

Strengthening EU support to peace mediation Statement from the European Peacebuilding Liaison Office (EPLO)

June 2020

The European Peacebuilding Liaison Office (EPLO) welcomes the initiative to update the EU Concept on strengthening EU capacities for mediation and dialogue, to reflect developments in international relations, capacities of the EU and lessons learned from the field of mediation¹ since the concept was adopted in 2009.

EPLO believes that the EU makes a considerable contribution to mediation globally and it has the potential to play an even stronger role. Firstly, the **EU should defend and expand the space for mediation in the face of increasingly confrontational politics throughout the world** and, countering a trend towards increasing recourse to military responses to crises. Secondly, **the EU should identify its distinct niche in leading and supporting mediation and ensure its capacities reflect its ambitions.**

The EU **can engage, promote and support mediation in many different contexts, across the tracks and with a diverse range of instruments** at its disposal, from senior diplomats to experts on a wide range of security, economic, gender, transitional justice, constitutional and legal matters. It can work through its partners (from other multilateral actors to INGOs and local 'insider mediators') to support multi-track processes that tackle highly sensitive issues, and over long timeframes, and it can facilitate linkages between the tracks to make each more effective.

EPLO believes that the new Concept should reflect the **EU's ambitions as a value-driven actor**, which is guided by the values enshrined in the Treaties. Considering that in many parts of the world unaddressed legacies of European colonialism and engagement based on commercial and security interests shape local perceptions, the EU may not be perceived as a 'neutral' or 'impartial' actor. Perceptions of the EU as a mediator will vary from context to context and between parties and different parts of the population. This should not prevent the EU from adopting a 'value-driven' approach or from acting impartially in its direct and indirect engagements in mediation efforts.

In order to clarify what 'value-driven' means for the EU, EPLO recommends that the Concept includes a **statement of the values and principles**, as well as practice-oriented recommendations, that EU mediators and EU-supported mediation processes should uphold. The accompanying guidance documents should consider the normative frameworks developed by other international mediation actors, such as the United Nations and African Union among other international organisations, and non-governmental actors, as well as existing relevant EU policy (notably the EU Strategic Approach to Women, Peace and Security, 2018). The resulting guidance should meet the requirements of the Treaty on European Union, reflect the EU's ambitions as a value-driven mediator, and ensure that EU mediation is in line with a professional state of the art approach to mediation.

¹ References to 'mediation' in this statement should be understood as including 'dialogue'.

The EU should promote and support an inclusive approach at all stages in mediation engagements. It should apply the same rigorous demands on inclusion it requires from its partners when appointing envoys and within its mediation teams. Increased engagement with civil society – in particular women, youth and marginalised groups – as well as “hard to reach” actors with different objectives and strategies would provide the EU with a stronger mandate and legitimacy.

The guidance documents should also consider how the EU can work together with and strengthen civil society actors, including local organisations, which play key roles in unlocking or reinforcing mediation processes at all levels. Support includes **providing a safe space for civil society** actors that engage with proscribed actors as a necessary component of a peace process, without fear or threat of unreasonable prosecution including for financing or otherwise supporting terrorism.

Any external action by the EU should be informed by **rigorous conflict analysis** (which must integrate robust gender analysis, otherwise it cannot be fit for purpose) in order to ensure conflict-sensitive planning and implementation of mediation engagements. This analysis should identify windows of opportunity, local peacebuilding capacities and other underlying resilience, and added value for EU engagement, direct or indirect before a conflict escalates to extensive violence as well as at all other stages.

Part of this analysis should seek to understand **how the EU is perceived** in a given context by different actors. Another element of analysis should be to think forward to **the minimum outcomes** the EU should achieve in supporting the implementation of a future peace deal. Such forward planning could have a significant impact in connecting long-term EU peace support seamlessly to a mediation process, therefore making an agreement more likely to be sustainable.

EPLO believes the updated Concept represents a great opportunity to continue to reflect on ‘**what success means for different EU mediation engagements**’. This could bring together EU and Member State officials, and civil society actors to increase coordination, consider specific cases, promote accountability, as well as develop a tailored monitoring and evaluation process that takes into account the specificities of mediation as a non-linear and highly flexible process that defies traditional M&E models.

The Concept should also include the requirement for the EU **to consider mediation as a possible first option** in interventions in contexts in or at risk of (violent) conflict. This will require:

- Training and awareness raising of mediation as a practice within the European Commission and the European External Action Service (EEAS)
- Political leadership from the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy (HR/VP) and from the Member States in ensuring that mediation becomes a go-to instrument by officials
- Enhancing the role of the EU Special Representatives (EUSR) in facilitating, fostering and taking mediation forward
- Adequate resources (staffing, training, programming budgets)
- That the EU engages inclusive teams at all levels of seniority in mediation
- That senior officials increasingly decide to engage in mediation where analysis suggests that the EU would be well-placed to prevent escalation.