

TAKING STOCK OF MEDIATION SUPPORT: WHAT DO ENVOYS THINK?



Project funded by the Ministry of
Foreign Affairs of Sweden



Government Offices of Sweden



FOREWORD

APPROACHING A COMPLICATED RELATIONSHIP

When EIP started developing the **Mediation Support Stocktaking Project** in 2016, we wanted to look at ways to make mediation support more effective. The idea for the project came from the realisation that the kind of expertise that mediation support practitioners were offering was not drawn on by mediators as much as it could (and should) be. We observed a mounting frustration within the support community. Our initial research confirmed this assessment, showing that despite an increase of mediation support actors around the world, the link between them and the people they are supposed to help (the mediators, or envoys) is not always optimal. We decided to design a project that would allow us to listen to both the supplier and the recipient of mediation support to get a better understanding of what is working and what is not.

The project started in August 2016 in Brussels, when EIP gathered leading mediation support experts to identify key challenges in their work with envoys and mediators. A space for discussion was opened, where experienced support practitioners who have been working in the same field for years could discuss their ideas and share their own experiences. They listed a series of common issues and problems that concerned their relationship with the beneficiaries of their work. We then turned the table and directed our attention towards the mediators. Throughout 2016-2017 we organized three high-level retreats with mediators from leading multilateral institutions (such as the UN, the EU, the AU and the OSCE), mediating states (such as Sweden, Switzerland and the US) and independent actors. The result of this process was a set of interesting and sometimes surprising insights, since the reactions from the mediators showed they view the challenges of mediation somewhat differently from support practitioners.

Given the discrepancies in the analyses of the problems, in December 2017 EIP hosted a final analytical meeting, in which we brought back our results to a small group of mediation support experts. In other words, we reverted to the specialists that kick-started our discussion in summer 2016. This time however, we had a lot of interesting data coming directly from the people who are supposed to benefit from their expertise. As a result, we conceived **seven scenarios, or problem statements**, which represent the kind of real-world situations that mediation support actors and mediators can find themselves in, where things are not going quite right.

To complement these scenarios, our team developed **possible options for mediation support actors** who are confronted with the problems identified. EIP tested these findings (both the problems and the solutions) with three mediation support units: Sweden, the OSCE and ECOWAS, in order to finalise both our diagnosis of the problems and our recommendations for possible solutions.

In short, both the problems and the solutions that follow below are the result of a long and thorough analytical process. We wanted our problem scenarios to be represented in an unusual and creative way, and this is why we asked cartoonist Lectrr to give his contribution to our project. We hope that our results will help envoys and mediation support experts reflect upon their working relationships, to the ultimate benefit of peace processes across the world.

Stine Lehmann-Larsen

Director Mediation, Policy & European Relations

TERMINOLOGY:

POLITICAL VS. TECHNICAL SUPPORT, CONFLICTING LABELS?

The distinction between a political advisor and a mediation advisor can be confusing, especially when the situation on the ground calls for political input rather than technical support. While it is generally agreed that the work is political, mediation support actors are often categorised as being technical.



What follows is a series of policy options for support actors concerning when to adopt a more political stance and when to embrace the perception that their work is ‘only’ technical.

OPTIONS:

- Recognise that the complexity of political processes means there will be rival actors and that power games will be played. There is a trade-off between adopting a non-partisan ‘technical support’ role on the one hand and broaching political discussions more directly on the other.
- Sometimes you may need to label your political work as technical. This allows you to keep on a technical mask, one that is generally perceived as non-threatening and uncontroversial. This can be useful both towards envoys and his/her teams, as well as to other departments within one’s organisation (i.e. political desks). However, be aware that branding yourself as technical, may create a stream of purely technical requests.
- If a peace process is already highly institutionalised, be prepared to follow an already well-established pattern where support that thinks outside the box may not be appreciated. If the process is newly set up, then you may be expected to think more creatively/step beyond the technical role.
- As a mediation support adviser, you can be a “political adviser plus”. Give tactical insights with strategic intent and a strategic direction.
- Reflect on whether ‘mediation support’ is the best way to brand the type of support you offer. Would envoys be more receptive to, and have their attention drawn to, offers of ‘peace process support’ or ‘mediation advice’? You may also let go of the label completely and focus on the support you can offer. That may cause you to explain yourself differently per person.

COMMUNICATION:

A DISCONNECT BETWEEN SUPPLY AND DEMAND

A communication disconnect takes place when envoys feel that they do not receive the support they want, and mediation support experts feel that the support they offer is not appreciated enough.



The disconnect can be addressed in a number of ways, some which may merely require a subtle change in approach. There can be many ways to package support, what follows is a series of policy options for support actors who find themselves in a similar situation.

OPTIONS:

- Acknowledge and accept that people at the top of their institution do not always know what kind of support is available. For issues not directly linked to a negotiation/mediation process, envoys may end up looking for help elsewhere instead of accessing expertise in-house.
- Constantly explain what you are about. Keep doing the outreach as if the mediation support team is a novelty in the organisation. In offering support, rather than saying 'we can offer a, b & c' adopt the stance 'how can we help'. Yet be aware that you may need to insert some expectation management.
- Cultivate champions in your system who get what mediation support is and who can communicate to the envoys well on what you provide.
- Analyse the reasons that underlie the high degree of secrecy and confidentiality, to then demonstrate to the envoy that you understand their concern. Practice 'strategic patience' and seek to raise issues at the right time and in the right place. It might be possible to discuss more confidential issues in private or informal settings rather than in larger formal or public meetings. Have the confidence to say, 'I cannot do my job if you do not share sufficiently with me'.
- Talk to the envoy's closest advisors. Knowing what the other advisors are thinking makes it easier to offer the appropriate kind of help.

TAILORED, FLEXIBLE SUPPORT: BROADEN THE MENU AND BUILD BRIDGES BETWEEN LEVELS, ACTORS AND PHASES

Envoys are looking for support that goes beyond the conventional service offers and that encompasses innovative categories of expertise. There are many sources that support experts can access and draw inspiration from. Many national and international actors are present in conflict settings, often pursuing different, and sometimes competing, agendas with different time scales and constituencies.



Envoys need help to understand the wider picture and ensure they build on the successes and failures of previous engagements. Here are a series of recommendations for support actors on how to provide the right kind of help.

OPTIONS:

- Think carefully about your audience when developing services. Not all envoys work as lead mediators. More mediators may be required for a peace process, and envoys sometimes work as ‘support envoys’ for others. As a consequence, some mediators are not in charge of their own processes.
- The target of support can vary. It can be the envoy’s team or the envoy him/herself. If it is difficult to reach the mediator him/herself, mediation support actors should focus on approaching/training the person closest to the mediator.
- Be timely, be available and be brief. Fast support is important, such as being able to call a hot-line and get answers within hours. Brevity of the input is equally essential as the wealth of available information on different solutions can be overwhelming.
- Use your access to or become a system insider, i.e. those who know the institutions inside out, its resources and assets and how to leverage them. System insiders can map out relevant channels and expertise and help envoys use the know-how already available and prevent reinventing the wheel.
- Use local advisors, people who are intimately aware of traditional and alternative conflict resolution approaches, to help generate creative ideas and locally acceptable methods. They can also offer a channel to an elite layer of the local constituency, helping spread the envoy’s message further than just his immediate team.

STRATEGY DEVELOPMENT:

DO NOT ASSUME THAT AN ENVOY HAS A STRATEGY IN PLACE FOR THE PEACE PROCESS, AND WHEN THERE IS ONE, THAT IT HAS THE NECESSARY POLITICAL BACKING

This problem is more prevalent than one might expect – and it is particularly hard to help an envoy when it is unclear where s/he wants to get to. But strategy does not necessarily need to be a meta-strategy for resolving the conflict in its entirety. It may be appropriate to focus only on one specific issue.



This calls for a nuanced understanding of strategy development; figuring out how to help create what the envoy wants. Once there is a strategy in place, envoys may need help to sell it to ensure that their strategy is accepted and supported by all the key stakeholders. Here are some suggestions on what support actors can do to make sure it happens.

OPTIONS:

- When there is no strategy, envoys operate in a reactive rather than proactive manner. Ask questions that allow envoys to think as it is a good way to stimulate engagement on strategy development.
- Think about your own qualities and resources within the team when nobody is pushing for a strategy. Start for example with suggestions for what to aim for in the next six months that get everyone on board and away from their ToRs.
- The closer you are to Track I processes, the harder it becomes to strategize when you are within the team. Instead, look at options to do so with the help of an external or by having someone seconded to the team.
- If an envoy does not have a strategy, see if you can organise a series of workshops, e.g. the first on mediation, one specific on the conflict and then a third that offers support on strategy formation.
- Ask the envoy, what does it take to solve the conflict? What is achievable in the time frame of your mandate? What is your personal objective?

CRITICAL VOICES: TELLING THE UNCOMFORTABLE TRUTHS

Perhaps counter-intuitively when looked at from a hierarchical point of view, but envoys want to hear and benefit from critical voices to inform their thinking, delivered by someone with whom they can have a robust discussion.



This moves well beyond a reactive service provider modality and requires careful consideration of the best option to follow. Critical voices can take several shapes, here are a series of suggestions:

OPTIONS:

- Consider internal practices such as red teaming, i.e. a process designed to detect network and system vulnerabilities and test security by taking an attacker-like approach to system/network/organisation.
- The questions a trusted adviser can ask may be more valuable than offering solutions. Introduce a mentor early on to act as a sounding board throughout the deployment.
- Work via an advisory group made of local advisors. They can act as a sounding board to the envoy on how his/her practices are perceived locally.
- Establish formal peer-to-peer networks of envoys. In-house mediation support entities can broker such exchanges between envoys as an indirect means to meet the demand for critical voices.
- If no one dares to be seen to criticize the mediator, consider finding the right space to approach him/her one-on-one.

TRUST BUILDING: HOW TO ESTABLISH YOURSELF?

It comes as no surprise that envoys only share information with people they trust. And while envoys are generally not in principle opposed to bringing in new people, all too often it is time constraints that prevent envoys from looking for alternatives.



LECTRR

This then requires mediation support actors to explicitly recognise, and devote time, in the pursuit of a range of trust building activities. Here a list of suggestions for support people who want to start engaging in relationship building activities.

OPTIONS:

1. Envoys often do not trust HQ and expect it to have a hidden agenda. Seek to bridge the gap between HQ and envoys: update HQ and comfort the envoy. When you have established a relationship with the envoy, bring it to HQ. For example, by writing a report but giving it to the envoy so s/he can share it with HQ (after filtering it). It shows the envoy s/he can trust you and connects them to HQ.
 2. Be aware that there may be gender or other identity-based issues around building a personal relationship with the envoy. Unfortunately, it can still happen that as a young woman you may for example be more challenged in getting a substantive role, or quickly be categorized as a notetaker. It is key to build allies to be able to tackle this.
- Prior to deployment
 1. Create formats that allow networking between senior envoys and others working within their institution who may be able to assist. This should not be overly 'manufactured': organise informal interactions such as drinks and dinners where mid-level professionals engage with the top rung and venues where the talent of juniors can be showcased.
 2. Get an introduction through someone else, after which you can advise, network and build trust.
 - During deployment:
 3. Establish a good working relationship with the key staff. Staff do not want their job to be undermined by someone who just arrived, and they will stop you from doing your job. Comfort key staff. Seek influence, not authority.
 4. Focus on the contribution that mediation support has been asked to make. Especially in complex field mission settings, you are not responsible for the whole mission, you have to focus on what you are called for.

DEPLOYMENTS: ADDED-VALUE OR MANAGERIAL BURDEN?

Just as much as it can be an aid, the deployment of experts to the field can also become a managerial burden for those at the receiving end. Experts coming in, may have expectations that are difficult to satisfy, and envoys end up spending time managing these. This takes away precious time, which could have been used on the process and the parties.



Support actors need to consider the various ways to mitigate the risk of being part of a problem prior to bringing the solution. A failure to do so may risk the entire mediation support enterprise. Below a list of recommendations for support practitioners.

OPTIONS:

- Keep in mind that the challenges associated with managing support within a bureaucratic environment can be a strong deterrent against requesting support in the first place. When offering support, do your best to relieve the bureaucratic burden.
- Keep in mind the principles of dialogue, openness and flexibility. Dialogue is not a phone call to the special assistant of the envoy, it means constantly asking what the envoy's requirements are.
- Provide expertise from afar if possible and relevant, and assess whether know-how can be found within the existing resources. This may be more suitable than going through the whole bureaucratic process of opening a new position.
- Make sure to hire the right people for the right job. Pay more attention to the selection process and procedures. Experts can be tested on different scenarios to see how they respond.
- Rather than deploying an e.g. gender expert for a short period, consider placing them in the team from the beginning. This can take away the perception that such a person is there to criticise or act as an 'activist' on any given topic.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The European Institute of Peace is grateful to the Government of Sweden for its generous financial support which made the Mediation Support Stocktaking project possible.

The project was implemented with the support of the Folke Bernadotte Academy. A special thanks goes to their Senior Advisor on Dialogue and Mediation Eldridge Adolfo.

The European Institute of Peace would like to extend a gracious thank you to everyone who contributed to the project, with a special mention of the following individuals for their valuable time and expertise:

- Álvaro de Soto H.E, Peruvian Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary to the French Republic
- Anna Hess, Programme Officer, Swiss Federal Institute of Technology in Zurich (ETH), Centre for Security Studies
- Anne Casper H.E, U.S. Ambassador to the Republic of Burundi
- Antje Herrberg, Senior Mediation Adviser, European External Action Service (EEAS), formerly MediatEUR
- Antonia Potter Prentice, Director, Alliance2015
- Asif Khan, Chief of the Mediation Support Unit, United Nations Department of Political Affairs (UN DPA)
- Babatunde Afolabi, Senior Programme Manager, Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue (HD)
- Bonaventure Cakpo Guedegbe, Juriste Documentaliste, Peace and Security Department (PSD) of the Commission of the African Union (AU)
- Brendan McAllister, Senior Associate, MediatEUR
- Brown Odigie, Programme Officer on Capacity Building and Mediation, Division for Mediation and Facilitation, Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS)
- Christina Stenner, Mediation Support Officer, Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE)
- Dame Rosalind Marsden, Associate Fellow, Chatham House
- David Lanz, Co-Head Mediation Programme, Swisspeace
- Derek Plumbly Sir, Visiting Professor of Middle Eastern Studies, King's College London

- Ebenezer Asiedu, Head of Division for Mediation and Facilitation, Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS)
- Fernando Gentilini H.E, Managing Director for the Middle East and North Africa, European External Action Service (EEAS), formerly European Union Special Representatives to the Middle East Peace Process
- Franz-Michael Mellbin H.E, Danish Ambassador to the United Arab Emirates and Qatar, formerly European Union Special Representative and Head of Delegation of the European Union to the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, Kabul
- Gerrard Quille, Head of Unit, European Parliamentary Mediation Support Service (EPMS)
- Haile Menkerios H.E., former Head of the United Nations Office to the African Union (UNOAU) and Special Representative to the African Union
- Hans-Christian Mangelsdorf, Head of Department, German Federal Department of Foreign Affairs
- Julian Davis, Team Leader, Middle East Region, United Nations Mediation Support Unit (UN MSU)
- Joel Ahlberg, Specialist Dialogue and Mediation, Folke Bernadotte Academy (FBA)
- Karin Johanson, Head of Unit, Department for Conflict and Humanitarian Affairs, Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Sweden
- Karin Landgren H.E, Non-Resident Fellow, Center on International Cooperation
- Karolina Hedström, Deputy Director, Department for Conflict and Humanitarian Affairs, Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Sweden
- Keira Goldstein, Senior Monitoring & Evaluation Officer, US Bureau of Conflict and Stabilisation Operations (CSO)
- Kenneth Gluck, Deputy Special Representative and Deputy Head of the UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA), Director and Deputy Head of the United Nations Peacebuilding Support Office
- Klara Grenhagen, Desk Officer, Department for Conflict and Humanitarian Affairs, Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Sweden
- Lena Sundh, Chair of the International Commission of Inquiry for Mali, formerly Special Envoy to the Great Lakes at the Swedish Ministry for Foreign Affairs
- Luc Ngowet, Senior Political Officer, United Nations
- Luther Barou Y.Y., Programme Officer, Economic Community of West African States Commission

- Mariame Camara, Programme Officer Mediation, Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS)
- Marie-Joëlle Zahar, Professor of Political Science, Director of the Research Network on Peace Operations, Montreal University
- Matt Waldman, Special Adviser to United Nations Special Envoy for Yemen, Centre for Empathy in International Affairs
- Matthew Tueller H.E, U.S Ambassador to Yemen
- Meeri-Maria Jaarva, Mediation Support Officer, Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE)
- Michael Doyle, formerly European External Action Service (EEAS)
- Michael Keating, Executive Director European Institute of Peace, formerly United Nations Secretary-General's Special Envoy for Somalia
- Ngozi Amu, Chief of the Research and Analysis Unit, United Nations Office for West Africa
- Nicholas "Fink" Haysom H.E, Special Representative for Somalia and Head of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Somalia, formerly United Nations Secretary-General's Special Envoy for Sudan and South Sudan.
- Nicole Providoli, Mediation Advisor, Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs
- Pieter C. Feith, Senior Advisor, European Institute of Peace, formerly European Union Special Representative and International Civilian Representative in Kosovo
- René van Nes, Head of Conflict Prevention and Mediation Support (acting), Integrated Approach for Security and Peace, Deputy Secretary General CSDP and crisis response, European External Action Service (EEAS)
- Roland Kobia, EU Special Envoy to Afghanistan, European External Action Service (EEAS)
- Roxana Cristescu, Head of Eurasia Programme, Crisis Management Initiative
- Sebastian Dworack, Head of International Capacity Development, Zentrum für Internationale Friedenseinsätze (ZIF)
- Sharon Morris, formerly US Bureau of Conflict and Stabilization Operations (CSO)
- Sigrid Kaag H.E, Minister for Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation of the Netherlands, formerly United Nations Special Coordinator for Lebanon
- Sofia Karlsson, Department for Conflict and Humanitarian Affairs, Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Sweden

- Sofia Zitouni, Senior Dialogue and Peace Mediation Officer, Folke Bernadotte Academy (FBA)
- Sonya Reines-Djivanides, Executive Director, European Peacebuilding Liaison Office (EPLO)
- Talia Wohl, Mediation Support Officer, Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe
- Teresa Whitfield, Officer in Charge, United Nations Policy and Mediation Division
- Thania Paffenholz, Director, Inclusive Peace & Transition Initiative
- Tomas Henning, Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), formerly European External Action Service (EEAS)
- Tore Hattrem H.E, Secretary-General of the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, formerly Ambassador-designate to the United Nations
- Umberto Tavalato, Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation of the United Arab Emirates, formerly Office of the Deputy Secretary General for Political Affairs, EEAS
- Wolf-Dietrich Heim H.E, Special Representative of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) Chairperson-in-Office for the Transdniestrian Settlement Process
- Youssef Mahmoud H.E, Senior Adviser, International Peace Institute

EIP TEAM

- Martin Griffiths, formerly Executive Director at European Institute of Peace
- Stine Lehmann-Larsen, Director Mediation, Policy & European Relations
- Ingrid Magnusson, Policy Officer
- Guy Banim, Advisor
- Patrick Gavigan, Senior Advisor
- Anouk van den Akker, Programme Assistant
- Gabriele Tallone, Programme Assistant

A DISTINCT MENTION GOES TO LECTRR
AND HANS BUYING FROM COMICHUSE,
FOR THEIR PATIENCE AND CREATIVITY
IN TRANSLATING OUR INSIGHTS INTO
CARTOONS.

READINGS AND LINKS

How to strengthen the quality of mediation?

By Stine Lehmann-Larsen

<http://www.eip.org/en/news-events/how-strengthen-quality-mediation>

Ten years of mediation support – where do we stand today?

By Stine Lehmann-Larsen

<http://www.eip.org/en/news-events/ten-years-mediation-support-%E2%80%93-where-do-we-stand-today>

Five things to read about mediation

By Anouk van den Akker and Ingrid Magnusson

<http://www.eip.org/en/news-events/five-things-read-about-mediation>

A new pathway to power: How to fast-track women's participation in peace processes

By Ingrid Magnusson and Antonia Potter Prentice

<http://www.eip.org/en/news-events/new-pathway-power-how-fast-track-women%E2%80%99s-participation-peace-processes>

What do mediators expect from mediation support?

By EIP's Mediation Quality Programme

<http://www.eip.org/en/news-events/what-do-mediators-expect-mediation-support>

Mind the Gap: How can policy be put into practice?

By EIP's Mediation Quality Programme

<http://www.eip.org/en/news-events/mind-gap-how-can-policy-be-put-practice>

Why it's hard to change the behaviour of a mediator - and why we should keep trying

By Arvid Hallberg

<http://www.eip.org/en/news-events/why-its-hard-change-behaviour-mediator-and-why-we-should-keep-trying>

How mediators help us improve mediation support

By Stine Lehmann-Larsen and Andreas Müllerleile

<http://www.eip.org/en/news-events/how-mediators-help-us-improve-mediation-support>

Demystifying mediation: impressions from a retreat with senior envoys

By Stine Lehmann-Larsen and Lucas van de Vondervoort

<http://www.eip.org/en/news-events/demystifying-mediation-impressions-retreat-senior-envoys>

What support does a mediator need for a peace process? Key takebacks on effective mediation support

By Stine Lehmann-Larsen and Ingrid Magnusson

<http://www.eip.org/en/news-events/what-support-does-mediator-need-peace-process-key-takebacks-effective-mediation-support>

Local solutions, critical friends, and telling good stories – impressions from an EIP retreat

By Stine Lehmann-Larsen and Ingrid Magnusson

<http://www.eip.org/en/news-events/local-solutions-critical-friends-and-telling-good-stories-%E2%80%93-impressions-eip-retreat>

Effectively Supporting Mediation – Developments, Challenges, and Requirements

By Stine Lehmann-Larsen

<https://www.hdcentre.org/publications/effectively-supporting-mediation-developments-challenges-and-requirements/>

European Institute of Peace (EIP)

Rue des Deux Eglises 25

1000 Brussels

Belgium

www.eip.org

info@eip.org

