

EPLO Statement on the European Union's Role in Dialogue and Mediation

The European Union, itself a project aimed at bringing peace, stability and prosperity to Europe, is playing an increasingly important role in securing peace worldwide. Being the world's biggest aid donor as well as largest trader and with some 20 ongoing and completed civilian and military missions in Europe, Africa and Asia, the EU can simply no longer be ignored when talking about peacebuilding matters. Dialogue and mediation are key peacebuilding activities. Both contribute effectively to conflict prevention and can be used at all stages of a peace process. Dialogue and mediation are tools applied by different actors and agencies, at different levels and for different purposes. This short statement sets out recommendations on dialogue and mediation for the EU, and includes supporting evidence from the work of EPLO members and other organisations. The recommendations highlight the importance of unofficial efforts, the roles of insiders and women, the need for the inclusion of a justice component, the necessity of talking to armed groups, and proposals on how the EU can strengthen its own capacity.

Recommendations

1. The EU should recognise that dialogue and mediation are **distinct yet linked processes, both of which are of great importance to **conflict prevention, management and transformation**.**

- Mediation is a communication process assisted by or initiated and led by a third party. It brings together representatives of the parties to a conflict leading to them to talk directly to each other, discuss issues, reach an agreement, and make decisions together. In contrast, dialogue is an open-ended communication process among people or groups with diverse perspectives or interests that is facilitated or moderated by a third party in order to foster mutual recognition, understanding, empathy, and trust.
- Experience has shown that mediation contributes positively to solving violent conflict.

Mediation is effective: it generally leads to a five times greater probability of reaching an agreement compared to a non mediated process, and a 2.4 times greater probability of long-term reduction of tensions.

Beardsley, Kyle C./Quinn, David M./Biswas, Bidisha/Wilkenfeld, Jonathan. Mediation Style and Crisis Outcomes. In: *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 50(2006), Nr. 1, 58-86 as referenced in the *Peace Mediation Course* by the Swiss FDFA in collaboration with the Mediation Support Project (Swisspeace / CSS, ETH Zurich)

- Early opportunities for resolving issues, reducing tensions and building peaceful relationships should be seized as conflict prevention is more effective than crisis management. Dialogue and mediation require a tiny fraction of the budgets allocated to military campaigns, international peace operations, and post-conflict reconstruction; yet too often there are inadequate resources and skills to effectively develop and deliver a strategic approach.

- Mediation and dialogue efforts should be incorporated into a comprehensive approach to peacebuilding. A dialogue and mediation model designed to fit the EU's conflict resolution needs and constraints should be developed.

2. Dialogue and mediation efforts need to take place at different levels, from top leadership to grassroots actors, and the EU should therefore recognise the differences as well as the complementarity between official and unofficial forms of dialogue and mediation and should seek to support efforts at all levels.

- As contemporary international scenarios are increasingly characterised by intra-state, protracted social conflicts, innovative and tailored methods and approaches to conflict prevention and transformation are needed. The EU should recognise the importance of non-state actors in the unofficial, on the ground, diplomatic processes, where state actors often cannot intervene due to a lack of access and trust, or the constraints of the international legal system.

In the years 2006 and 2009 Crisis Management Initiative, in cooperation with a several other civil society organisations, published the **Private Diplomacy Survey**, a mapping exercise aimed at portraying the activities, methods, values and ways of operation of a number of private diplomacy actors (PDAs) in Europe and America. Within the peace and conflict resolution community there are several NGOs that use private diplomacy to complement the activities of state-actors, and use new approaches in the face of traditional diplomacy. These PDAs mediate conflicts, support peace processes, and engage in dialogue with a variety of actors with the purpose of conflict resolution. The survey allows readers to consider the multi-faceted nature of private diplomacy, including mediation, dialogue processes, democratisation processes or advice to parties engaged in armed conflict. Among others the survey included CMI, the Humanitarian Dialogue Centre, the Berghof Foundation for Peace Support, CITpax, Club of Madrid, Partners for Democratic Change International, Interpeace, Glenree, Search for Common Ground, International Alert, USIP and Kredha.

Click [here](#) for the [2008 survey](#) and [here](#) for the [2006 mapping](#). Click [here](#) for more information about CMI.

- Without support for and long-term engagement with informal processes, the formal process is likely to fail. For example, without unofficial dialogue processes, agreements reached during official mediation talks may not be acceptable to the public at large or to certain influential groups that have not been involved in the official peace process, who, in turn, may become spoilers of the official process.
- Unofficial dialogue and mediation efforts are also less sensitive to outbreaks of violence, keeping communication channels open and continuing processes of confidence-building in protracted conflicts.
- As too much external pressure can easily derail a peace process, the EU, rather than imposing outside solutions, should focus on supporting existing dialogue and mediation efforts, including those undertaken by civil society.
- The EU and its Member States should liaise with each other and coordinate with civil society organisations in order to ensure a comprehensive and more effective approach to dialogue and mediation, and to compensate for the disadvantages of one track by using the advantages of the other. One way to link official and unofficial processes is by tailoring financial and policy tools such as the Instrument for Stability.

Search for Common Ground uses multi-layered, multi-track processes to prevent and resolve conflicts. SFCG stresses that in mediation work the process is as important as the outcome. There is more to diplomacy than talking about political issues, and therefore a process must be dynamic enough to be able to shift between diplomatic tracks, including the **cultural track**. Examples of this include professional exchanges, music, film and art exhibitions, or when SFCG's US-Iran program brought an American national wrestling team to Tehran to compete in a tournament. This sort of *sports diplomacy* has a proven history of helping thaw tensions between countries, and, in the case of 1971 ping-pong diplomacy between the US and China, paving the way for official rapprochement. In the end, only governments can make official peace, but non-official tracks can contribute to, support and breathe life into the official process. Lastly, the process is as important as the outcome because a well-structured process is needed to build trust, which is the only basis for a settlement of enduring character. *For more information about Search for Common Ground, please click [here](#).*

Burundi Case - From top to community levels: the experience of empowerment at the Burundi Leadership Training Program (BLTP). This local NGO was set up in 2002 in partnership with ESSEC IRENE, WWICS and CMPartners. It has organized dozens of retreats to facilitate dialogue between leaders in war-torn Burundi, at all levels of responsibility. This included for example a meeting in September 2007 which brought together the three former Heads of State, top cabinet members, party chiefs and military high command. A like-minded dialogue inspired grass-root efforts, with a series of workshops organised in Kirundi at very local level, gathering more than 6,000 local leaders.

For more information about ESSEC IRENE, please click [here](#).

Somaliland Case - The Somaliland case is unusual in that its peace process (1991-1997) was simultaneously a self-determination and state-building process due to the power vacuum that existed. Tracks I and II were thus unusually convergent and the absence of international intervention is notable. There are lessons about effective approaches to consensus building within civil society. Negotiations in Somaliland grew out of traditional mediation approaches. Clan elders led reconciliation processes based on the traditional Somali social justice code, 'xeer', to build peace from the bottom up – from community to regional (or 'state') level. Inter-clan grievances were settled locally first, through dialogue and building consensus, which was then scaled up through a series of landmark conferences tackling issues on a regional/national level. Key elements of civil society effectively merged into government as clan elders negotiated and instituted the political settlement and became political leaders, and the traditional 'guurti' deliberative assembly evolved into a form of parliament.

Interpeace works in Somaliland. For more information about Interpeace, please click [here](#).

Mindanao Case - In Mindanao, the international NGO Nonviolent Peaceforce has been present since spring 2007 in volatile communities with multi-national teams of well-trained civilians. Living side-by-side the local communities and with open channels of communication with all authorities and armed actors, their non-partisan stance allowed them to be considered a reliable facilitator both for dialogue at grass-roots level to save vulnerable lives (e.g. in case of negotiating a safe way out for encircled IDPs) and for engaging the parties and international stakeholders at the higher levels to strengthen the peace process. NP activities in the Philippines are currently co-funded by the Instrument for Stability.

For more information about Nonviolent Peaceforce, please click [here](#).

Kosovo Case - With support of "Partners-Kosova" (members of Partners for Democratic Change International) and different donors, a very divided village with an Albanian majority and a Serbian minority had a chance to profit from a project donation aiming to increase freedom of movement for all communities within the village by installing public lighting. As the communities went into a dispute because they couldn't agree on which project to support (each community wishing to fund a project which would mostly benefit its own people) Partners Kosova have initiated Mediation sessions initially between Albanian and Serb community representatives, and further with larger groups of different community members in order to try to find a solution that will satisfy both communities, but still implement the project and not lose this donation. In order to solve the dispute Partners Kosova invited a donor to attend one of the mediation sessions and convinced the donor to increase the donation in order to cover both community demands. Finally the donor has agreed to increase the donation and overcome this problem that turns out to increase even deeper the division among the Albanian and Serbian communities in Bablak village. Finally this problem was solved with win-win solutions and both communities were able to implement projects. This case represents the reality of community divisions between Albanian and Serbian communities in Kosovo, relations that have been damaged during the Kosovo war in 1999, but at the same time represents a unique opportunity to use mediation as ADR method to contribute towards better interethnic cooperation, especially when it is in the mutual community interest.

For more information about PDCI, please click [here](#).

3. The EU should acknowledge the role played by **insider mediators** in both formal and informal peace processes.

- Insider mediators are closer to the conflict parties than outsider mediators in the cultural and normative senses. They have in-depth knowledge of the situation as well as close relationships to the parties.
- The concept of the neutral outsider as mediator, often promoted by the West, does not necessarily work in all cultures; sometimes a mediator is more likely to be accepted when he/she is an insider.
- Insider mediators are highly relevant in the context of a “weak” state as they possess legitimacy and have the potential to hold the fabric of society together.

Process benefits from permanent local units’ efforts. Both in Burundi and then in DR Congo, ESSEC IRENE and partners entrusted the direction of operations to local personalities who were able to maintain the confidence of all local and international actors. In Burundi, national representatives consulted mentioned two names: Fabien Nsengimana, a former presidential advisor, and Eugène Nindorera, former Minister of Human Rights. These two eminent men set themselves apart by their unanimously recognised impartiality and dignity. In the DRC, they turned to Michel Noureddine Kassa, former head of the DRC office of OCHA (UN Office for the coordination of Humanitarian Affairs). A French-Algerian, he embodied, from 1994 to 2002, the spirit of impartial action in service of the population.

For more information about ESSEC IRENE, please click [here](#).

- The EU needs to acknowledge and strengthen the key role of insider mediators in any peace process, for example, by providing support to local actors / insiders.
- It should also be noted that the work of insider and outsider mediators can be complementary. According to the experience of many outsider mediators, insider mediators in informal peace processes are essential at all stages of a peace process – for information, for contacts, for support and as those who bring together different societal groups at a time of fragmentation. Outsiders can in turn play many roles that insiders cannot. For example, outsider mediators can bring with them lessons learned from other situations, and they may be able to make bold statements and engage in risky tasks. Moreover, in community-level dialogues the physical presence of outsiders can provide leverage for the insider mediators’ agenda for a peaceful resolution of the conflict and outsiders can help to ensure that the work of mediators on each side of the conflict divide is synchronised. What seems to be needed, therefore, is increased coordination and support between outsiders and insiders, as well as between formal and informal peace processes.

The Mediation Support Project (Centre for Security Studies, ETH Zurich, and swisspeace, Bern), together with the Berghof Foundation for Peace Support stress the importance of recognising the key role of insider mediators in informal peace processes. Insider mediators live in the conflict region and are affected by the conflict. They have in-depth knowledge and enjoy a high level of legitimacy and trust from the population. They work before, in parallel, and after formal peace processes. While “outsider” mediators are often needed for some time, “insider” mediators are key to sustainable peace. Many formal peace processes start with non-official talks, often facilitated by insider mediators who are from the conflict regions and who bring in-depth knowledge as well as are dedicated to work on the issues at hand. Recognising their key roles in peace processes is essential to providing them with the necessary support to increase their effectiveness, both in formal and informal mediation efforts.

For more information about the Mediation Support Project, please click [here](#) or go to the last section of this statement.

4. The EU should take account of the significant role **women** play in dialogue and mediation processes.

- Women play a critical role as conflict mediators. Not only do they play an important role in talking to, appealing to and acting as a role model for others, they also bring different issues to the table, for example new ideas on power-sharing or gender-related issues. Yet their participation is often limited by social norms and the EU should help to overcome this.
- Women should be party to dialogue and mediation efforts at all levels. Women, men, girls and boys experience armed conflict in different ways, and play different roles in the same context. Women and girls in particular are often targets in armed conflict. Yet women also participate in conflicts, either voluntarily or against their will, and often fulfil the duties of men during their absence. Mediation and dialogue efforts should take into account these different experiences and roles by ensuring that women have a seat at the table and by ensuring that all issues are considered through a gender-sensitive lens.
- In general, the perspectives and needs of all members of society, including women but also youth, displaced persons, and marginalised communities, should be included in peace processes, otherwise these processes lack substance, legitimacy and acceptance, which in turn could jeopardise their sustainability and implementation.

Mano River Case - In 2001 relations between leaders in the Mano River Union (MRU) countries were tense. Against the backdrop of accusations that Liberian President Charles Taylor was funding RUF rebels in Sierra Leone and that Guinea supported Liberian rebels opposing the Taylor government, ECOWAS tried in vain to restart negotiations between the countries. All three parties refused diplomatic engagement of any kind. That same year Mary Brownell formed the Mano River Women Peace Activist Network (MARWOPNET) from her own Liberian Women's Organisation paired with other women's groups from Sierra Leone and Guinea. MARWOPNET became a regional women's forum for peace and security in the conflict-prone Mano River Basin. MARWOPNET visited all three MRU leaders in turn and appealed for peace. Initially gaining access to these state leaders proved difficult, but with repeated communication of their requests through prepared statements they persuaded them to meet and dialogue. On 4 June 2003 peace talks between the three countries were held in Accra and ultimately culminated in the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement on 18 August 2003.

Kenya Post-Election Crisis Case - Ms Dekha Ibrahim Abdi together with other Kenyan mediators set up "network of networks" of mediators that was crucial in the Kenyan post-election crisis. The Concerned Citizens for Peace (CCP) network of networks helped to bring down tension and hence supported the national mediation process, linking formal and informal mediation efforts (Mason, 2009).

Kosovo Case - In 2004 in Kosovo, a case of blood feud (traditional practice of revenge killing) was referred to Partners-Kosova, member of Partners for Democratic Change International (PDCI). Previous mediation/dispute settlement efforts had failed. The Director of the Center, Shukrie Gashi, a very experienced female mediator, met several times with the different families engaged in the dispute. Her mediation resulted in the two families reconciling without the need for compensation for the death and agreeing not to pursue revenge. According to Ms. Gashi, a key success factor was that she was a woman. This allowed her to communicate more easily with the eldest of the families, a grandfather and grandmother. Above all, because Albanians traditionally show respect for women, the presence of Ms. Gashi during the meetings encouraged the parties to manage their anger and prevented them from losing their calm. This made it possible to have a fruitful and peaceful dialogue, even if the topics at stake touched the very inner core of the people, their identity and their honour.

For more information about PDCI, please click [here](#).

5. The EU should accept that **armed groups** need to be included for dialogue and mediation efforts to be successful – if not directly than indirectly.

- As primary conflict parties, non-state armed groups have both the potential to hamper and/or facilitate peace processes and post-war peacebuilding. If not included in the peace process, armed movements and their constituencies are likely to become more radicalised and turn into “spoilers”. Engagement, on the other hand, tends to strengthen the pro-dialogue factions within armed groups because it offers them viable alternatives to violence. All belligerent groups should be included, or at least given the choice to participate.
- Inclusive dialogue and mediation platforms foster local ownership of conflict transformation, which is important because the parties to the conflict are the only ones who can solve the dispute.
- Groups who are part of a process are more likely to support it. By ensuring that their own interests and needs are addressed, they are more likely to accept the terms of agreement.
- There are several non-state actors who engage with armed groups (see one example in the textbox below), and the EU should recognise the complementarity of activities at the unofficial and official levels.

As part of its support to negotiation processes and national dialogues, the [Berghof Foundation for Peace Support](#) aims to enhance domestic capacities for conflict transformation through direct engagement with all major conflict stakeholders, based on the principles of inclusivity and multi-partiality. Constructive dialogue with non-state **armed groups** is thus a crucial component of its activities in Sri Lanka, Lebanon and Nepal. It also supports direct exchange of peer-advice and capacity-building between successfully transformed armed groups (e.g. South Africa, Northern Ireland, El Salvador) and those currently exploring constructive peacemaking options. Its partner organisation [Berghof Conflict Research](#) also carries out participatory action research with members of (former) armed groups on security transition processes in order to reassess international peacemaking/peacebuilding support programmes from the point of view of their “receiving end”.

For more information about the Berghof Foundation for Peace Support, please click [here](#). For more information about Berghof Conflict Research, please go [here](#).

6. EU dialogue and mediation efforts should include a **justice** component.

- Dealing with a legacy of gross human rights violations is one of the biggest challenges that post-conflict societies face and an essential step in moving towards sustainable peace. Transitional justice approaches contribute to building sustainable peace by challenging impunity, engaging with the root causes of conflict, and addressing victims’ grievances.
- Recent developments in the field of international justice have changed the legal and normative framework conditions under which peace agreements are brokered, and mechanisms for dealing with the past have become an integral part of such agreements.
- EU actors involved in dialogue and mediation should be mandated to include issues of transitional justice in their work, including cooperation with international justice mechanisms where relevant.
- International legal norms forbid blanket amnesties for war crimes, crimes against humanity, and genocide, and mediators have a duty to inform the negotiating parties of this.
- Civil society and the public should be consulted on how to address the legacy of human rights violations.

7. If the EU decides to strengthen its own capacity for dialogue and mediation, then it should pay attention to the following:

- There are a number of ways in which the EU can be involved, by providing mediation support on one hand and by acting as mediator on the other.
- Official and unofficial strands of dialogue and mediation are complementary. Further efforts and investments must be undertaken in order to harmonise and coordinate these different efforts in order to have sustainable results.
- The EU should think about its role in cooperation with others active in the field of dialogue and mediation, such as the UN, the AU, and civil society. The EU should work actively with specialised civil society organisations working in the field of dialogue and mediation both in the EU and in conflict-affected countries that have the capacity to improve and complement the EU's role. Clear agreements should also be reached between the EU and the relevant regional bodies that set out Standard Operating Procedures.
- An EU mechanism allowing more predictable and quickly available funding for on the ground support to dialogue should be considered, building on the existing Facility under the Instrument for Stability. It could be part of a future European Civil Peace Service, part of the remit of a Peacebuilding Directorate within the External Action Service or included in the proposed European Institute for Peace.¹
- The EU should work on professionalisation of its own dialogue and mediation capacity, including increasing training of personnel. EU actors would benefit from in-house mediation support resources, which should include expertise on transitional justice, gender issues and so on. Specific expert networks and/or a mediation support unit that can assist mediation efforts should be set up. Recruitment should be made based on professional expertise and not on status. The EU should also think about improving its practice by strengthening the monitoring and evaluation of its dialogue and mediation efforts. This would entail debriefings, studies reflecting the perceptions and experiences of conflict parties concerning the strengths and limits of mediation, and evaluation of the interplay between mediation mandates, means, actions and results.

The **Mediation Support Project** (MSP) funded by the Political Affairs Division IV of the Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs (FDFA), could serve as a model for a mediation support unit for the EU. MSP was founded in 2005 as a joint venture between the Swiss Peace Foundation (swisspeace) and the Center for Security Studies (CSS) at the ETH Zurich (Swiss Federal Institute of Technology), forming a successful synergy and cooperation of government structures, NGO practice and academic research. MSP carries out a variety of tasks for the FDFA, such as carrying out research and knowledge management, in particular in peace mediation methodology and topical expertise; organising trainings and retreats (by designing and implementing tailor-made trainings and workshops in peace mediation for diplomats, ambassadors, peace promotion experts, mediators and conflict parties). MSP further provides networking platforms for peace mediators, such as roundtables or international gatherings, develops information network tools, and offers direct process-support in ongoing mediation processes.

For more information, please visit swisspeace's website [here](#) or the Peace Mediation Course [here](#).

¹ A European Institute of Peace, similar to the model of the US Institute of Peace, is under discussion. It could play a role akin to the European Institute for Security Studies, including offering or evaluating training, carry out evaluation and be a repository for lessons learned, enable centralised sharing of information within the EU as well as beyond between specialised organisations, and provide mediation support through logistical support and the coordination of expert and stand-by support for mediation activities.

List of Resources

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European Network for Civil Peace
Services—EN.CPS
European Centre for Conflict
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ESSEC Iréné
Fundación para las Relaciones
Internacionales y el Diálogo Exterior—
FRIDE
German Platform for Peaceful Conflict
Management
International Alert
International Center for Transitional
Justice—ICTJ
International Crisis Group
International Security Information
Service - ISIS Europe
Interpeace
Kvinna till Kvinna
Life and Peace Institute
Nansen Dialogue Network
Nonviolent Peaceforce
Partners for Democratic Change
International—PDCI
Quaker Council for European Affairs—
QCEA
Saferworld
Search for Common Ground
swisspeace
Toledo International Centre for Peace—
CITpax
World Vision

THE EUROPEAN PEACEBUILDING LIAISON OFFICE EPLO

EPLO is the platform of European NGOs, networks of NGOs and think tanks active in the field of peacebuilding, who share an interest in promoting sustainable peacebuilding policies among decision-makers in the European Union.

EPLO aims to influence the EU so it promotes and implements measures that lead to sustainable peace between states and within states and peoples, and that transform and resolve conflicts non-violently. EPLO wants the EU to recognise the crucial connection between peacebuilding, the eradication of poverty, and sustainable development world wide and the crucial role NGOs have to play in sustainable EU efforts for peacebuilding, conflict prevention, and crisis management.

EPLO advances the interests of its members through common policy positions and consequently advocating for those common positions. EPLO disseminates information and promotes understanding of EU policies of concern to its Members. The Office builds also solidarity and cooperation amongst its members and with other relevant NGO networks. Finally, EPLO raises awareness about the contribution the EU should make to peacebuilding and the need to hold the EU accountable to its own political commitments of helping secure peace within and outside its borders.

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