



Improving EU capabilities for peacebuilding

EDITORIAL

RE-ASSESSING THE EU MEDIATION STRATEGY IN THE BELGRADE-PRISTINA DIALOGUE

The EU's mediation in the post-Yugoslav conflicts dates back to 2001, when it helped mediate between ethnic Albanian insurgents and the government of Macedonia. A decade later, it facilitated high-level negotiations between Serbia and Kosovo that culminated in the Brussels Agreement of 2013. This ongoing Brussels dialogue represents a perfect case study of the EU's mediation strategy and its effectiveness in implementation.

The EU's main leverage with Serbia is the country's ongoing EU accession negotiations. Kosovo lacks a clear membership prospect, and it remains to be seen what kind of incentive the EU can hold out now that talks on visa liberalisation have concluded. Even though not all member states have recognized Kosovo, the EU has shown internal coherence and unequivocally supported the negotiations and the signing of the Brussels Agreement. The main success of the Brussels Agreement is a normalization between Serbia and Kosovo on the diplomatic level and a regular high-level dialogue between the leaders.

The first challenge raised by the the EU's mediation is the lack of transparency. The "strategic ambiguity" of the Brussels-mediated agreements may have been beneficial initially but it is now perceived as a barrier to accountability from elites that have failed to implement the agreements. Secondly, there is criticism that the EU is being unclear about whether it is facilitating a dialogue (using a communication strategy) or mediating a dialogue (using a manipulative strategy). One person we interviewed for the EU-CIVCAP project suggested that the EU claimed mediation in cases that resulted in success but whenever there was a crisis would insist that it was merely facilitating. Representatives of civil society interviewed by EU-CIVCAP were in favour of the EU taking a more directive role by spelling out the next phase of the dialogue and the expected outcomes, for example a comprehensive legal settlement (albeit without specifying its contents).

The main weakness of the EU-mediated dialogue is its failure to address the local roots of the conflict and to achieve legitimacy with local populations. This has left the EU open to criticism from local constituencies for supporting a process captured by elites, while relying on resources from other international actors for the involvement of opposition parties, civil society and academia. In the words of one of the interviewees: "The EU is discussing with the main spoilers of the dialogue, while letting civil society mediate inter-ethnic relations."

In addition to its support for Track I dialogue, the European Commission has supported people-to-people contacts (Track III) by funding civil society co-operation at the local level through the Civil Society Facility, although the impact on the normalisation agenda is unclear. The task of supporting the inclusion of other political and social actors through Track II and track one-and-half dialogues has been left to the member states and other

donors, such as Switzerland and Norway. It was only this spring that the European External Action Service issued a call for support of mediation efforts by non-profit organisations, despite the fact that it was they that managed to prevent an escalation of intra-ethnic conflict and to reach minor agreements.

Within EU-CIVCAP, we analysed three initiatives facilitated by international and local civil society organisations after the signing of the Brussels Agreement in 2013. The first is a multi-track dialogue that supports the normalisation of Serbian-Albanian relations facilitated by an international non-governmental organisation—the Center for Inclusive Governance (CIG)—as well as two initiatives that specifically aid internal national dialogue among Kosovo stakeholders, which are enabled by two Kosovo NGOs, the Balkan Policy Research Group (BPRG) and the Kosova Democratic Institute (KDI). All three initiatives were supported by Switzerland.

Our research suggests that the mediation by international NGOs in the earlier stage of conflict was possible due to their links with the international interveners and a perception among both international and local actors of an unbiased approach being taken towards local dynamics. The two national NGOs became acceptable to local actors because of the existence of a mutually hurting stalemate and to the internationals because of their own failure to mediate internal conflict among Kosovo Albanian political parties. It is important to note that all three NGOs have drawn on the social capital built through the previous work of key staff with local constituencies.

Track II dialogues are an effective way to create trust between parties in the first track. All of the initiatives seem to have succeeded in doing so by establishing regular contacts among groups that had not been communicating directly or had only been involved in public disputes prior to the launch of the dialogues.

Similarly, the major achievement of Track II mediation is to teach local political parties to agree to disagree on certain issues without resorting to violence, as was previously the case in the Kosovo Parliament. Track II talks are a useful platform for the operationalisation and implementation of the agreements reached within Track I.

Analysing the published conclusions from some Track II meetings, we concluded that many recommendations have been reiterated multiple times within different groups, indicating that the process of reaching consensus is slow and dependent on domestic political factors that constrain or enable participants.

However, the coordination by NGOs of dialogues with various stakeholders allows for interplay between one track and others, which in turn facilitates consensus. All analysed initiatives, run by NGOs, have managed to decrease the political cost of their actions to their sponsors as they are not directly linked with, or blamed for, negative outcomes, while they can harvest the successes by introducing them into the Track I dialogue. This is one reason why mediation by an internal mediator—a local NGO, with perceived “peace spoilers” such as Vetëvendosje—was chosen instead of direct negotiations by Western embassies, as is usually the case. Serbian government actors prefer the track one-and-a-half format, which allows them to test new co-operation initiatives while avoiding the scrutiny they would be susceptible to from their local constituencies if co-operation were to be launched officially. All three initiatives enjoy international legitimacy, but have limited reach among the general public as, with the exception of the KDI-run dialogue, they mostly take place behind closed doors. Only the international NGO-run initiative enjoys legitimacy with political actors from the main sides of the ethnic and political divides in Kosovo and Serbia, while the two national NGO-driven initiatives enjoy the legitimacy of those local political actors with whom they share ethnic ties.

The EU has benefited from the information and local knowledge generated through Track II processes on what actions are possible at a particular moment, on potential new issues to be added to the agenda, and on potential scenarios for a comprehensive agreement. However, until recently, the EU failed to conduct systematic multi-track diplomacy; rather, inputs made within different tracks depend on the familiarity of NGOs involved with EU actors. As a result, opportunities to ensure the consistency and to strengthen the sustainability of agreements were missed. In order to succeed in advancing normalisation as a key goal of mediation, the EU should support and leverage the inclusion of both communities in the dialogue through engagement in multi-track diplomacy.



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Sonja Stojanovic Gajic is Director of Belgrade Centre for Security Policy.

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FORTHCOMING EVENTS

12 September 2018: Final EU-CIVCAP policy conference, Brussels

The final conference of the EU-CIVCAP project will serve as a platform for the Work Packages to present their research and its policy implications to an audience of policy-makers and practitioners, notably highlighting lessons identified from past and current approaches. We have secured the participation of senior EU officials, EU-CIVCAP researchers and civil society representatives. For more information and to register for the conference, please follow the link below.

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PAST EVENTS

Research Meets Policy Seminar 3 – “Conflict Prevention and Peacebuilding: Lessons from Research”

On 25 June 2018, the Centre for European Policy Studies (CEPS) in Brussels hosted the third and last EU-CIVCAP Research Meets Policy Seminar, under the title “Conflict Prevention and Peacebuilding: Lessons from research”. Michael E. Smith, Professor of International Relations at the University of Aberdeen and leader of EU-CIVCAP’s Work Package 7, presented the EU-CIVCAP Catalogue of Lessons Identified and the draft report on best practices, following which comments were given by two discussants and a debate was opened with the audience. A report on the proceedings is available at the link below.

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EXPERT NETWORK

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EXPERT OF THE MONTH: AUGUST



Dennis Blease

Dennis Blease (PhD) is a Senior Security & Justice Advisor and Director of DBA Security Sector Reform (SSR) Consultants Ltd. He is also an SSR associate with the Geneva-based International Security Sector Advisory Team (ISSAT) and lectures on behalf of the European Security and Defence College (ESDC) as part of its Eastern Partnership programme. He also facilitates SSR courses for the European External Action Service (EEAS). He holds a PhD from Cranfield University. He retired from the British Army as a Brigadier General in 2008. During his time in service he spent a total of 9 years working with NATO, EU and the UN. He was the EU Director of Operations for the first ESDP military operation, Op CONCORDIA (2003). As Commander of NATO's mission in the Republic of Macedonia (2004-2005), he advised the Government on post-conflict reconstruction programmes and SSR. This role was expanded to the regional level when he was appointed NATO's lead on SSR matters for the Western Balkans (2006-2008) and part-time SSR advisor to the former Finnish President Martti Ahtisaari, the UN Special Envoy, who led the political process to determine Kosovo's future status (2006-2007). During the past ten years Dennis Blease has facilitated training for the UK's Stabilisation Unit and has lectured on SSR at universities and security institutes throughout Europe, as well as in Palestine, Ethiopia and Bangladesh.

In August, he wrote our Expert of the Month blog under the title, "Capacity building within partner security sectors: The place of governance".

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EXPERT OF THE MONTH: JULY



Daniela Irrera

Daniela Irrera is Associate Professor of Political Science and IR at the University of Catania, where she teaches International Politics and Global civil society. She is currently President of the European Peace Research Association (EuPRA). She has been Visiting Fellow at the Stony Brook University, New York; Clinton Institute for American Studies, University College Dublin, Ireland; Fulbright Alumni at University of Delaware; Université Libre de Bruxelles; University of Oxford; New Bulgarian University, Sofia; Metropolitan University, Prague; Dogus University, Istanbul; Nicolaus Copernicus University, Torun; Nanyang Technological University; National University Singapore. Daniela has been recently awarded with a DAAD Fellowship at the Peace Research Institute Frankfurt and with a research grant at the European Union Center of Excellence, University of Alberta. Daniela is Member of the executive committee of the Standing Group on Organised Crime, European Consortium for Political Research. She is part of several research projects funded by the EU under Jean Monnet Action, Lifelong Learning Programme, and Horizon 2020. Daniela has extensively published in the areas of International Relations and EU politics, dealing with global terrorism, transnational organised crime, civil society and humanitarian affairs.

In July, she wrote our Expert of the Month blog under the title, "Greece and the Republic of Northern Macedonia: The (in)visible role of the EU".

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EXPERT OF THE MONTH: JUNE



Rabia Nusrat

Rabia Nusrat is International Alert's Regional Projects Manager for South Asia, and is currently overseeing and developing Alert's work in Afghanistan and Pakistan. The focus of her work over the past 6 years with Alert has been on engaging with the business sector on peacebuilding, conflict-sensitive employment programmes, the role of diaspora social enterprises to support reconciliation efforts and conflict sensitive media reporting (with a focus on minority rights and religious extremism). She also has a keen interest in gender and violent extremism issues. Before joining Alert, Rabia worked for British Asian Trust in London for 3 years, spearheading their work in Pakistan and managing their portfolio of education, health and livelihood projects in South Asia. Prior to joining the Trust, Rabia worked in Pakistan in the private and development sector, focusing in particular on education. Rabia has an MSc in International Policy Analysis from the University of Bath and a BSc(Hons.) in Economics and Management from University of London. In June, she wrote our Expert of the Month blog under the title, "Challenges on trade routes between Afghanistan and Pakistan".

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CATALOGUE OF LESSONS IDENTIFIED

The Catalogue of Lessons Identified has been updated, with 25 lessons now available online. This is a living document that is being updated throughout the project.

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