donors and practitioners, can help make programmes more effective in implementing mediation practices. The EEAS should work with its civil society partners to develop more meaningful understandings of what 'success' looks like for EU mediation efforts, and how this can be supported.