


“Ten years on: Enhancing EU mediation and dialogue capacities”

Report on the community of practice meeting on peace mediation



26 June 2019, Brussels





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About the EEAS Framework Contract for Conflict Prevention and Mediation Support

This Community of Practice meeting was organised by a consortium that implements the EEAS (European External Action Service) Framework Contract for Conflict Prevention and Mediation Support. This Consortium brings together the long-standing experience, expertise and logistical capacities of six leading European organisations including mediatEUr, Swisspeace, ESSEC IRENE, ECDPM, CITpax and Search for Common Ground.

The Consortium's ultimate aim is to support the EU's conflict prevention and mediation efforts in the world in line with the Lisbon Treaty provisions; and to enable the EEAS to systematically use conflict prevention and mediation as efficient and cost-effective tools of first response to emerging or on-going crises, thereby directly supporting the implementation of relevant policy commitments, such as the 2009 EU Concept on Mediation and Dialogue.

The overall objective of this Framework Contract is to provide the EEAS Integrated Approach for Security and Peace Division with external expertise, technical and logistical assistance for conflict prevention, peace mediation and dialogue support that is high quality, tailored to its needs, timely and in line with international good practice.

The geographic scope of this contract is global as Consortium Partners collectively have the capacity to ensure the broadest geographic reach, including Central America; Latin America; Middle East and North Africa; Sub-Saharan Africa; Central, Eastern Europe, and South-Eastern Europe (the Balkans); South and South-East Asia.

The Framework Contract supports target individuals, groups and entities currently or potentially involved in conflict prevention and mediation efforts across the EEAS and other EU institutions such as within the EU headquarters, EU delegations and CSDP missions.

All views expressed in the report are those of the consortium and do not necessarily reflect the positions of the EEAS.



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Introduction

2019 marks the tenth anniversary of the 2009 'Concept on Strengthening EU Mediation and Dialogue Capacities' ('EU mediation concept'). This document called for the EU to develop a systematic approach towards mediation and strengthen capacities for mediation support to more effectively and efficiently contribute to the prevention and resolution of violent conflict. Ten years later, a renewed interest within the broader international community in mediation and conflict prevention can be observed.

In this context, the Mediation and Dialogue Team of the European External Action Service (EEAS) Directorate for Integrated Approach to Security and Peace (ISP.2) convened two meetings, with the following objectives:

1. Allow for an open discussion on mediation and mediation support between member states, the EEAS and EU institutions, as well as non-governmental organisations;
2. Pave the way for reinforcing a community of European mediation practitioners through the creation of a community of practice platform to enable EU staff to draw on diverse experiences, share best practices and exchange on emerging trends with leading experts in peace mediation and dialogue work at different levels and in different contexts;
3. Enhance EU policy formulation on mediation and dialogue, and ensure a link with operational activities of the EU.

The first day of the meeting convened officials from EU institutions and member states to discuss engagements in mediation and dialogue processes and expectations for enhanced EU cooperation. This provided an opportunity for member states to showcase lessons learned on particular processes, have a dialogue on the lessons from the 2009 mediation concept and identify needs to further develop EU policy on mediation.

The second day was organised with a wider Community of Practice, gathering senior officials and experts from EU institutions' and member states' mediation support structures, leading representatives from non-governmental organisations active in peace mediation and mediation support, as well as selected partner countries. This report focuses on the highlights and key messages from the Community of Practice meeting held on 26 June 2019 that was organised around four interactive thematic sessions:

- Session 1: Digitalisation and mediation
- Session 2: Religion and Mediation
- Session 3: Women's Mediators networks
- Session 4: EU as a Mediation Actor: Quo Vadis?

During the lunch, two representatives from US-based institutions, viz. the US Department of State and the United States Institute for Peace, were invited to share experiences and perspectives on their approaches to mediation. The following sections of this report provide summaries and key takeaways from the presentations and discussions of each of the thematic sessions as well as the lunchtime presentations.

Opening remarks



During his opening remarks of the Community of Practice meeting, René van Nes, Acting Head of Division ISP.2 at the EEAS, welcomed the great interest in the topic of the meeting. Mr van Nes observed an increased political buy-in into mediation, with a particular interest in the role of women and youth in mediation processes, as well as the link between climate change and conflict. At the same time, complacency should be avoided. The mediation community needs to respond to a changing environment marked by the threats of climate change, technology and digitalisation, and an unprecedented

multiplicity of actors in conflicts. Collectively responding to such challenges requires new tools. To seize the current political momentum, the mediation community needs to develop a clear narrative on what mediation entails, why it is important, what it has achieved in the past and what impact it can have in the future. To lead the discussion forward, Mr van Nes identified three needs:

- **A need to better understand the mediation landscape in Europe:** EU and member states need to know from each other what structures and capacities for mediation and mediation support are in place, which thematic and geographical expertise is available where, and which needs for new modalities of information exchange exist.
- **A need for conceptual clarity:** Different interpretations of the concept of mediation exist. Moreover, the 2009 EU mediation concept is now ten years old, warranting a reflection on whether the document still responds to today's realities and needs.
- **A need for partnerships:** EU institutions, member states, experts and practitioners should develop stronger partnerships to exchange experiences and lessons.

The Community of Practice meeting particularly responds to the third need.



Session 1: The digital world, mapping and mediation

Expert input and facilitation by Miguel Varela (mediatEUR) and Antje Herrberg (EEAS)



Peace mediators, dialogue facilitators and peacebuilders operate in an environment affected by complex dynamics, constantly changing perceptions and deep-rooted conflicts. Understanding this environment requires good information that is updated regularly. At the same time, the world is increasingly hyperconnected: Social media, instant messaging and a continuous flow of online information occupy the attention of decision-makers and interlocutors in mediation processes. For peacebuilders and mediators, this creates a risk that the impact and visibility of their work is significantly reduced. In light of this, the first thematic

session addressed the links between digitalisation and mediation, using interactive discussion methods.

Specifically, the session addressed the following three topics:

- the challenges and opportunities of digitalisation for mediators
- experiences with digitalisation in peace work from key experts (see Box 1 below)
- using online mapping as a digital tool in practice

After an expert input by Miguel Varela (mediatEUR), participants engaged in group discussions on the following five questions:

- **confidentiality:** How to balance needs for external communication and the need to protect the confidentiality of the mediation process?
- **Integration:** Which flows of information can enrich a mediation process and how they can be integrated in such processes?
- **Impact:** How can mediators stand out from the noise in information flows and how can it be ensured that the work of mediation practitioners has an impact on decision-making?
- **Content and analysis:** What is the role of third-party mapping and external information in mediation processes?
- **Does tech really matter:** Do digital tools matter for a mediator and what are their advantages?

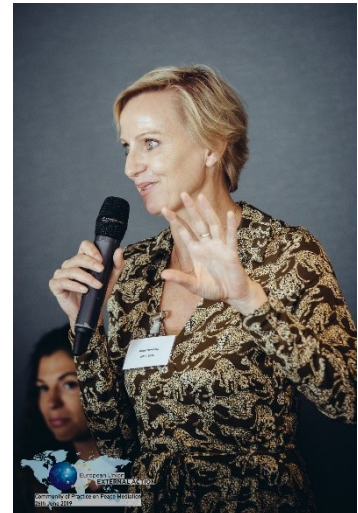
The following sections summarise the key messages and highlights from the presentation and discussions of this section.

1. Social media can make mediation more inclusive

Mediators rely on language and stories to do their work. Social media such as Twitter, WhatsApp and others therefore provide opportunities for creative solutions for mediation. Mediators need to share information with parties and communicate with the outside world. With modern technology, there is a chance to do this on a continuous basis. Easy and free access to information through social media provides a tool to mediators to talk freely to parties, quickly react to events and mobilise action. Modern technologies and social media can also democratise mediation processes by connecting to a wider population, collecting feedback and integrating views from a broader audience into the process. In doing so, the choice of the media should be sensitive to the fact that different social media tools enjoy diverging degrees of popularity or availability in different contexts.

2. Confidentiality should be protected

The need to communicate with a wider audience should be carefully balanced with the importance of protecting confidentiality of information and maintaining trust in communication processes. Therefore, there is a need to adapt the ground rules of communication to the specific circumstances of mediation processes, e.g. when dealing with remote areas where people do not have access to the same communication networks. Mediation teams also need to clarify upfront which communication channels it will use (e.g. email newsletters, paper communication). It is important to agree on a strategic approach amongst mediators and conflicting parties on how to address the issue of confidentiality in a world where everything is monitored. Modern technologies (such as WhatsApp and other encrypted platforms) can be used to create secure platforms of information exchange and provide a safe space for dialogue with and between conflicting parties.



In light of this, mediators and support teams have a responsibility to become literate in technology. They need to have access to expertise on information and communication technologies and social media savviness. Yet the tools themselves should also be adapted to the trade of mediation. One cannot expect the tools to simply work for mediators. Even encrypted tools such as WhatsApp can be subject to leaks or screenshots, although other apps like Signal could be used to control this. A methodological reflection is therefore needed on how existing tools can be used and how one can connect to the digital world to adapt tools to the specific needs of mediation, e.g. in terms of user-friendliness and information security.

3. Mediators should respond to the risk of information fragmentation



The enormous and constant flow of news and information via social media also poses risks. In a landscape in which information is increasingly instant, crowded and fragmented, it becomes more difficult for mediators to track and control information. The challenge for mediation teams is to filter out noise and disinformation to avoid obstruction of the focus of the discussion. Social media can even derail mediation processes. In conflict situations, narratives may emerge that influence the process negatively and reduce space for mediation, e.g. because they focus on incidents or are

limited to the elite level. Social media can facilitate the development and spread of such narratives. Mediation teams themselves can use

social media to ensure that their communication is as inclusive as possible to maintain trust and credibility. New technologies can also be used by mediators to create counter-narratives to put the spotlight on the important issues and the real stories on the ground, away from incident-focused political narratives. Both the EU (see e.g. “EU vs Disinformation”) and the UK government have ample experience with this, from which various lessons can be learnt. Social media could also be used to strategically leak information, e.g. to test the waters. At the same time, meeting participants warned for the escalation into narrative battles.

4. Mediators should adapt social media use to their trade

There is disagreement on how mediators can and should use social media to stand out from the noise and have an impact on decision-making processes. Some noted that mediation teams should not be public relations machines to convince decision-makers to put more resources in the field of mediation, but rather focus on the relationships between the parties themselves as the core of their work. At the same time, government officials need to answer to their political masters and need support from the field in these efforts. While it was recognised that donors want short-term results and tangible success stories, mediators and peacebuilders generally operate in a longer-term range. The focus should therefore be on real narratives and facts that are reflective of the long-term perspective of the efforts.

Box 1 – Using digitalisation in peace work: two practical examples

Malik al-Abdeh from the European Institute for Peace (EIP) introduced the audience to the **'Syria Digital Lab'**¹, a project recently designed and currently being implemented by EIP to create a digital ecosystem for mediators, humanitarians, donors, as well as Syrian tech developers and entrepreneurs. The underlying logic of the project is that many actors are already active in the domain e.g. through research on language use, combating disinformation or training Syrian entrepreneurs and developers, yet donors and practitioners remain sceptical on the potential of digital solutions for mediation purposes. The Syria Digital Lab project therefore aims to bring different actors together to exchange experiences and build a network across the traditional dividing lines and work towards a common purpose through practical solutions. Especially the humanitarian sector has much experience in using digital tools that others can learn from. The project also builds on an awareness that the digital world is an area for communication itself and that control over this digital space can become a conflict issue or a negotiation field in its own right.

Adam Cooper presented the **Digital Toolkit for Mediators 1.0**, which was designed by the United Nations Department for Political and Peacebuilding Affairs in collaboration with the Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue. The purpose of the Digital Toolkit is to consolidate lessons from the field on the risks as well as the opportunities of technology for mediation purposes. Practical uses could include using satellite technology to track refugee movements or to inform conflict analysis, engagement with the parties and strategic communication. The Toolkit is available online² and also aims to feed the discussion on how to adapt mediation practice to new forms of conflict that involve technological aspects. Conflicts are increasingly happening in cyberspace and hacking becomes a more important means of warfare. Mediators need to be better equipped to engage in this domain, e.g. to conduct confidence-building measures in cyberspace. Some experiences exist from cyber diplomacy that should feed into mediation practice.

5. New technologies can support, but not replace traditional tools

There is potential in using modern technologies to collect, analyse and summarise data to better understand public opinion. Using historical data can help reveal trends over time. Such mapping and analysis could complement information provided through opinion polls on what people are saying and thinking. Nevertheless, such tools can be biased and provide more a surface view than in-depth research. New technologies often offer an incomplete picture, especially in regions that are less developed and as a consequence of the digital divide: Actors present on new media are

¹ See <https://www.syriadigitallab.com/> for more information.

² See <https://peacemaker.un.org/digitaltoolkit>

not representative of the whole society, but often rather reflect a new, urban generation. They are the ones that are both the audience of social media engagements and actors in creating and propagating narratives themselves. It therefore remains important to complement social media use with traditional tools to reach a wider audience that is not necessarily digitally connected. During the session, the facilitator used the dialogue mapping technique to visually capture arguments and counterarguments in the discussion and illustrate its for facilitation, analysis of dialogue content and contextual awareness. Using ICT tools may help to visualise arguments in mediation and communication efforts and frame or neutralise statements as part of a facilitation process. It could also provide a framework for mediators and facilitators to retain memory from their sessions, share and coordinate knowledge and build on experience. The result of the mapping exercise during this session can be accessed via [this link](#). More information on dialogue mapping can be found in Box 2, including an example from the session.



***There is no alternative to going to the ground,
listening to people and hearing the narratives of
the parties and of those experiencing
the consequences of the conflict.***



Box 2 – Dialogue mapping

Dialogue mapping is a methodology to capture, organise and present ideas around one or more questions in a visual format. The goal of mapping is to unlock shared understanding amongst participants of the issues that affect them, especially in the face of wicked problems. There are three key elements to dialogue mapping: the mapper, a shared display, and a notation system.

Dialogue mapping follows an issue-based notation, organising the content of a given discussion into questions, ideas and arguments. One of the key tasks of the mapper is to identify the key questions and ideas present in the speech of participants. Listening actively to the input by each participant, the dialogue mapper builds a diagram that begins (from left to right) with a question, grows into ideas to address the question and concludes with arguments for or against each of the ideas. That structure makes the flow of conversation in the map immediately understandable for both participants and external readers.

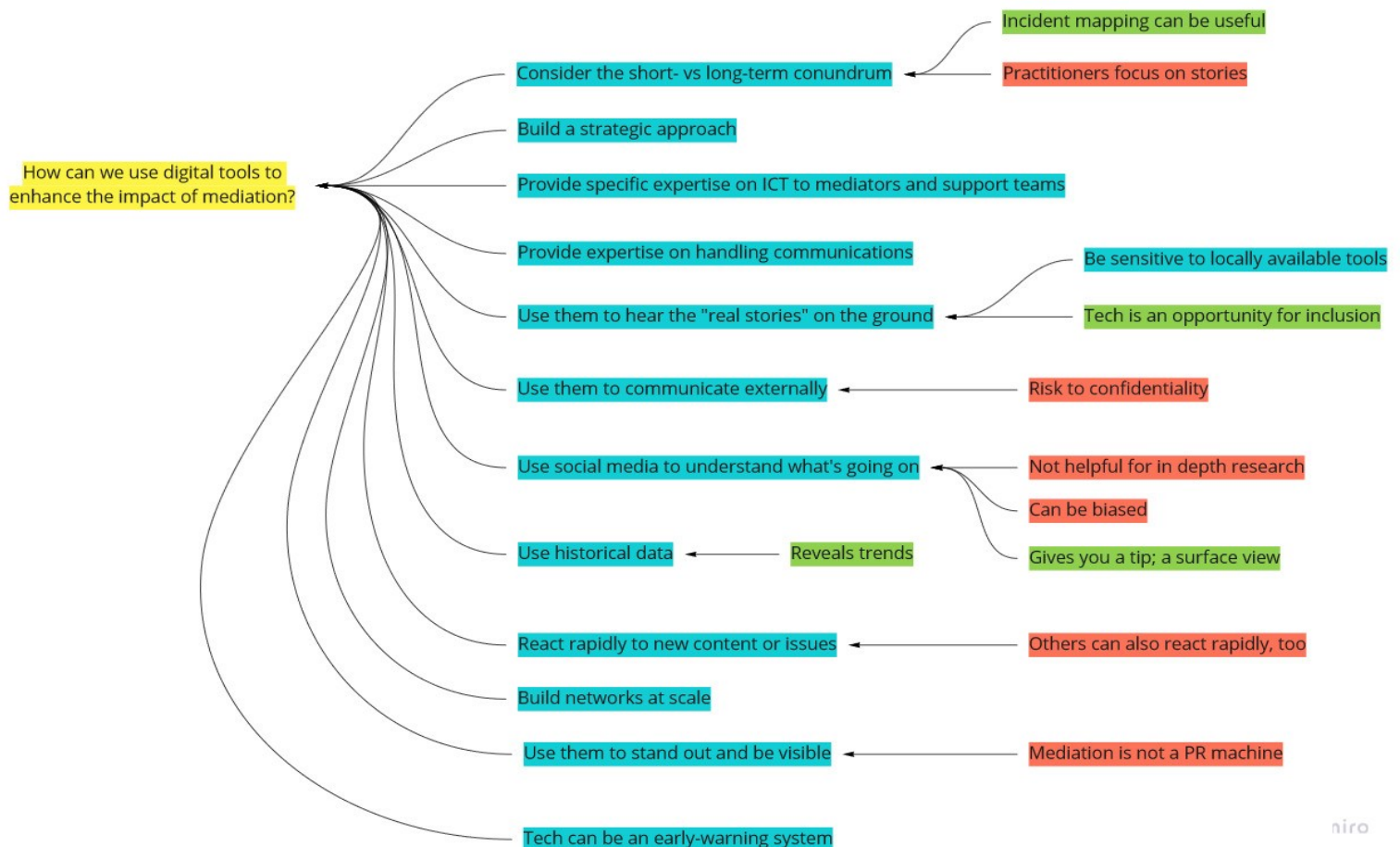
As a live facilitation method, dialogue mapping helps record the voice of all participants and provides them with a visual representation of their input into the meeting. It also helps avoid truth by repetition, collecting each argument and idea once. It is a useful tool when dealing with design processes, task groups, and specific questions. However, in an open

conversation, facilitators may find it challenging to organise speech into the IBIS (issue-based information system) notation.

While, at its core, dialogue mapping is a low-technology methodology (all you need is pen and paper), the digital world is an opportunity to utilise it to its full potential. Some tools, like Debategraph (www.debategraph.org) or the Peacelogs system (www.peacelogs.info), are built specifically for dialogue mapping, allowing users to easily store and explore their maps online and expanding on the usefulness of mapping by adding analytical tools, geographic maps and other resources. Others, like Kumu (www.kumu.io), Mindomo (www.mindmodo.com) or Miro (www.miro.com) are great tools to organise complex information and can easily be adapted for dialogue mapping, such as demonstrated during the [mapping of the session](#).

Figure 1: Example of visual dialogue mapping of the discussion

(yellow = question, blue = ideas, green = pros, red = cons)



Expert input and facilitation by Owen Frazer (Center for Security Studies, ETH Zürich)

[illegible]

- The following sections summarise the key points from the presentation and the contributions from meeting participants.

Mediation practitioners should be self-aware of how their own perspectives are influencing them. Everyone approaches religion from a particular point of view that is informed by personal and institutional worldviews. Reflecting on our own viewpoints, intentions, identities and prejudices can help us take into account any biases and limitations we may have. This is particularly important for the EU, which tends to separate religion from policy and politics. As a peace mediation actor, the EU must consider how its secular character shapes its approach to conflicts with religious dimensions, which biases it may create in its approach to religion and how it can credibly work on religion and conflict.

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member states as well as in like-minded states such as the United States. One participant noted that self-reflection may require asking the question whether mediation itself is a form of religion. Thinking about the practices, beliefs, community, institutions and spiritual dimensions of mediation can yield new insights to better mainstream religious dimensions into mediation policy and practice.

2. Acknowledge that religion matters

Today, more than 80 percent of people worldwide identify themselves with a religious group. At the same time, religion increasingly plays a role in conflicts, such as between different religious groups (e.g. Catholic-Protestant, Shia-Sunni). The majority of religious conflicts revolves around at least one party taking a religious position on some of the main issues being disputed. However, the role of religion in conflict should neither be underestimated nor overestimated. Getting the right balance requires an approach to conflict analysis that emphasises religion holistically.

3. Think holistically

In policy, religion is often treated as a silo, separate from e.g. economic questions, governance, security or human rights. In reality, however, religion cuts across many different topics and therefore requires a more holistic approach that mainstreams religion in European mediation efforts. Religion shapes how actors see and approach the work, including the issues disputed during a conflict. Religious actors should be engaged as an integral part of society, instead of purely as a separate sector that talks between themselves in interreligious dialogue.



“We should stop treating religion as a silo issue, next to economic development, governance or human rights. In reality, religion often cuts across all these issues. We need to think about religion in a more holistic way.”

- Owen Frazer



To think holistically about religion, it may help to consider religion across five dimensions: a set of beliefs, a community, a set of institutions, spirituality, and practices. Religious conflicts can revolve around clashes on each of these dimensions, yet religion can also be a source of peace. As such, considering these five dimensions can help seeing how religion can be both a divider e.g. on ethical questions such as abortion) and a connector (e.g. 2016 Marrakesh Declaration of Muslim leaders, papal mediation in two catholic countries).

4. Identify religion-specific challenges



Conflicts with religious dimensions may pose specific challenges for mediation. Some disputed issues may become “sacred” when they touch upon fundamental values, beliefs, practices or symbols of a religious community. Examples are the religious foundations of the state of Israel or the Buddhist tradition in Sri Lanka. Compromise in such disputes may become difficult, meaning that traditional negotiation and mediation approaches based on a practice of ‘giving and taking’ may not work. Religious differences may also relate to diverging world views, backgrounds and identities, which could result in difficulties among parties in understanding each other and in communicating effectively. This also limits the potential of pure dialogue-based approaches. Being unfamiliar with actors holding very different worldviews is not only a barrier for relation-building between the parties, but also between the parties and the mediator. Especially mediators that come from a strong secular culture (such as the European Union and international institutions) may feel ill-equipped to engage religious actors.

5. Integrate religion into conflict analysis

Mainstreaming religion in mediation requires integrating it into conflict analysis. This involves considerations of how religion may affect different factors of analysis, such as:

- **context:** Include a mapping of the religious landscape into context analysis.
- **actors:** Acknowledge and understand the diversity of religious actors. This requires a mapping of their interests, structures, hierarchies, actions, strengths and complementarities. It should also recognise that religious networks are distinct from other civil society networks in that they operate at the local and national level and may exert high relative influence.
- **issues:** Religious issues are often perceived as indivisible. New formulations may need to be found to make them divisible in a mediation process.
- **power:** Religion is a source of power that can be instrumentalised. Understanding the power dynamics around religion in specific contexts requires engaging deeply with religious communities in those contexts.
- **gender:** Quick assumptions based on superficial understandings of religion should be avoided, e.g. on the role women can play in mediation processes in a Muslim context.

6. Adapt mediation process design to take religion into account

Religious dimensions and challenges should be reflected in the approach and theory of change of the mediation process, as well as in its vision and goal. A religion-sensitive conflict analysis can help in identifying where mediation process design may need to be adapted to take into account the

challenges and opportunities presented by religion. When doing so, particular points to reflect on are:

- **the identity of the mediator:** Where relevant, the EU should be able to recognise that the religious identity of the mediator can be an added value in certain situations. Where necessary, teams with mixed identities may be considered. The EU should identify the right personalities that can engage or support in religiously-motivated conflicts.
- **Track:** Religion is often pushed to Track 2 mediation, but should also be put more centrally on Track 1.
- **Participation and inclusion:** Process design should consider whether all voices are being heard. That may require reflection on whether and how to include actors that may hold very different values from the EU or even reject EU values.
- **Discourse:** Including religious language and narratives in discussions and agreements may help to resonate with constituencies and avoid resistance from religious communities. Engaging with religious perspectives and narratives early on may also prevent religion from becoming a tool for spoilers.
- **Religious leaders as a resource:** High-level religious leaders often enjoy significant legitimacy and influence. The EU should consider how it can support religious leaders that are pro-peace and how it can remind such leaders of their responsibilities.
- **Practical arrangements:** The practical and logistical organisation of mediation processes should take into account religious sensitivities in relation to venue, timing, meals, the use of media and financial aspects.

7. Build capacity on religion and mediation

During the discussion, questions were raised as to whether there was enough expertise within the EEAS for integrating religion into the EU's mediation efforts. It was suggested that there is a need for internal trainings, both general trainings on religious literacy and context-specific trainings to understand the role of religion in particular contexts. This is the purpose of the European guidance note for mediators on how to deal with religion and religious

actors, which is currently under development. As it is not realistic to expect all staff to become religion experts, consideration should be given to how religious competence within teams can be developed. European policy-makers and practitioners should be allowed to develop stronger knowledge, mindsets and skillsets to deal with religion in mediation processes through trainings. A resource website is also being developed to cover religious aspects in conflicts and to provide a checklist to help mainstream religion in mediation processes.

It was also suggested to learn from what other like-minded states such as the US are doing, and to draw on resources and expertise in civil society and universities. Providing the EEAS with a mapping



of the landscape of expertise within member states could be a useful tool. An EEAS representative pointed out that many lessons are also to be learned from the United States, which is well ahead on the issue. Switzerland also has much expertise, having been working on the intersection of religion, politics and conflict for 15 years, supporting processes to address conflicts with religious dimensions in Central Asia, the Sahel, the Middle East and North Africa and South-East Asia.

Lunch presentations: Perspectives from the US



During the lunch, representatives from US-based institutions presented their experiences, lessons and suggestions on mediation work. Antje Herrberg from the EEAS stressed to importance of continued transatlantic cooperation in the field of conflict prevention, mediation and peacebuilding and praised their commitment and attendance of this meeting.

Tyler Thompson from the **US Department of State Bureau of Conflict and Stabilization Operations (CSO)** described the work of the US administration in peace process support. US peace process support focuses on political instability, atrocities prevention and electoral violence, countering violent extremism, and supporting and reforming the security sector. CSO has established a peacebuilding support network that supports sharing of best practices in mediation, designing peace processes etc. A strong focus is hereby put on data analytics to inform evidence-driven guidance. The US Department of State hopes to reinvigorate the peace process support network as part of a partnership with the US Institute for Peace. Mr Thompson noted that the US may not always be the best placed to assume the role of mediator, thereby highlighting the importance of building partnerships and engaging with a wider community of practice also in Europe.

Susan Stigant from the **Africa Programme of the US Institute for Peace (USIP)**, an independent and non-partisan agency established by the US Congress, shared two experiences with relevance for transatlantic cooperation. In one instance, USIP was requested to provide support to the peace process in the Central African Republic. At that point, USIP had an office in Bangui, but was not involved in the peace process as such. USIP staff connected with different missions and organisations presented in Bangui, including the EEAS and bilateral missions, to explore opportunities for more efficient cooperation. This was built on a realisation that USIP would be better positioned if it had more information on who was doing what and which expertise was available where.



A second example relates to the USIP involvement in Sudan. Sudan is going through a complicated transition that puts the role of nonviolent action and civic mobilisation at the centre of the debate.

Yet there are also questions about how political divisions in the Gulf region are creating cracks in the ground in Sudan. For international partners, there is a real struggle to track the process in all its complexities, and the EU and the US could jointly explore how different efforts can connect to advance a civilian-led government in Sudan. The added value of USIP itself could lie in strengthening conflict analysis, as well as building a better understanding on the role of religious leaders.

Session 3: Women mediators' networks

Expert input and facilitation: Lara Scarpitta (EEAS) and Catherine Turner (University of Durham)



The EU is supporting women involved in peace processes around the world, such as Syria, Yemen and Libya. The EEAS Secretary-General also recently stated that the EU wants to be in the lead in implementing the Women, Peace and Security Agenda globally, using all means from diplomacy to training and capacity-building to enable women to play a full role in mediation and peacebuilding.

The question on how the number of women in mediator positions can be promoted closely links to the recent emergence of various regional networks for women mediators. These networks span across different regions and cultural contexts, yet share the common aims of increasing the number of women in high-level mediation positions and fostering connections between local women's mediation work and international peace processes and actors. During this session, three of such networks were presented (see Box 3). Following these short presentations, Catherine Turner (University of Durham) gave a brief introduction on the barriers to women accessing high-level mediation roles and then invited participants to reflect on the following questions:

- How can the role of women in peace processes be further enhanced?
- What are the areas of potential beneficial collaboration between the mediation community of practice and the women networks?
- What steps can be taken by mediation support organisations to engage with the networks?
- What policy and funding support is necessary from the EEAS to enable such engagement?
- What are the main barriers to effective engagement with and between women mediators' networks?

The main insights and highlights from the session are summarised below.

Box 3 – Women mediators’ networks: three examples

Chris Coulter presented the **Nordic Women Mediators network**, a network of women from Denmark, Sweden, Norway, Finland and Iceland who have professional experience in peacebuilding and peace mediation. The network is organised regionally, but in itself consists of national networks in each of the five Nordic countries. How this is organised differs in each of the countries. Ms Coulter particularly focused on the Swedish network, which has sixteen members, mostly diplomats and some NGO representatives. They are formally appointed by the Swedish minister of foreign affairs and enjoy a status of ‘special representative’. As such, the promotion of women mediators is a state-led process, aligned with the Swedish feminist foreign policy that also provides resources. The other national networks are organised in different ways. The Nordic Women Mediators also receive support and training from the Folke Bernadotte Academy in Sweden, the Crisis Management Initiative in Finland and Norad in Norway. Members of the network are particularly involved in advocacy activities, but they also support women mediators and peacebuilders on the ground.

Irene Fellin introduced the **Mediterranean Women Mediators Network**, an Italian initiative inspired by the Nordic Network. The Mediterranean Network comprises 44 founding members and 23 countries around the Mediterranean, including from various conflict-affected countries in the region. Members of the network have been identified through the Permanent Representations to the UN of the various countries, as well as through national governments and civil society organisations to ensure a diverse group of people. Through a structure of local satellites, the network aims not only to increase the numbers, but also build opportunities to connect with the practice on the ground and support local initiatives. Ms Fellin also pointed at the importance of connecting with the broader mediation community, which it aims to do through the launch of a global alliance of regional networks.

Jonathan Cohen presented the **Women Mediators across the Commonwealth network**, coordinated by Conciliation Resources. The network aims to bring together women mediators to exchange and learn, and to advocate for the increased representation of women in peace processes around the world. It is part of a wider effort to see women not as victims but as agents of change. The network now has 37 members, recruited among activists and peacebuilding practitioners, which engage in mediation and dialogue. The UK’s Foreign and Commonwealth Office provides support to help build the capacities of the network and its members, while also supporting practical initiatives on the ground.

1. Address the underlying challenges of a male-dominated system

In her introductory input, Catherine Turner (University of Durham) pointed out that still many barriers exist to women's participation as mediators. These relate, amongst others, to gendered stereotypes, male gatekeepers, the invisibility of women in male dominated mediation spaces, and a conception of security as a 'man's business'. Moreover, some members of the mediation community are resistant to push for gender and inclusion out of concerns that it would compromise their integrity as a mediator. Many participants agreed that while women mediators receive training and capacity-building, they still lack the opportunities to participate.



"The question is not simply how to get more women in mediation teams. It is about how we can counter a male-dominated system. A stronger dialogue is needed on what this system looks like and how it can and should change."

- Matthias Ryffel, Swisspeace



As Matthias Ryffel (Swisspeace) argued, we should look beyond the question of participation of women in mediation teams and focus on the underlying challenges of a male-dominated system marked by paternalism and strong hierarchies in which men do not easily give up their places. A stronger dialogue is needed on how masculinities have an impact on power dynamics and how such a system can be changed. Women do not have the benefit of a social structure that makes them being perceived as just 'mediators' (rather than 'women mediators'). Consequently, support is needed to fight structures that are inherently biased against women. That necessarily means that both women and men need to be more sensitive to such structural barriers, e.g. by organising training on gender issues specifically targeting men.

2. Support movements that strengthen the voice of women mediators



Various efforts have been made to create movements to push for greater participation of women in mediation and peacebuilding processes, as outlined in Box 3. Some networks have also been built in the context of the UN or the African Union (e.g. Femwise). These networks focus specifically on women in the role of mediator, with the aim of also

amplifying the voices of women involved in other peacebuilding activities. Yet many women mediators' networks lack funding to work properly. As a result, women mediators and networks

often compete for resources, opportunities and visibility. Supporting such movements is important to strengthen the visibility and voice of women mediators. Exploring more global cooperation between regional associations of women networks, as well as joining up forces with youth platforms or religious organisations, can help strengthen voices and advance common goals. Role models can also have a great influence. The stories of successful women mediators need to be captured and shared widely to contribute to confidence among women in their skills and capacities to engage in mediation and enhance the leadership brand of women mediators.

3. Build political support for more inclusiveness

Structural barriers to more inclusive mediation processes raise the question how more political support can be built to provide opportunities for women to be involved, beyond support to training and capacity-building. Antti Pentikäinen (Helsinki

Deaconess Institute) wondered whether a ‘me too’ movement in the mediation community is needed and whether higher targets of woman involvement should be included in programming. Other participants agreed that more political leverage should be used to make women’s participation in mediation processes a deal breaker. Linda Benraïs from ESSEC Irene suggested co-mediation between men and women as an approach to ensure parity. Parity in mediation teams is important because the experience of the mediator will determine how they assess the relative priority of issue in the peace process, including gender inclusion. Greater diversity potentially means greater openness to gender sensitive conflict analysis from both male and female mediators.

“You can have the best trained women in the world, but if the gatekeepers remain deaf, nothing will change.”

- Mathilde Flemming, *Search for Common Ground*

4. Avoid instrumentalisation and put diversity at the centre of the discussion



Various participants acknowledged the risk that being a woman mediator comes with expectations of interest and expertise (only) in gender issues or Women, Peace and Security. This can lead to further marginalisation of women based on stereotyping. Further, arguments that focus on the added value of inclusion of women in terms of more sustainable outcomes create additional expectations for women, against which men are not usually judged. While it is important to assess whether peace processes with more women involved have been

more effective, the debate should never resort to that argument only. Rather the promotion of diversity in mediation teams- and the use of co-mediation in particular- should be central to efforts to increase women’s participation as mediators. The systematic exclusion of women from

mediation roles is an ethical issue. Adopting a diversity based approach can help to address it. Placing an emphasis on the skills required for mediation rather than the personality of the mediator can help increase the representation of women by overcoming existing biases within the system, judging women for the skills and experience they bring to the job rather than their gender.

Session 4: EU as a mediator: quo vadis?

Expert input and facilitation: Sven Kühn von Burgsdorff (EEAS) and Olai Voionmaa (EEAS)



The identity of the EU as a peace project gives a particular orientation to the Union's foreign policy engagement with the promotion of peace as a central feature. Yet, it was only in 2009 when the EU agreed for the first time on a concept and definition of mediation. At that time, the document nevertheless set progressive points on mediation and mediation support, including a strong focus on gender issues. Over the years, the EEAS has built out solid structures, particularly in the form of its Mediation Support Team. The team provides operational, technical and policy support, assists with rapid deployment of experts, provides capacity-building, coaching and training, and engages in knowledge management and outreach. Partnership development has also been a key focus: The EEAS works with civil society organisations and international organisations such as the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) or the African Union, which often meet at technical and senior levels to share lessons and experiences.

Today, the EEAS Secretary-General has put mediation again at the forefront of EU external action. The topic also enjoys growing support within the wider international community. While the EU has built out technical capacities, the challenge is how the mediation community can further seize the existing political momentum. This concluding session therefore looked at perspectives for European mediation and mediation support. The following questions were discussed:

- What is the added value of EU mediation (support) and what are its disadvantages?
- How to enhance cooperation with different actors and partners?
- How can a continuous EU Community of Practice on mediation be further nourished and institutionalised?

The following sections summarise the highlights of the discussion:

1. Added value and disadvantages of EU mediation (support) in practice

Participants mentioned various advantages of EU mediation and mediation support. Particularly, the combination of its more impartial reputation, its convening power and ability to build

partnerships were mentioned. The EU has the capacity to play an active role to push for certain issues, as it did, for example, in the Kosovo-Serbia dialogue. However, this raises the question under which conditions the parties and the EU member states will allow the EU to play such a role. The EU's strength and legitimacy highly depend on the willingness of its member states to speak with one voice. This can be an advantage, but also a stumbling block. If no joint political approach can be found among member states, this limits the capacity of the EU to act as mediator or to deliver on the carrots it promises to the parties (e.g. accession as a carrot to Northern Macedonia).

Another advantage for the EU is its access to a pool of experts and capacity to provide financing and capacities over a longer term. These contribute to making the EU a credible and reliable actor to engage in mediation or mediation support and broker sustainable agreements. Furthermore, the EU has a large toolbox at its disposal, which include diplomacy, CSDP missions and operations, EU Special Representatives and sanctions. This equips the EU well to monitor peace agreements, support their implementation and use leverage where necessary to keep peace processes on track. Yet it also often leads to questions over how the EU's leverage as a political and economic actor balances with the expectations of the Union as an honest broker. In some instances, the EU's agenda was considered incompatible with the expectations of neutrality from a mediator. For example, it was pointed out that in Syria, the wish of certain member states to play an assertive role via sanctions and diplomatic pressure compromises the ability of the EU to play a mediating role.



A benefit of the EU is that its broad toolbox provides flexibility and agility in its approach. In some instances, it can play a more nuanced, mediating role, whereas in other contexts it can opt for a role of a more visible, assertive player. Its main advantage is that it speaks on behalf of all member states and therefore has significant political clout.

2. Building a shared understanding of the EU's political ambition

The 2009 Mediation Concept is a coherent document in itself, but in practice, it no longer reflects the reality of actual support to peace processes. More internal coherence and clarity over the EU's political ambitions would benefit its role as a mediator and facilitate cooperation with partners. This includes the question of how the ambition of the EU to become a stronger 'player' on the international scene, rather than just a payer, can be reconciled with its role as a mediator or mediation supporter. EU mediation will continue to be influenced by bureaucracy, political inertia and member state interests. Such institutional dynamics will be difficult to change and define the margins of manoeuvre for EU mediation practice and support. The real question should therefore be how to move within the boundaries set by political dynamics and bureaucratic rules of the game. Creative solutions to overcome the dichotomies between the EU's value-based approach of



democracy and human rights and its ambitions in mediation as an impartial actor should also be found.

An updated Mediation Concept would be an opportunity to be more focused on how and why the EU wants to engage in mediation. Such a reflection process has to be well informed by a good understanding of the advantages and disadvantages of EU mediation in practice and where its added value

lies. While the EEAS leadership has expressed an ambition to prioritise mediation, this has so far not resulted in additional extra capacities. Therefore, the EU is by default compelled to work with a community of practice. What the EEAS can do also depends on capacities provided by member states. The new mediation concept should address the question on how this cooperation can become more efficient and collaborative.

Seizing political traction for this purpose requires an ability to demonstrate impact to political leaders. The mediation community therefore need to develop better tools to measure impact, share lessons and build compelling stories through regular exchanges of views. While the EU Council does not have a dedicated working group on mediation and conflict prevention, existing structures could be used to push mediation higher on the agenda. Exchanges within a community of practice can provide a good platform for dialogue on this matter.

3. Strengthening and institutionalising a community of practice on peace mediation

To strengthen and further institutionalise a community of practice on peace mediation, participants formulated the following recommendations:

- **Define the scope:** It should be clarified who the community of practice is going to serve. While it needs to be inclusive and low-profile, it should also be visible enough for its target audience and potential participants.
- **Be efficient:** The community of practice should not become too heavy or time consuming. It is also important to avoid replication of other actors (e.g. EPLO).
- **Be transparent:** Preparatory work should define in advance who can be part of the community and who not, and what it will and will not do. This should also be communicated clearly and transparently.
- **Use the framework contract:** The EEAS ISP framework contract with the mediatEUr-led consortium is a valuable tool to provide support and expertise in a flexible way that should also be made available to the community of practice.
- **Brand it:** A website, newsletter and annual meeting will create visibility and recognisability for its target audience.

Conclusion

As the EU celebrates the tenth anniversary of its mediation concept, and with political momentum for mediation on the rise, this community of practice meeting provided an opportunity for debate on how EU policy and practice on peace mediation and dialogue can draw on past experiences and adapt to new challenges. Three themes were discussed in detail:



First, as the world becomes hyperconnected as a result of new digital technologies, the mediation community needs to adapt to a reality in which information is quicker, easier to access and more fragmented. This brings challenges to mediation processes (e.g. incident-focused narratives, information asymmetries), but also opportunities for more creative and inclusive mediation. It highlights the importance of investing in digital literacy of mediators through trainings and engaging with the digital community on how to adapt new tools to the needs of the mediator. Nevertheless, traditional media will remain a central pillar of communication activities of mediation practitioners.

Second, as religion is a growingly important factor of violent conflict, the discussion allowed a reflection on the relevance of religion to EU mediation policy and, which will inform the EEAS' upcoming guidance on religion and mediation. Debates highlighted the need for self-reflection on perspectives, biases and norms related to the EU's secular character, and the importance of a holistic approach to religion throughout the EU's mediation efforts, including in conflict analysis. This will require internal trainings and guidance for EU staff to build religion-sensitive knowledge, mindsets and competences within mediation (support) teams.

Third, as the EEAS is aspiring a leading global role to promote the Women, Peace and Security agenda, gender and mediation was a central topic. In this context, participants argued for a stronger dialogue on how to counter gender-biased social structures and ensure more opportunities for women to be involved in mediation processes. Among the suggestions proposed were providing gender sensitivity trainings to both men and women, supporting women mediators' networks advocating for women involvement and focusing the argument on diversity and inclusion.

The debates highlighted various opportunities to strengthen and adapt EU mediation support to new challenges. Yet this will also require more internal coherence over the EU's new political ambitions in terms of mediation (support). An updated EU Mediation Concept would be an opportunity to clarify the Union's ambitions and motivations to engage in mediation. This should build on a solid reflection on where the EU has expertise, added value and where it can cooperate with member states and other partners. It was agreed that a continued engagement with the Community of Practice (e.g. through regular meetings) will help feed expertise into EU mediation policy and practice to help build better tools, share lessons and build a compelling narrative.

Annex 1: list of participants

Last name	First name	Organisation
al-Abdeh	Malik	European Institute for Peace
Aldorf	Lenka	Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Czech Republic
Arévalo	Julian	Institute for Integrated Transitions
Arih	Aljaz	Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Slovenia
Benrais	Linda	ESSEC Irene
Bertrand	Daniel	Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Belgium
Bilde	Merete	SG.1, European External Action Service
Bouchet-Couzy	Clémence	Quaker Council for European Affairs
Caruso	Francesca	Mediterranean Women Mediators Network
Cohen	Jonathan	Conciliation Resources
Conti	Lorenzo	European Peacebuilding Liaison Office
Cooper	Adam	Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue
Costa	Nuno	mediatEUR
Coulter	Chris	Folke Bernadotte Academy - Nordic Women Mediators
Crsitescu	Roxana	Crisis Management Initiative
Deneckere	Matthias	ECDPM
Desmidt	Sophie	ECDPM
Dirosa	Roberta	ISP.2, European External Action Service
Djinnit	Said	ACCORD
Einhauser	Barbara	FPI.2, European Commission
Eves	Father Sylvestre Olivier	Association camerounaise pour le dialogue interreligieux
Fellin	Irene	Mediterranean Women Mediators Network
Flemming	Matilda	Search for Common Ground
Frazer	Owen	Centre for Security Studies ETH Zurich
Fried	Leonard	Fondation Hirondelle
Gröthe	Tobias	Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Germany
Hedström	Karolina	Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Sweden
Herrberg	Antje	ISP.2, European External Action Service
Impagliazzo	Paolo	Community of Sant'Egidio
Jaarva	Meeri-Maria	Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe
Karczmarz	Michal	Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Poland
Kestemont	Esther	mediatEUR
Klinge	Hannah	Crisis Management Initiative
Kühn von Burgsdorff	Sven	ISP.2, European External Action Service
Lehmann-Larsen	Stine	European Institute for Peace
Lindgen	Laura	Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Finland

Lopez-Salva	Catalina	ISP.2, European External Action Service
Luchtenberg	Kyra	Independent Diplomat
Lüttman	Christoph	CSSP mediation
M. De Bruijn	Eveline	Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Netherlands
Marescaux	Johana	EPMS, European Parliament
Mesie	Kamiel	United Nations
Montemarani	Giacomo	Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Italy
Mühlmann	Thomas	Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Austria
Murphy	Theodore	Mediation Europe
Nedved	Radek	Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Czech Republic
Niemi	Katja-Maaret	Felm
O'Neil	Richard	Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ireland
Otte	Marc	Egmont Institute
Pajuste	Carmen	Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Estonia
Pentikäinen	Antti	Helsinki Deaconess Institute
Perlot	Wilbur	Clingendael Institute
Price	David	Debate Graph
Quesada	Kathrin	mediatEUR
Rougy	Nicolas	Interpeace
Rouxel	Quentin	Ministry of Foreign Affairs, France
Russ	Marion	Search for Common Ground
Ryffel	Matthias	Swisspeace
Segal	Mark	Foreign and Commonwealth Office, United Kingdom
Scarpitta	Lara	ISP.2, European External Action Service
Simon	Julie	ESSEC Irene
Squadrito	Giovanni	FPI.2, European Commission
Sterwe	Helena	ISP.2, European External Action Service
Stigant	Susan	United States Institute of Peace
Thompson	Tyler	US Department of State
Turner	Catherine	Durham University
Van den Boogeert	Judith	Clingendael Institute
van den Werf	Lyske	Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Netherlands
Van Nes	René	ISP.2, European External Action Service
Varela	Miguel	mediatEUR
Voionmaa	Olai	ISP.2, European External Action Service
Yeganeh	Abdy	Independent Diplomat
Zegretti	Cesare	College of Europe

Annex 2: Meeting agenda

Wednesday 26 June

8:30-9:00	Registration and welcome coffee
9:00-9:30	Welcome, purpose and format of the meeting René Van Nes, Acting Head of Division, ISP.2, <i>EEAS Debriefing of the Member States Meeting on 25 June</i>
9:30–11:00	Session 1: Digitalization and mediation Miguel Varela, mediatEUr & Antje Herrberg, EEAS <i>Mediators, dialogue facilitators and peacebuilders operate in environments affected by complex dynamics, constantly changing perceptions, and deep- rooted conflicts. Understanding them requires not only good information, but good information updated regularly. How can mapping help build the contextual awareness and the inclusion that is necessary for mediation to succeed?</i>
11:00 –11:30	Coffee break
11:30-12:30	Session 2: Religion and Mediation Owen Frazer, Center for Security Studies ETH Zurich & Helena Sterwe, EEAS <i>Religious narratives and identities often play an integral role in violent conflicts. This session will examine how international stakeholders are equipped to address religion in peace processes with the objective to extract good practices for the policy work of the EU: how religion matters in the peaceful resolution of conflict and mediation? In what ways can mediators be sensitized to work with it?</i>
12:30-13:30	Lunch
13:30-15:00	Session 3: Women’s Mediators Networks Catherine Turner, Durham University & Lara Scarpitta, EEAS <i>The EU is both visibly and effectively supporting women involved in peace processes around the world, in particular in Syria, Yemen and Libya. Today, a number of regional networks exist for women mediators (Africa, Nordic, Mediterranean, and Commonwealth). How can we further enhance the role of women in peace</i>

processes? What are the challenges and limitations in fostering the coherence between these women mediators' networks?

15:00-15:30 **Coffee break**

15:30-17:00 **Session 4: EU as a Mediation Actor : Quo vadis?**

Sven Kühn von Burgsdorff, EEAS

This session aims to conclude the meeting by looking at the perspectives for European mediation and mediation support. What is the EU 'comparative advantage' in mediation? How to enhance cooperation between different actors? How can we further nourish and institutionalise a continuous EU CoP on mediation?

17:00-17:30 **Restitution of sessions, conclusions and way forward**

Antje Herrberg, EEAS



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