



AGENCY FOR
PEACEBUILDING



ITALY AND PEACE MEDIATION

Agency for Peacebuilding

May 2024

ABOUT THE AGENCY FOR PEACEBUILDING

The Agency for Peacebuilding (AP) is a think-and-do organisation committed to bridging the gap between research and practice in peacebuilding.

AP aims to contribute to more peaceful and just societies by preventing and transforming violent conflict and creating spaces for dialogue and cooperation across sectors and divides. AP's vision is of a world where conflicts can be transformed without violence and where peace can be promoted through inclusive, innovative, and sustainable means.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

The report was written by Bernardo Venturi and Mariachiara Giaccai. The authors wish to thank Lamberto Zannier, Bernardo Monzani, Mikhail Silvestro Sustersic, and Sara Giulia Buccafusca for their valuable comments and support in finalising the research. The authors also thank all the interviewees for their availability.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This report has been realised with the support of the Analysis, Programming Statistical and Historic Documentation Unit - Directorate General for Public and Cultural Diplomacy of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation according to Art. 23-bis of Presidential Decree 18/1967. The views expressed in this report are solely those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation.



Ministero degli Affari Esteri
e della Cooperazione Internazionale

Photo description: Headquarters of the Ministry of External - Rome – Italy (Credit: Wikimedia, 2014).

Updated version on 29/05/2024.

www.peaceagency.org

TABLE OF CONTENTS

FOREWORD	4
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	6
INTRODUCTION	8
PART 1. The transformation of peace mediation	10
1.1 Mediation between old concepts and recent operationalisations	10
1.2 Peace Mediation at a Crossroads	15
PART 2. Rise and role of the mediation support structures	21
2.1 The rise of mediation support structures	21
2.2 Models of States' Mediation Support	23
2.3 States' mediation support: who leads?	24
PART 3. Italy and peace mediation	32
3.1 Italy's foreign policy: what role for peace and mediation?	32
3.2 Institutional capabilities for peace mediation	33
3.3 Italian civil society and peace mediation	34
3.4 Toward an Italian Mediation Support Structure?	34
RECOMMENDATIONS	37

FOREWORD

The historical period in which we are living is being defined by the increasing complexity of the international political context and by profound changes in the nature of conflicts. This situation has made crisis prevention and management more challenging, requiring an in-depth reflection on the effectiveness of the instruments available. In this context, a debate on mediation and the need to make it more effective has begun: mediation will indeed be a fundamental tool for preventing the emergence and spread of conflicts in the near future.

The analysis of recent conflicts reveals an extremely diverse landscape. Many have a hybrid nature. They are often linked to domestic issues and to the specific structure of states' societies. More and more, conflicts are also fuelled by the intervention of external actors, who are driven by their own specific interests. Therefore, today's conflicts require specific and in-depth training for mediators, who must have the ability to activate multifunctional teams and interact with a wide range of interlocutors, who can be capable of contributing to the resolution of specific issues or, in some cases, influencing the parties directly involved in the conflict.

It is often necessary to devise complex strategies, involving active outreach to external actors and including initiatives to address specific issues, such as the lack of societal integration or the impact of the role of international crime, which may have an impact on the conflict itself.

Moreover, the return of an environment dominated by geopolitical rifts has become a serious obstacle to initiatives aimed at encouraging direct engagement between the parties at the negotiating table, and it requires careful preparation with long-distance dialogue, where the mediator represents the main channel for dialogue.

In such situations, it is essential that a mediator carves an autonomous and proactive role, and acts, as much as possible, as an attentive listener, with a good understanding of the parties' perceptions and needs, in order to identify areas of potential progress. In this scenario, the mediator can fully play his or her role as an impartial facilitator.

These reflections are the main thrust behind the creation of the "Group of Friends of Mediation", an informal ministerial-level initiative initiated within the United Nations (UN), which is being co-chaired by Finland and Türkiye. Similar initiatives in support of mediation have been registered across other international and sub-regional organisations - including the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in

Europe (OSCE) - and have led to the creation of mediation support structures within their respective secretariats. These structures are modelled based on those operating in countries that have traditionally made mediation one of their foreign policy priorities.

This rethinking and broadening of the role of international mediation represents a great opportunity also for Italy, which, thanks to its geographical position, history, and well-developed socio-cultural ties and friendships, is a natural bridge between three continents. Italy also plays a crucial role in Europe, especially in its central and South-Eastern regions. There are significant examples of Italian excellence in this field. For example, Giandomenico Picco, an authoritative diplomat and UN mediator who recently passed away, was universally recognised and applauded for the success of his interventions at the highest level in Iran, Iraq and Lebanon, among many others. Giandomenico's efforts significantly contributed to the prestige of Italian diplomacy.

This is therefore a particularly propitious moment to start reflecting on the need to invest more systematically in the field of mediation in order to prepare a new generation of mediators, and to develop Italy's full potential as an active contributor to the international peace and stability architecture.

*Lamberto Zannier - former Secretary General, OSCE
and Member of AP's Advisory Council*

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The main objective of this publication is to analyse Italy's role in peace mediation in the transforming global context and changing the rules of international mediators. Due to the changing global context and the difficulties in achieving lasting results, peace mediation faces an identity crisis. Six emerging trends deserve close attention: new mediators are emerging and their overall number is increasing; regional organisations are more active in mediation, but with a limited impact; non-governmental actors are gaining more space for manoeuvre; a professionalisation of the sector is in place and some formal mediation support mechanisms have been progressively established in the last 10-15 years; the UN role in peace mediation has been declining; and some UN mediation norms and principles are contested, or, at least, not fully shared.

While personal contacts between high-level politicians remain important, they are no longer sufficient for effective mediation aimed at bringing about fundamental structural change within a conflict. This realisation brought, in the 2000s, several notable changes, with international organisations and states institutionalising different forms of Mediation Support Structures (MSS).

Despite the variety of models and approaches that mushroomed in the last two decades, it is possible to cluster MSSs into the categories: those embedded within foreign ministries, those that act as an external independent entity, or those that use a mixed model of these two approaches. So far, Italy has not invested in MSS but appears well-positioned to strengthen its capacity for peace mediation.

The differences between the various models of MSS depend first on how a state interprets its role as a mediator, which usually depends on its foreign policy trajectories, its geographical and historical position, and the relevance of the state in the context. This paper categorises the states by their experience in establishing and running MSS: *experienced mediators*, *rising stars*, *“new” influentials*, and *newcomers*.

Italy has regularly used diplomacy to advance causes or themes close to its interests or values, although, in these efforts, it has always preferred multilateral approaches. Interestingly enough, Italy has also experienced “hybrid diplomacy”, a synergic action between public institutions and civil society organisations. Overall, Italy has dedicated limited attention to building up specific capacities for peacebuilding and mediation. Yet, At the end of 2022, however, the MFA established a focal point as “Coordinator for mediation capabilities” within the Directorate General for Political Affairs and Security (DGAP).

In this framework, a hybrid model of MSS could represent a reference to develop mediation capacities. This option can support a valuable level of collaboration and integration between the MFA and prominent CSOs. Italy is anchored in rigid and historic alliances (EU and NATO chief among them). In this context, an independent mediation group with a light tie to the MFA could represent an added value.

The paper is structured in three parts. The first part analyses the transformation of peace mediation at the global level. First, it traces the international context and the recent developments in the operationalisation of peace mediation. Then, it analyses six emerging trends in terms of actors, structures, principles, and standards. The second part is specifically dedicated to the rise and role of the mediation support structures. Four areas of work and three models of MSS are defined, while different experienced and less experienced states operating on mediation are scrutinised. The third part is devoted to the role of Italy in peace mediation, considering both the institutional trajectories and the role of non-governmental actors. Finally, the study provides recommendations for Italy on peace mediation.

INTRODUCTION

“They [the parties] are locked in a deadly struggle trying to exterminate each other (...) The miracle is that [mediation] sometimes works.”¹

Peace mediation is not an easy job. Failure is a core part of the job description. Orchestrating a peace agreement takes months or years and it is often far from being successful. Paul Collier and colleagues found that 50 percent of peace agreements reached relapsed into conflict within ten years.² Despite the odds, peace mediation remains both fascinating and necessary.

One of the characteristics of the changing nature of armed conflicts is that often peace agreements do not address the underlying causes of violence. Instead of including long-term conflict resolution, mediation processes often prioritise short-term conflict management. As a consequence, many peace processes have lost their effectiveness.

Due to the changing global context and the difficulties in achieving lasting results, peace mediation faces an identity crisis. New approaches and perspectives are emerging in response to these challenges, but they are far from universally embraced or supported. New and diversified actors are also emerging with an increase in the overall number of mediators. For a long time, there has been Western dominance. However, in the last two decades, the mediation scene has deeply evolved.

Another relevant trend is the professionalisation of peace mediation. While personal contacts between high-level politicians remain important, they are no longer sufficient for effective mediation aimed at bringing about fundamental structural change within a conflict. This realisation brought, in the 2000s, several notable changes, with international organisations and states institutionalising different forms of Mediation Support Structures (MSS). This rise of MSS can be considered part of the growing trend of establishing institutions for global governance.

In this framework, the main objective of this publication is to analyse Italy's role in peace mediation in the transforming global context and changing the rules of international mediators. The analysis could not be timelier. While this publication is being finalised, the Berlin Moot, a high-level conference on peace

¹ Waldman, Matt. 2022. [‘Exploring Mediation Effectiveness’](#), p. 7.

² Collier, Paul, V. L. Elliott, Håvard Hegre, Anke Hoeffler, Marta Reynal-Querol, and Nicholas Sambanis. 2003. *Breaking the Conflict Trap: Civil War and Development Policy*. A World Bank Policy Research Report, World Bank and Oxford University Press, Washington, DC.

mediation is taking place in Berlin. The event – organised by the Berghof Foundation, a German peacebuilding non-governmental organisation (NGO), and supported by the German Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA), as well as other sponsors – represents a signal and a desire to open a new phase in thinking about mediation practice and pave the way to innovative approaches to conflict resolution in Europe and globally. This policy paper, combined with the 6th edition of the Bologna Peacebuilding Forum, which is also dedicated to mediation, are humble attempts to head in the same direction.

The paper is structured in three parts. The first part analyses the transformation of peace mediation at the global level. First, it traces the international context and the recent developments in the operationalisation of peace mediation. Then, it analyses six emerging trends in terms of actors, structures, principles and standards. The second part is specifically dedicated to the rise and role of the mediation support structures. Four areas of work and three models of MSS are defined, while different experienced and less experienced states operating on mediation are scrutinised. The third part is devoted to the role of Italy in peace mediation, considering both the institutional trajectories and the role of non-governmental actors. Finally, the study provides recommendations for Italy on peace mediation.

The research used a predominantly qualitative methodology, while also informed by some quantitative data. The analysis and findings were based on a comprehensive literature review and interviews with key informants. The literature review included official government documents, documents from international organisations, event reports, feasibility studies, policy papers and reports from think tanks and NGOs, and other studies related to peace mediation. The research also built upon previous analysis from AP's report "Italy and Peacebuilding", which was published in 2022. In regard to interviews, a total of 22 were conducted between December 2023 and March 2024, with diplomats, civil servants and members of NGOs. Finally, a focus group discussion was held with Italian experts on mediation.

PART 1. THE TRANSFORMATION OF PEACE MEDIATION

1.1 Mediation between old concepts and recent operationalisations

According to the Global Peace Index, over the last 15 years, the world has become less peaceful, with 2023 representing the thirteenth year in which global peacefulness deteriorated.³ It is evident that conflicts today are more interconnected and complex than ever before. For example, armed conflicts often coincide with the rise of violent extremism, leading to additional human security threats. This is due to the involvement of a wider range of actors, who operate at different levels and by different means. Additionally, the international system is becoming increasingly fragmented, particularly due to deadlock and disagreement at the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) concerning global security issues and conflict management.⁴ Overall, the shift from the unipolar world that emerged in the early 1990's to a multipolar one has weakened the liberal international system.⁵ As a consequence, local and international actors working on peace and security have today more options to understand the international space in an unprecedented way.

This global landscape also affects how mediation processes are conducted and their impact. One of the characteristics of the changing nature of armed conflicts is that often peace agreements do not fully address the underlying causes of violence. Instead of focusing on long-term conflict resolution, mediation processes often prioritise short-term conflict management such as ceasefire or humanitarian access. These measures are often necessary and urgent, but they should be connected to a longer strategy. This short-term approach leads to the re-emergence of tensions shortly after the mediation process is over. Consequently, once a country or society is on a violent path, it becomes increasingly difficult to redirect it towards peace.⁶

³ Institute for Economics & Peace (IEP). 2023. '[Global Peace Index 2023: Measuring Peace in a Complex World](#)'. Sydney.

⁴ Waldman, Matt. 2022. '[Exploring Mediation Effectiveness](#)'.

⁵ Hellmüller, Sara, Jamie Pring, and Oliver P. Richmond. 2020. 'How Norms Matter in Mediation: An Introduction'. *Swiss Political Science Review* 26(4): 345–63.

⁶ De Coning, Cedric, Ako Muto, and Rui Saraiva, eds. 2022. 'Adaptive Mediation and Conflict Resolution: Peace-Making in Colombia, Mozambique, the Philippines, and Syria'. Cham: Springer International Publishing.

A lot has changed in peace mediation, therefore, since the term *peacemaking* was first introduced in the UN Charter⁷ (box 1). The UN has been a prominent institution in peace mediation, mainly through the "good offices" of its Secretary-General. However, despite the UN Charter's definition of mediation as a primary way to resolve international conflicts, it was not until the mid-2000s that a thorough review and analysis of the process of mediation took place. This was in response to the limitations of more forceful international interventions and influenced by the success of Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) methods at the domestic level.⁸

Following the 2005 World Summit, the UN was committed to playing a central role in the prevention and management of violent conflicts, promoting a coherent and integrated approach to the prevention and resolution of armed conflicts and strengthening its capacity to respond promptly to peace mediation efforts.⁹ One of the outcomes of the 2005 World Summit was the call for the Secretary-General to strengthen support for mediation, which led, the following year, to the creation of the Mediation Support Unit (MSU) in the Department of Political Affairs and Peacebuilding (DPPA).

DEFINING MEDIATION

According to *An Agenda for Peace*, peacemaking represents an "action to bring hostile parties to agreement, essentially through such peaceful means as those foreseen in Chapter VI of the Charter of the United Nations."¹⁰ The Charter indeed has foreseen a variety of tools for peacemaking: negotiation, mediation, conciliation, arbitration, and international law mechanisms.

Specifically on **mediation**, the UN launched the *Guidance for Effective Mediation* aiming to foster mediation efforts that are both professional and credible. In the Guidance, mediation is therefore defined as a voluntary process "whereby a third party assists two or more parties, with their consent, to prevent, manage or resolve a conflict by helping them to develop mutually acceptable agreements".¹¹

⁷ Peacemaking is a term present in UN documents but rarely used by international organisations in defining peace mediation. For this reason, the authors of this paper decided to use "peace mediation" as a term easily understandable by a broader public.

⁸ Lanz, David. et al. 2017. '[Understanding Mediation Support Structures](#)'.

⁹ United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) Adoption of the 2005 World Summit Outcome (2005) UN Doc A/60/L.1.

¹⁰ Boutros-Ghali, 1992. 'An Agenda for Peace'. paragraph 20.

¹¹ United Nations. 2012. '[Guidance for Effective Mediation](#)'.

While mediation can be applied in various fields, in this research we refer specifically to **peace mediation** oriented toward areas of potential or ongoing violent crises and conflicts.

In mediation, it is essential to recognise that each conflict has different characteristics, hence, the mediation process must consider the specificities of each setting while ensuring local ownership. Since the definition and application of mediation vary depending on contexts and cultures, mediation must be flexible.

Peace agreements represent another key term in the peace mediation field. Peace agreements are usually defined as formal, publicly available documents that aim to bring the conflict to an end.¹² Peace agreements are designed following an accurate preparation that should consider the previous experiences and agreements, as well as wide discussions with conflicting parties. Peace agreements should be realistic, accurate, and account for the frequent change of dynamics in conflict areas; moreover, peace agreements should outline clear timelines and delineate responsibilities for the parties involved in the implementation phase.¹³

To address various aspects of the conflict situation, mediation can follow different levels of actions or “tracks”: governmental diplomacy (Track I), informal discussions and dialogue among non-state actors (Track II), and grassroots initiatives involving community leaders and civil society organizations (Track III). Alongside these tracks, **multitrack diplomacy** is an approach that involves multiple levels of engagement and multiple actors at the same time going beyond traditional governmental channels. The goal of multitrack diplomacy is to create a comprehensive and inclusive process that addresses the root causes of the conflict and builds sustainable peace.

In July 2011, the General Assembly adopted its first resolution on mediation (UNGA 65/283)¹⁴, calling for the identification of specific criteria to carry it out. The “Group of Friends of Mediation” – which consists of 43 member states of the UN, and seven regional organisations – played a crucial role in the adoption of this resolution, which addresses challenges related to coordination in mediation processes. One of the achievements was the publication of the “Guide for Effective Mediation” in 2012, which remains a point of reference.

¹² The University of Edinburgh. ‘[PA-X: Peace Agreements Database](#)’.

¹³ OSCE. 2012. ‘[Developing Guidance for Effective Mediation - Consultation with Regional, Subregional, and Other International Organization](#)’.

¹⁴ United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) Strengthening the role of mediation in the peaceful settlement of disputes, conflict prevention and resolution (2011) UN Doc A/RES/65/283.

Resolution UNSCR 65/283 provides a systematic approach to mediation, with increased coordination, capacity building, and allocated resources. It highlights the contributions of States, the UN, regional and international organisations, as well as civil society. Notably, it recognises the role of regional organisations and emphasises the need to specifically that women participate in mediation. The resolution encourages leveraging existing mediation capacities and ensuring coherence among various actors involved in mediation efforts. Against this backdrop, the resolution also signals a change in the role of mediators, which has expanded beyond the primary objective of ending violence by assisting conflicting parties to reach a mutually acceptable agreement. Nowadays, mediators can be also responsible for upholding specific norms associated with durable peace agreements, such as promoting human rights, gender equality, and inclusivity.¹⁵ Yet this normative aspect remains controversial, as will be discussed in the second part.

The years following the adoption of this Resolution have seen the progressive emergence of a “doctrine” of mediation and a set of guidelines in different regional organisations. In 2009 the African Union (AU) began to structure its mediation. In 2012, the Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue (HD), a Geneva-based NGO, provided support to the AU to publish standard procedures for mediation support. After different steps, the AU established its MSU in 2016. Other Regional Economic Communities (RECs) such as the Intergovernmental Authority for Development (IGAD) have invested in MSS. IGAD’s own MSU was formally established in 2012, after a High-level Consultative Meeting on Mediation, while the Mediation Facilitation Division (MFD) of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) was established in 2015.¹⁶ In Europe, in 2014, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) developed the Reference Guide on Mediation and Facilitation of Dialogue.

Likewise, the European Union (EU) has engaged in peace mediation as part of its preventive diplomacy actions. However, while the UN and the mentioned RECs have invested in mediating among their members, the EU has focused on mediating as an external part with its own agenda. Since the adoption of the 2009 “EU Concept on Strengthening EU Mediation and Dialogue Capacities”, the EU has assumed a role in various national peace processes, for example in Kosovo and the Philippines. In 2020 the EU developed the first “Peace Mediation Guidelines” as a parallel process to the elaboration of the new Concept of EU Peace Mediation. In 2023, a new updated version of the Guidelines was published. While about 10 years have passed from the first document to the second, it is interesting to note that the two latest versions

¹⁵ Hellmüller, Sara, Jamie Pring, and Oliver P. Richmond. 2020. ‘How Norms Matter in Mediation: An Introduction’. *Swiss Political Science Review* 26(4): 345–63.

¹⁶ Bustamante, Manuel. 2020. [‘The AU and the Drive for Mediation Support’](#). *AFRICA REPORT*.

of the Guidelines have been almost consequential. This new pace gives the sense of a sort of working document able to meet new opportunities and challenges.¹⁷

The 2020 Guidelines aim to translate into practice the EU's core principles in peace mediation and recognises that it is one of the priorities of the European External Action Service (EEAS).¹⁸ In parallel, the 2020 Concept utilised mediation expertise and insights to update the policy framework for EU mediation.¹⁹

The first Guidelines were produced by the Mediation Support Team (MST) of the EEAS following consultations with experts through the "Community of Practice".²⁰ After the first edition in 2019, the Community of Practice has become an annual event to evaluate and implement mediation policies resulting in a close collaboration among non-governmental actors, experts, and institutions.²¹ The 2023 Guidelines have been revised based on feedbacks from practitioners and consultations with the international peacebuilding community and new thematic priorities have been added.²²

Peace Mediation Databases

1

PA-X

The Peace Agreement Database²³ is a project managed by the University of Edinburgh to collect and analyse data on peace agreements. In March 2024, it contained 1959 peace agreements as part of 150 peace processes that unfolded between 1990 and 2022. The database covers peace agreements from various regions, countries or entities, and it is organised based on the type of agreement, conflict level, and date. Furthermore, it offers insights into the content, implementation, and outcomes of peace agreements. The PA-X database also includes tools for visualising the data that are useful resources for researchers, policy-makers, and practitioners.

¹⁷ Agency for Peacebuilding, Research Interview, January 2024.

¹⁸ EEAS. 2020 '[Peace Mediation Guidelines](#)'.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ [EU Community of Practice on Peace Mediation](#). Organised annually since 2019, the EU Community of Practice on Peace Mediation (CoP) is an EU event that convenes international actors, policymakers, practitioners, experts, and representatives of civil society in the field of peace mediation.

²¹ Agency for Peacebuilding, Research Interview, January 2024.

²² In the 2023 Mediation Guidelines, the following thematic priorities have been added: transitional justice, national dialogues, youth, insider mediators, security confidence building measures and ceasefire mediation, engagement with violent extremist actors, humanitarian negotiations and mediation, and electoral dispute resolution.

²³ '[PA-X: Peace Agreements Database - Site](#)'.

2 **United Nations Peacemakers**

The UN Peacemakers database²⁴ is a comprehensive archive of documents related to peace agreements and other materials relevant to peacemaking efforts. It is a valuable reference tool for professionals involved in mediation, negotiation, conflict resolution, and peacebuilding initiatives worldwide. With close to 800 documents available, the database covers a wide range of topics and issues related to peace processes, including formal peace agreements, ceasefire agreements, peacebuilding frameworks, and other related documents. The documents in the database are categorised based on specific criteria such as region, country or territory, conflict type, and date.

3 **Peace Accords Matrix (PAM)**

The Peace Accords Matrix²⁵ has been implemented by the Kroc Institute for International Peace Studies at the University of Notre Dame since 1999. PAM maintains a detailed database of 34 Comprehensive Peace Agreements (CPAs) negotiated between 1989 and 2012, and it includes information on formal peace treaties, ceasefire agreements, and other related documents. The PAM programme uses a specific quantitative methodology to track the progress of peace agreement implementation, and it has the largest existing collection of implementation data on intrastate peace agreements.

1.2 Peace Mediation at a Crossroads

In the current evolving global landscape, peace mediation finds itself at a crossroads. Even if new approaches and perspectives are emerging in order to face today's challenges, they are not yet widespread and supported completely.

Six emerging trends deserve close attention:

- New mediators are emerging and their overall number is increasing;
- Regional organisations are more active in mediation, but with a limited impact;
- Non-governmental actors are gaining more space for manoeuvre;
- A professionalisation of the sector is in place and some formal mediation support mechanisms have been progressively established in the last 10-15 years;
- The UN role in peace mediation has been declining;
- Some UN mediation norms and principles are contested, or, at least, not fully shared.

²⁴ ['UN Peacemaker - site'](#).

²⁵ ['Peace Accords Matrix - Site'](#).

The emergence of new mediators

New and diversified actors are emerging, with the consequence that there are more mediators compared to the past. For a long time, peace mediation has been dominated by Western countries. However, in the last two decades, the mediation context has deeply evolved. Today, countries such as Türkiye, China, Qatar, and Saudi Arabia are remarkably more present as international mediators. Indeed, the main agreements achieved in the last few years did not have the presence – or at least the *leading* presence – of the main mediation powerhouses that have been seen in the past. Mediators such as Norway or Switzerland are still involved in several peace processes. However, they are more frequently supporting than leading.

This process was also described as an *East world shift* in peace mediation²⁶ or as the rise of *illiberal* mediators, highlighting the end of the *liberal order*.²⁷ Besides, other European countries without a tradition in peace mediation (e.g., Germany or Sweden) have been working to define their new role in the sector, as presented in the next part of this paper.

The role of regional organisations

In this framework, regional organisations are more present in peace mediation, with different results and specific approaches. Additionally, regional organisations are often seen as key mediators due to their knowledge of local contexts and swift response capabilities.²⁸ In Africa, regional organisations are often active in peace mediation. For example, IGAD plays an important role in South Sudan and Sudan along the AU; the Southern African Development Community (SADC) is active in Mozambique, while ECOWAS tried to have a role in the Sahelian countries where a coup d'état occurred between 2020 and 2023, yet with limited results due to the contestation of the same organisation. In Asia, Indonesia increased its mediation role (e.g., in Myanmar), also with the support of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). In Eurasia, the OSCE has traditionally mediated in the former Soviet countries, but with a decreasing role due to the Russian full invasion of Ukraine in February 2022.

²⁶ Agency for Peacebuilding, Research Interview, January 2024.

²⁷ From the diversified interviews conducted, it emerged that the *liberal* vs. *illiberal* narrative in international mediation is mainly present among US scholars, while other authors and practitioners were more sceptical in using this terminology despite all acknowledging the ongoing trends and changes.

²⁸ OSCE. 2012. '[Developing Guidance for Effective Mediation - Consultation with Regional, Subregional, and Other International Organization](#)'.

More space for non-governmental actors

Peace mediators are also changing due to the growing engagement of NGOs.²⁹ The increasingly fragmented nature of armed conflicts pushed the need to go more often beyond dominant track-one mediation activities. At the same time, as state actors often feel reluctant to engage with critical actors such as radicalised groups, NGOs play a paramount role.

As a consequence, NGOs, such as the Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue (HD), the Crisis Management Initiative (CMI) - Martti Ahtisaari Peace Foundation, Conciliation Resources or the African Centre for the Constructive Resolution of Disputes (ACCORD) have emerged as some of the most notable mediators deeply involved in formal and informal processes and able to connect the dots from track one to the grassroots level.³⁰ Some NGOs have established structures to facilitate their own mediation efforts, while others have worked to support states and international organisations. The Mediation Support Network (MSN)³¹ was created in 2008 as a global network.³²

It should be also mentioned that mediation organisations rarely mediate, as such. Some interviewees argue that more complex, fragmented conflicts require mediators and mediation organisations to diversify. They may still mediate, but increasingly they will need to orchestrate, manage, persuade, motivate, connect, create, rethink and advise. By this account, mediators need to engage with a wide range of actors, support and assist them, bring them into processes, and help to move things forward over time.

Professionalisation in peace mediation

Another important trend is professionalisation in peace mediation. Most authors agree on the fact that mediation is a professional process that requires training, analysis, and strategies. While personal contact between high-level politicians remains important, they alone are not sufficient for effective mediation aimed at bringing about fundamental structural change.³³

The establishment of the UN Mediation Support Unit has, in particular, contributed to increasing the understanding of the utility of a standing support structure for mediation efforts, and inspired other

²⁹ Some sources referred to NGOs as private diplomacy/initiatives (Agency for Peacebuilding, Research Interviews, January 2024), but this terminology risks confusing civil society organisations (CSOs)/non-profit with the business/private sector.

³⁰ Agency for Peacebuilding, Research Interview, January 2024, and De Coning, Cedric, Ako Muto, and Rui Saraiva, eds. 2022. *Adaptive Mediation and Conflict Resolution: Peace-Making in Colombia, Mozambique, the Philippines, and Syria*.

³¹ MSN currently has 22 member organisations (UN Peacemaker. '[Mediation Support Network](#)').

³² Lanz, David, et al. 2017. '[Understanding Mediation Support Structures](#)'.

³³ United Nations. 2012. '[Guidance for Effective Mediation](#)', and Alvarez, M. et al. 2012. '[Translating Mediation Guidance into Practice: Commentary on the UN Guidance for Effective Mediation by the Mediation Support Network](#)' ed. Mediation Support Network.

international and regional organisations, besides states, to create their own support structures.³⁴ These include countries like Belgium, Finland, Germany, Norway, Sweden, Switzerland, and Türkiye, as presented in the next chapter.

UN declining role in coordinating peace mediation

The UN is currently facing challenges in taking a leading role in mediation. While it played a paramount role in past peace processes in many countries, such as Timor-Leste or Cambodia, today the United Nations is not the lead institution working on mediation in many conflicts. The UN has obtained some rather unknown success in terms of discrete preventive diplomacy – for example during the 2015 Nigerian Elections or in Malawi (2011-12)³⁵ – but has also lost opportunities in conflict-affected countries where the UN Secretary-General or his special envoys have sought to provide mediation and good offices. For instance, the UN is still leading mediation efforts in relation to the conflicts in Cyprus and Western Sahara, but it has failed to make progress in both countries for decades.³⁶ In other contexts, like Ukraine, Syria and Yemen, the UN Secretary-General (UNSG) sought to play a paramount role with his good offices, yet it could not seize political momentum, and many opportunities for the institution to play a role were lost. At the same time, the limitations in the UNSG's efforts also derived from the divisions that have affected the Security Council over the last ten years, as well as the increasingly polarised nature of political debates (both in the Security Council and at the General Assembly) and the loss of legitimacy by traditional global powers like the United States.

These political constraints, or even failures, are in contrast with the already mentioned UN Mediation Unit and its supporting bodies such as the Standby Team of Senior Mediation Advisors and the High-Level Advisory Board. According to the UN Mediation Guidance, the United Nations should play a leading role, while all the other actors should act accordingly and be coordinated by the UN. Yet, this is rarely the case. On the one hand, the UN is often not perceived as an impartial body; on the other, sometimes the UNSG's special envoys are not leading figures in terms of skills or regional competencies, and this creates opportunities for other actors to take the lead and sideline the UN.

³⁴ Lanz, David, et al. 2017. '[Understanding Mediation Support Structures](#)'.

³⁵ Nathan, Laurie, et al. 2018. '[Capturing UN Preventive Diplomacy Success: How and Why Does It Work? | Policy Paper and Case Studies](#)'.

³⁶ Benomar, Jamal. 2023. '[What Happened to the UN's Mediation Abilities?](#)' *PassBlue*.

Contested norms and principles

In terms of principles, some authors highlight how the norms regulating mediation have historically been liberal³⁷, primarily due to the influence of liberal internationalism.³⁸ However, with the end of the liberal order and the emergence of diversified actors, the liberal/illiberal debate could result in limited. Other definitions and categories are needed, such as principled/opportunistic as suggested during a research interview.³⁹ Probably, the best option is to focus on specific principles and to analyse how they are considered or negotiated.

The authors who underline the differences between traditional Western mediators and “new” states, also mentioned that the key point is that the UN has some principles that are not for debate: the UN is obliged to stick to its constitutive norms.⁴⁰ Other scholars and practitioners indicate, however, that the focus should be mainly on reaching an agreement and the parties should be free to choose the mediator.⁴¹ In this perspective, the choice of mediators who impose limited conditionalities could be more attractive. In the same vein, some state actors might prefer to engage in mediation with groups who they see as closer to them in terms of culture, language or values. This could be the case in particular when mediating with armed groups, as it was for Qatar with the Taliban.

Looking at the principles related to peace mediation, is crucial to give specific consideration to the concept of inclusivity. The literature shows that an inclusive peace process has more chances to last compared to non-inclusive processes.⁴² The UN has, indeed, widely remarked on how women and youth should be included in peace processes. The adoption of UNSCR 1325 (2000), as well as later resolutions on the so-called Women, Peace and Security (WPS) Agenda, have made explicit the need, even the obligation, to ensure that women specifically are part of peace processes. Yet, some actors, continue to be reluctant to promote the participation of women mediators. At the same time, women are proven to be able to reach actors whom male mediators often cannot, and to add legitimacy to both mediation proceedings and their outcomes. For some experts, the involvement of women is therefore not negotiable, while for others halting the fighting could be the priority, even if a non-inclusive process has limited chances to last.

³⁷ Liberal order refers to a set of global, rule-based, relationships based on political liberalism as emerges after the second world war.

³⁸ Hellmüller, Sara, Jamie Pring, and Oliver P. Richmond. 2020. ‘How Norms Matter in Mediation: An Introduction’, and Bercovitch, Jacob, and Ayse Kadayifci. 2002. ‘Exploring the Relevance and Contribution of Mediation to Peace-Building’, and De Coning, Cedric, Ako Muto, and Rui Saraiva, eds. 2022. *Adaptive Mediation and Conflict Resolution: Peace-Making in Colombia, Mozambique, the Philippines, and Syria*.

³⁹ Agency for Peacebuilding, Research Interview, January 2024.

⁴⁰ Agency for Peacebuilding, Research Interview, January 2024.

⁴¹ EEAS. 2020 ‘[Peace Mediation Guidelines](#)’.

⁴² See, for example: Roger Mac Ginty and Oliver P. Richmond "Inclusive Peace Processes: Learning from Complex Cases", *International Peacekeeping*, Volume 18, Issue 2, 2011; and Thania Paffenholz and Nicholas Ross, "[Inclusive Peace Processes: International Best Practice and Emerging Trends](#)", United Nations University Centre for Policy Research, 2016.

Some of the limitations associated with inclusive mediation relate to the number of actors involved in the process and its timeframe. For example, in certain UN-led mediation processes, the UNSG's special envoys operate under a strict mandate that has limited duration, often with dense schedules. The challenge arises when attempting to include a diverse and large number of people for a fully inclusive process, which may not easily align with the financial and time constraints under which some institutions operate.

Furthermore, while there is recognition that inclusive mediation encompasses not only women but also other marginalised groups, there appears to be a lack of commitment to incorporating other categories in practical implementation. At the institutional and political levels, for instance, there is a lack of promoters for inclusion beyond women.

Another principle is in terms of local or national ownership. To establish consent and credibility, as well as ensure peace agreements that can be implemented, it is crucial to involve local actors in mediation processes.⁴³ To achieve acceptability and ownership, as well as gain international support, mediation processes, and peace agreements also, should be co-designed with experts in local and international normative frameworks.⁴⁴ However, many domestic actors lack control over mediation processes, leading to third-party mediation being associated with conflict resolution processes that are perceived as being imposed by more powerful actors.⁴⁵

⁴³ OSCE. 2012. '[Developing Guidance for Effective Mediation - Consultation with Regional, Subregional, and Other International Organization](#)'.

⁴⁴ Alvarez, M. et al. 2012. '[Translating Mediation Guidance into Practice: Commentary on the UN Guidance for Effective Mediation by the Mediation Support Network](#)' ed. Mediation Support Network.

⁴⁵ De Coning, Cedric, Ako Muto, and Rui Saraiva, eds. 2022. *Adaptive Mediation and Conflict Resolution: Peace-Making in Colombia, Mozambique, the Philippines, and Syria*.

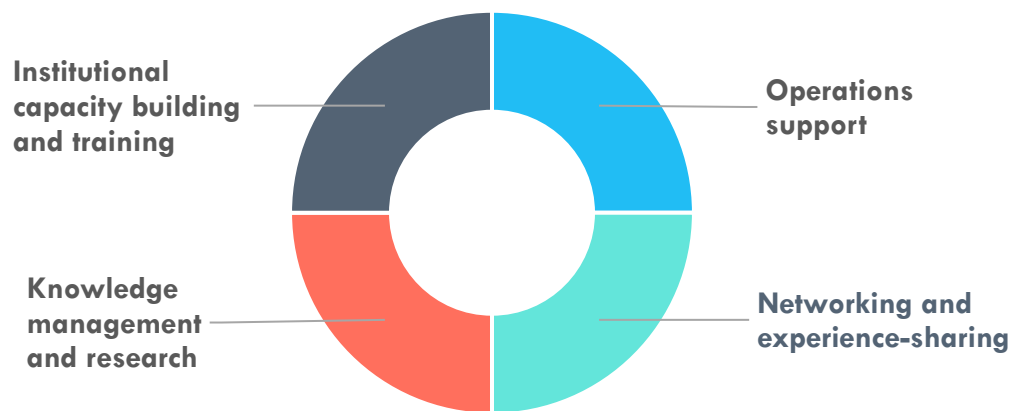
PART 2. RISE AND ROLE OF THE MEDIATION SUPPORT STRUCTURES

2.1 The rise of mediation support structures

In the 2000s, several international organisations and states institutionalised different forms of Mediation Support Structures (MSS).⁴⁶ The rise of MSS can be considered as part of the growing trend of establishing institutions for global governance.⁴⁷ The research centre Swisspeace analysed the emergence of MSS as the result of a multifaceted process: “MSS materialised through the interplay of political interests, operational needs, and discourses emphasising that professionalisation is required for effective peacemaking”.⁴⁸

This section analyses the main structural models of MSS and the core practices emerged at the national level. Some regional organisations are mentioned, but the main attention is devoted to how these structures operate at the national level, in order to better understand prevailing models and offer comparative analysis.

Figure 1: Four areas of mediation support⁴⁹



⁴⁶ The MSSs are also defined as Mediation Support Units (MSU), for example the UN Mediation Support Unit. MSS seems the main definition at the national level, but the expression does not present substantial differences (Lanz, David, et al. 2017. '[Understanding Mediation Support Structures](#)').

⁴⁷ Lanz, David, et al. 2017. '[Understanding Mediation Support Structures](#)'.

⁴⁸ Ibid., p.30.

⁴⁹ Adapted from Stine Lehmann-Larsen, '[Effectively Supporting Mediation: Developments, Challenges and Requirements](#)', Oslo Forum Papers, Geneva: Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue, 2014.

The role of Mediation Support Structures consists of “the professionalisation of mediation as a method-based approach; this goes hand in hand with training, research, networking, and operational support for ongoing mediation processes”.⁵⁰ The MSS aims to improve capabilities and to implement mediation as a foreign policy instrument. In general, three main clusters of activities are considered to fall under the purview of MSS: (i) conduct training for partners, conflict parties, diplomats, or other mediators; (ii) generate knowledge on peace mediation; and (iii) develop direct or indirect support for mediation processes. This support can be through experts, mediators, instruments, or financial support to a specific partner. In all cases, the MSSs are separated from the geographic desks or units that, in ministries of foreign affairs, usually deal with bilateral issues with a given country.⁵¹

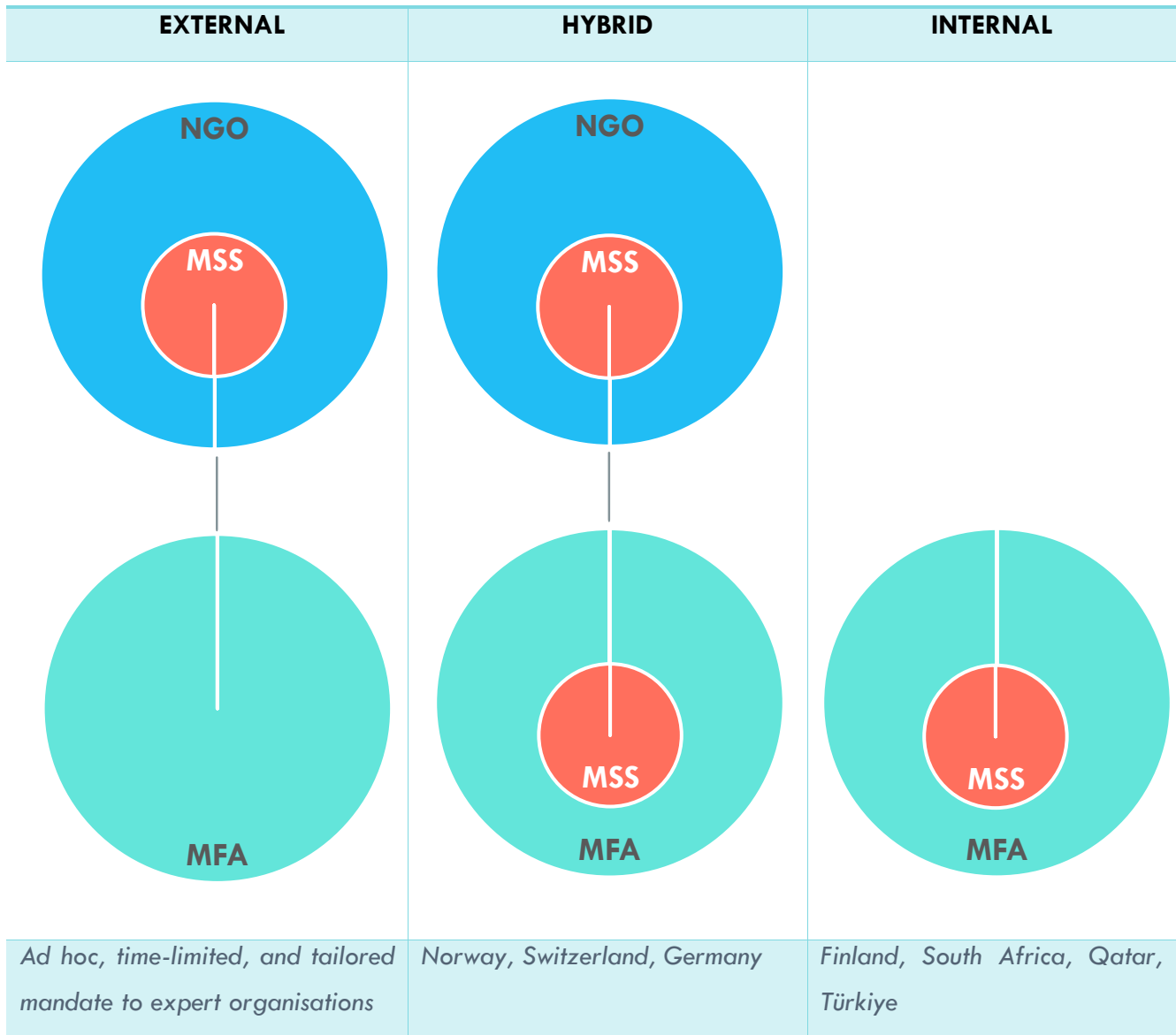
⁵⁰ Mason, Simon Jonas Augusto, and Mukondeleli Mpeiwa. 2023. ‘[The Role of Mediation Support Structures](#)’, p.1.

⁵¹ González Bestelo, Mabel, and et. al. 2022. *La Mediación Internacional En Conflictos. Retos y Oportunidades Para España*. IECAH.

2.2 Models of States' Mediation Support

Despite the variety of models and approaches that mushroomed in the last two decades, it is possible to cluster MSSs into the categories: those embedded within foreign ministries, those that act as an external independent entity, or those that use a mixed model of these two approaches.⁵²

Figure 2: Mediation Support Structure Models⁵³



⁵² Mason, Simon Jonas Augusto, and Mukondeleli Mpeiwa. 2023. [‘The Role of Mediation Support Structures’](#).

⁵³ Adapted from Mason, Simon Jonas Augusto, and Mukondeleli Mpeiwa. 2023. [‘The Role of Mediation Support Structures’](#).

MSS within the Foreign Ministry are politically exposed but can usually guarantee more continuity in terms of staff and resources. Finland represents the main example of this centralised mediation support structure.

External entities – such as NGOs, foundations, universities, or platforms – usually benefit from some degree of independence and have more room for manoeuvre, for example, to engage with actors that the governments cannot involve directly. This model is not represented by a single country. Instead, the external mediation structure is more *ad hoc*, time-limited and tailored to specific contexts when a country gives a mandate to expert organisations that provide specific and more punctual support for a planned, or ongoing mediation process.

The hybrid model can leverage the benefits of the two approaches, at least in theory. Therefore, it is the most common, with examples found in Switzerland, Norway and Germany. For this reason, some analyses present hybrid structures more adapted to dealing with characteristics of the current conflicts, which feature multiple parties, and fragmentation.⁵⁴

Using this framework of analysis, it's possible to see how the main states active in peace mediation utilise their power and their MSS. Here they are divided according to their experience in mediation structures.

2.3 States' mediation support: who leads?

The differences between the various models of MSS depend first on how a state interprets its role as a mediator, which usually depends on its foreign policy trajectories, its geographical and historical position, and the relevance of the state in the contexts.⁵⁵ Instead of presenting the different MSSs based on their model, this section provides a bird's eye view dividing the states by their experience in establishing and running MSS: *experienced mediators*, *rising stars*, *“new” influentials* and *newcomers*.

⁵⁴ González Bestelo, Mabel, and et. al. 2022. 'La Mediación Internacional en Conflictos. Retos y Oportunidades Para España'. IECAH.

⁵⁵ Mason, Simon Jonas Augusto, and Mukondeleli Mpeiwa. 2023. '[The Role of Mediation Support Structures](#)'.

2.3.1 The experienced mediators

Norway

Peace mediation and international conflict resolution are key components of Norway's foreign policy.⁵⁶ The best-known example of Norway's mediation prowess might still be the 1993 Oslo Accords, which were initiated through secret channels facilitated by Norwegian mediators with connections in Palestine and with Israeli academics. The peace domain in foreign policy is supported by large and long-term investments resulting in flexible and rapid approaches, which can be enacted across the humanitarian, development and peacebuilding fields.

The hybrid nature of the Norwegian MSS model has allowed for adaptability, enabling Norway to exert direct influence and access to peace processes that would typically lie beyond its direct involvement. Some of the MSS's partners comprise independent research institutions that collaborate synergically with the government to conduct policy-relevant research. The Norwegian Centre for Conflict Resolution (NOREF) represents the main one, while the Norwegian MFA works also with the Peace Research Institute Oslo (PRIO) and the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC). NOREF started as a specialised peacebuilding agency, but over the years the organisation has moved into the more specific area of mediation. NOREF's independence has ensured great flexibility in its work while nurturing the trust of the government in its mediation efforts.⁵⁷ In Norway, the MSS participates in activities focused on providing direct assistance to peace processes, along with capacity building and knowledge management initiatives, such as those found in the Oslo Forum, which fosters experience sharing and advanced networking opportunities.⁵⁸

Switzerland

Mediation plays a significant role in Switzerland's foreign policy, evolving from sporadic engagements to a full-fledged peace policy. Switzerland was one of the first countries to promote structured mediation and systematically support the UN efforts. Indeed, it has a long-standing tradition of promoting peace as part of its foreign policy, which intensified after the end of the Cold War. The country's engagement in over 30 peace processes across more than 20 countries underscores its commitment to mediation. Among the most notable engagements of the Swiss government is its involvement in the negotiations that led to the signing of the comprehensive peace agreement between the Government of Colombia and the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) in 2016.⁵⁹

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Agency for Peacebuilding, Research Interview, January 2024.

⁵⁸ Mason, Simon Jonas Augusto, and Mukondeleli Mpeiwa. 2023. '[The Role of Mediation Support Structures](#)'.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

Switzerland's position in foreign policy is characterised by its long-standing tradition of humanitarian work and good offices. With a consensus-based democracy that aligns well with the principles of mediation, Switzerland has established itself as a respected mediator on the international stage. Additionally, Switzerland's neutral status contributes to its acceptability as a mediator, allowing it to facilitate dialogue and negotiation processes effectively and to be perceived as impartial and trustworthy by conflicting parties.⁶⁰

Switzerland has developed a hybrid mediation support structure that involves collaboration between governmental and non-governmental actors. The Mediation Support Project (MSP), established in 2005, exemplifies this approach, bringing together entities like the Center for Security Studies (CSS), Swisspeace, and the Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs (FDFA). The core characteristics of the Swiss hybrid model include a broad conceptualisation of mediation support encompassing training, operational support, networking, and research, and a dual focus on supporting Swiss-led mediation efforts while also contributing by offering expertise and supporting mediation processes led by others. In this framework, research and training play crucial functions. The former serves as a foundation for understanding and addressing various aspects of conflicts, while the latter aims to enhance the skills and capabilities of international diplomats, not only the Swiss ones, engaged in peace mediation.⁶¹

2.3.2 The Rising Starts

Finland

Since the early 2000s and inspired by Martti Ahtisaari⁶², Finland's involvement in peace mediation has encompassed endorsing the policies of the UN and the OSCE in line with its overall multi-lateral foreign policy. Among these international institutions, Finland played a leading role alongside Türkiye in the so-called “Group of Friends of Mediation” marking a significant stride in strengthening peace mediation.⁶³ The leading role of the Finnish president in foreign policy has traditionally allowed Finland to have a clear political will on mediation in addition to its technical expertise. Furthermore, the Finnish MFA programmatic partnerships with various national organisations specialised in peace mediation, as well as its stable funding, indicate the intention to engage strategically in mediation, rather than merely as a

⁶⁰ Agency for Peacebuilding, Research Interview, February 2024.

⁶¹ Mason, Simon Jonas Augusto, and Mukondeleli Mpeiwa. 2023. [‘The Role of Mediation Support Structures’](#).

⁶² Martti Ahtisaari (1937-2023) was a former UN diplomat, a Finnish statesman and a renowned peace mediator in international conflicts. Upon leaving office of President of Finland, he founded the Crisis Management Initiative in 2000. In 2008 he was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for “his important efforts, on several continents and over more than three decades, to resolve international conflicts”.

⁶³ OSCE. 2012. [‘Developing Guidance for Effective Mediation - Consultation with Regional, Subregional, and Other International Organization’](#).

donor.⁶⁴ Usually, partners of the MFA work on invitations for mediation efforts in tracks 1.5 and 2 involving various local actors. Geographical priorities are therefore not the first element to be considered in the mediation effort, even though traditionally Finland has a longstanding partnership with the AU in facilitating the coordination of activities and networks aimed at supporting mediation efforts.

Even if mediation for peace has been a foreign policy priority since 2007, it was not until 2021 that Finland established a mediation support unit, the Centre for Peace Mediation aimed at functioning as a central hub for planning, developing, and coordinating the ministry's peace mediation endeavours. In the last few years, the MSS has grown and changed rapidly⁶⁵ and it is now composed of nine career diplomats and one support expert. Its efforts are now supported through a dedicated line in the MFA's budget.

Responding to just one directory, the MSS is part of a clear hierarchical structure within the ministry. Like in any other unit in the ministry, there is a four-year rotation which is beneficial for sharing experiences. However, since peace mediation is highly specialised, the rotation demands frequent training to align personnel's competencies to the scope of the unit. Finally, the Finnish MFA has a secondment programme for its diplomatic staff, which allows cooperation with some organisations like the OSCE active in peace mediation.

Germany

The role of mediation in Germany has evolved significantly in recent years. While traditionally it has not been a visible actor in the field of mediation, Germany has increasingly recognised the importance of mediation in conflict resolution and peacebuilding. This shift has been driven by a more proactive foreign policy stance and a growing realisation of the need for effective crisis prevention and peace promotion efforts. Linked to this development, and perhaps contributing to it, is the fact that Germany has demonstrated a special interest in advancing the Women, Peace and Security Agenda and has actively engaged civil society and academic partners in its mediation initiatives.⁶⁶

The conference "Germany as a Mediator," held in 2014, represented a milestone in the implementation of a mediation support structure for Germany. By shedding light on mediation support structures in other countries, the conference created momentum and raised awareness about the importance of having a dedicated Mediation Support Structure (MSS). The Initiative Mediation Support Deutschland (IMSD) was

⁶⁴ Agency for Peacebuilding, Research Interview, February 2024.

⁶⁵ Mason, Simon Jonas Augusto, and Mukondeleli Mpeiwa. 2023. ['The Role of Mediation Support Structures'](#).

⁶⁶ Ibid.

then established alongside the creation of a specific division within the German Federal Foreign Office (FFO). The division focuses on four main activity lines in mediation support: knowledge generation, training courses for German diplomats, management of mediation-related budgets, and cooperation with other states. IMSD operates in alignment with the activities of the FFO and plays a crucial role in coordinating mediation support efforts between government and civil society actors. This hybrid government-civil society support structure reflects Germany's commitment to enhancing its mediation capabilities and contributing to global peace efforts.

The guiding principles for German mediation include crisis prevention, stabilisation, and peacebuilding measures. Germany values effective multilateralism and recognises the importance of an integrated approach in addressing today's complex crises.⁶⁷ Since 2018 Germany has invested also in building academic capacities related to mediation. Various centres, including the Berghof Foundation, have been involved in research as well as training initiatives.

Canada

Canada, rather than maintaining a consistent and structured unit dedicated to mediation, has relied on *ad hoc* arrangements, establishing temporary structures when opportunities arise and dismantling them afterwards.⁶⁸

In 2009, the Canadian government initiated the Peace and Stabilisation Operations Program (PSOPs) as the central framework for conflict prevention, stabilisation, and peacebuilding efforts in fragile and conflict-affected regions. PSOPs is responsible for providing policy leadership on peace and coordinating the Canadian strategic responses to complex political crises.⁶⁹

The Mediation Support Structure in Canada is divided into geographic and thematic branches. The “peace and stabilisation programme” is one of such branches. The Task Force model, known for its formalised structures and standard operating procedures in decision-making, generally brings together representatives from various geographic and thematic areas and engages with specialised professionals. This model entails collaborations across multiple branches and its advantage lies in the informality it affords, granting a certain degree of flexibility. Yet, the most significant limitation of this model is its lack of clear political guidance, which, in peace mediation processes, is usually required at one point or another. Another drawback is the resource-intensive process of assembling experts in the field on each

⁶⁷ Federal Foreign Office. '[Peace Mediation Framework](#)'.

⁶⁸ Agency for Peacebuilding, Research Interview, January 2024.

⁶⁹ Canada, Global Affairs. 2015. '[Peace and Stabilization Operations Program](#)'. GAC.

occasion and the absence of permanent structures.⁷⁰ The model is nevertheless evolving also in consideration of possible improvements on some political and financial questions and trying to create an identity for the country's efforts related to peace operations.

South Africa

South Africa represents a salient example of peace mediation in Africa. South Africa has played a paramount role in mediating conflicts across Central and Southern Africa, for example in Burundi in the 1990s and in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). Building on this legacy and experience, in the 2000s South Africa increased its capacities in peace operations and in 2015 it established its Mediation Support Unit within the MFA.⁷¹ Government officials also work closely with experienced non-governmental mediation support actors such as the African Centre for the Constructive Resolution of Disputes (ACCORD). In the last few years, mediation has not been a political priority, however, and the MSU has not been fully empowered.⁷² Yet, mediation remains important in terms of visibility and in building South Africa's capacity to engage on international issues as a global actor. For example, South Africa provided its back channels and connections to open the negotiation between Hamas and Israel in November 2023. Also, South Africa's current President, Cyril Ramaphosa, was part of the group of African leaders, representing in total of seven countries, who travelled on a mediation mission to Ukraine and Russia in June 2023.

2.3.3 The “new” influentials

The recent literature on peacemaking widely analyses the role played by emerging mediators, as mentioned in the first part of this paper. Here Türkiye and Qatar are discussed from an MSS perspective. It should be also underlined that historical European mediators are now looking for synergies with these actors. For example, the UN's Group of Friends of Mediation has been initiated and co-led by Finland and Türkiye, while Switzerland as a convening power has cooperated with Qatar in different conflicts in an effort to complement each other.

Türkiye

Starting in the 2000s, Türkiye has made mediation a more central component of its foreign policy, and thus developed a more proactive approach to such efforts.⁷³ Istanbul was engaged in several peace processes starting in Iraq in 2003, yet its most well-known engagement is likely to be the mediation

⁷⁰ Agency for Peacebuilding, Research Interview, January 2024.

⁷¹ Mason, Simon Jonas Augusto, and Mukondeleli Mpeiwa. 2023. [‘The Role of Mediation Support Structures’](#).

⁷² Agency for Peacebuilding, Research Interview, January 2024.

⁷³ Sofos, Spyros. 2022. [‘Turkey as a Mediator’](#). PeaceRep.

between Ukraine and Russia that led to the Black Sea Grain Initiative, in 2022. Türkiye does not have a proper or formal MSS but relies on its diplomacy and the synergic work with the Turkish humanitarian NGOs TİKA (the official development agency) Yunus, the Public Diplomacy Agency, and the Presidency for Turks Abroad and Related Communities.⁷⁴

Furthermore, Türkiye, along with Finland and the then Swiss Presidency of the OSCE established the “Group of Friends of Mediation” (GoF) in March 2014.⁷⁵ Furthermore, Türkiye has mainstreamed mediation training among diplomats. For example, in 2018 Ankara launched the Mediation for Peace Certificate Programme intended for junior diplomats from the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) Secretariat and OIC Member States.⁷⁶

Qatar

Qatar is among the states that emerged as prominent mediators in the 2000s. From US–Taliban talks, to Chad opposition groups, and to the recent role in the ceasefire between Hamas and Israel. During the Israel-Hamas war that erupted in 2023, Qatar has successfully gained a large consensus among differentiated actors maintaining open channels of communication with all actors despite some clear political positions.

In terms of mediation structure, Qatar’s mediation is led by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and/or the Amiri Diwan (the administrative office of the Amir⁷⁷) and its associated advisers, including the National Security Adviser. Since 2016, Qatar also has followed other countries initiating a process of professionalisation through training (including early career diplomats) and new specific roles such as the Special Envoy for Counterterrorism and Mediation in Conflict Resolution.⁷⁸

2.3.4 The Newcomers

In the last few years, additional countries have started to explore if and how to establish an MSS. For instance, **Ireland** strongly advocates for peace mediation in achieving peaceful resolutions to conflicts and it is aligned with the multilateral endeavour to support the UN’s involvement in mediation efforts. Clearly, Ireland has developed expertise following the signing of the Belfast/Good Friday Agreement in 1998, after 30 years of sectarian violence and political stalemate in Northern Ireland.

⁷⁴ Aras, Bülent. 2012. ‘[Turkey’s Mediation and Friends of Mediation Initiative](#)’. Center for Strategic Research.

⁷⁵ Sofos, Spyros. 2022. ‘[Turkey as a Mediator](#)’. PeaceRep.

⁷⁶ Republic of Türkiye Ministry of Foreign Affairs. ‘[Peaceful Resolution of Conflicts and Mediation](#)’.

⁷⁷ The emir of the State of Qatar is the monarch and head of state of the country.

⁷⁸ Whitfield, Teresa (ed.), ‘[Still time to talk: adaptation and innovation in peace mediation](#)’, Accord 30 (London: Conciliation Resources, 2024).

Another country with an interest in peace processes and mediation is **Spain**. In 2022, the Spanish MFA commissioned a study to the *Instituto de Estudios sobre Conflictos y Acción Humanitaria* (IECAH) on the opportunities for Spain to play a greater role in peace mediation. The study found that Spain has been accumulating significant experience in mediation tasks in different crises and contexts. Although Spain does not yet have a MSS, there are several non-governmental organisations specialised in peace processes in the country; moreover, the *Red Española de Mediación* (Spanish Mediation Network) can strengthen its component related to international conflicts.⁷⁹ The study was considered and debated by the MFA and remains a reference for a possible institutionalisation and professionalisation of mediation. Meanwhile, the Spanish Diplomatic School has also established a peace mediation training module for future diplomats.⁸⁰

Rather similar to the Spanish path, in recent years the French institutions and civil society organisations have reflected on the role of **France** in peace mediation. The reflection was officially coordinated by the *Agence française de développement* (AFD), the French development agency. After two workshops attended by different stakeholders in March and May 2023, a report was published in March 2024.⁸¹ The document takes stock of the efforts made by French institutions and stakeholders and highlights how a more systematic and coordinated approach will be needed in the future.

Austria has been also building upon its long-standing tradition of providing platforms for multilateral negotiations and conferences – including the Mediation Facility in the government's 2020–2024 coalition agreement. Also, **Belgium** and **Sweden** are among the states with a growing interest in MSS. The **Italian MFA** is also in an exploratory phase to define a possible MSS as analysed in the next chapter.

Overall, this non-exhaustive list of old and new states committed to peace mediation shows a significant trend in establishing national Mediation Support Structures at the state level. This trend should be carefully considered when both analysing and working on peace processes.

⁷⁹ González Bestelo, Mabel, and et. al. 2022. 'La Mediación Internacional En Conflictos'. Retos y Oportunidades Para España. IECAH.

⁸⁰ Agency for Peacebuilding, Research Interview, January 2024.

⁸¹ Boutillis, Arthur, Girardot, Maguelone et Dillais, Matthieu, 2024. 'Étude sur le concept de médiation dans le champ de la prévention des conflits et de la consolidation de la paix', consolidated version, March 2024.

PART 3. ITALY AND PEACE MEDIATION

3.1 Italy's foreign policy: what role for peace and mediation?

What is Italy's posture in the transforming global landscape on peace mediation? What about Italy's approach to mediation support structures? Firstly, Italian foreign policy has traditionally been centred around three main areas: Europe, the Mediterranean, and transatlantic relations. At the same time, over the last decade, an increasing interest in sub-Saharan Africa has emerged with more connections to the Mediterranean.

Secondly, Italy has tended to maintain a "followership" approach through its participation to the international community preserving or improving its status.⁸² In addition, the Italian MFA often highlights the connection between political interests and international economic and commercial interests at the Ministry. This connection underscores the role of peaceful relations in Italy's interest, as it trades with all regions of the world.

Thirdly, Italy has regularly used diplomacy to advance causes or themes close to its interests or values, although, in these efforts, it has always preferred multilateral approaches. Interestingly enough, Italy has also experienced "hybrid diplomacy", a synergic action between public institutions and civil society organisations. One example is represented by the Italian government's support to the Community of Sant' Egidio for the peace process in Mozambique in the 1990s. Or Italy's championing of freedom of religion at the International Criminal Court⁸³ or the most recent Mediterranean Women Mediators Network (MWMN) launched in 2017. In fact, the MWMN has been promoted by the Italian MFA and implemented by the think-tank *Istituto Affari Internazionali* and the Italian branch of Women In International Security (WIIS Italy).

Overall, Italy has dedicated limited attention to building up specific capacities for peacebuilding and mediation.⁸⁴ Primarily, Italy has dedicated resources to follow some main priorities, originating from the multilateral system. For example, in the past the Italian government has paid attention to specific issues such as demining. In 2010, it also adopted its first National Action Plans (NAP) on the Women, Peace and Security Agenda. The approval of NAPs has been one of the main recommendations for supporting the

⁸² Carati Andrea, Locatelli, Andrea, 2017. 'Cui prodest? Italy's questionable involvement in multilateral military operations amid ethical concerns and national interest', *International Peacekeeping*, 24:1, 2017.

⁸³ Raffaele Marchetti, 'La diplomazia ibrida italiana'. *Come il governo e la società civile cambiano il mondo insieme*, Mondadori, 2017.

⁸⁴ Venturi, Bernardo, Stefano Marinelli. '[Italy and Peacebuilding](#)', Agency for Peacebuilding, May 2022.

national-level implementation of UNSCR 1325. By 2010, nearly 30 countries had already approved their own Plans: by adopting its own Plan, Italy signalled its interest in joining the movement in support of women's empowerment in peace and security and then committed human and financial resources to ensure its continued contribution. Italy's fourth NAP, adopted in 2020, remains in force until 2024 and discussions for the new plan are ongoing.

3.2 Institutional capabilities for peace mediation

Both the Italian MFA and the Italian Agency for Development Cooperation (*Agenzia Italiana per la Cooperazione allo sviluppo*, or AICS) do not have a specific structure or unit dedicated to peacebuilding. Within AICS, peace-related topics are not a specific area of work and, whenever necessary, they are considered by the Emergency and Fragile States Unit, in a "Triple Nexus" approach⁸⁵. At the same time, the MFA does not have a roster of international experts on peace and related issues.

At the end of 2022, however, the MFA established a focal point as "Coordinator for mediation capabilities" within the Directorate General for Political Affairs and Security (DGAP), implementing one of the recommendations presented by AP in its report on Italy and Peacebuilding.⁸⁶ Following his appointment, the focal point drafted internal notes on Italian mediation capabilities, highlighting strengths and possible trajectories. In 2023, the role of the focal point was redefined as "Coordinator for Women, Peace and Security, Youth and Mediation" and maintained within the DGAP. Despite the mandate being extremely broad for a single diplomat, this move established more linear coordination in the peace domain.

Between late 2023 and early 2024, the coordinator established close contact with Italian CSOs and research centres specialised in peacebuilding with the intention to establish a "group of contact" and to develop more cooperation between the MFA and non-state actors on peace mediation. In addition to this, the MFA has also strengthened its internal training on mediation for junior and counsellor-level diplomats. Moreover, the University of Genoa, with the support of the DGAP, launched a summer school on "Mediation in International Conflicts" in 2023⁸⁷.

⁸⁵ Triple Nexus is intended as the interlinkages among the three most important pillars of international cooperation: humanitarian, development, and peacebuilding. The Triple Nexus is an evolution of the concept of Linking Relief, Rehabilitation, and Development (LRRD). It is an approach in the humanitarian and development field that connects in a linear process short-term relief measures with longer-term development programs. However, given the complexities of certain multifaced crises, a more holistic approach based on contiguity was elaborated. The HDP Nexus made clear the benefits of synergies among the three pillars, at the same time challenges related to joint programming and financing may emerge (['Italy and the Triple Nexus'](#), Agency for Peacebuilding, May 2023).

⁸⁶ Venturi, Bernardo, Stefano Marinelli. ['Italy and Peacebuilding'](#), Agency for Peacebuilding, May 2022.

⁸⁷ The Advanced Course will be replicated in July 2024 ([details on the website](#)).

3.3 Italian civil society and peace mediation

As previously analysed, a limited number of Italian CSOs specialise in peacebuilding⁸⁸ and this is due to different factors. So far, the MFA still needs to adopt a specific strategy and a budget line for peacebuilding. Italian NGOs have a lot of experience on calls issued by AICS, but they do not prioritise peacebuilding. Despite these constraints, different organisations work with dedication and professionalism. A crucial issue remains dialogue with political institutions. Overall, for the non-governmental sector, there remains ample room for improvement and professionalisation in the peace sector.

In Italy and globally, Sant'Egidio has represented a paramount NGO in the field of peace mediation. Its mediation efforts in Mozambique in the 1990s represent to this day one of the most often cited examples of a successful mediation process at the international level, but the organisation has also worked on peace processes in Guatemala, Albania, Algeria, Uganda, Guinea and, more recently, in South Sudan and Chad. Beyond Sant'Egidio, interest in mediation among civil society actors is growing. Notably, in December 2022 the Italian Initiative on International Mediation (3IM) was established with the plan “to support Italy to increase its contribution to broader initiatives of dialogue and strategies on conflict prevention and peace mediation”.⁸⁹ 3IM, along with AP and the MWMN has been in close dialogue with the Italian MFA as an informal “group of contact” on Italian capabilities in mediation.

3.4 Toward an Italian Mediation Support Structure?

The second part of this paper identifies a vivid and recent trend in establishing mediation support structures in European and non-European countries and regional organisations. At the same time, countries with consolidated MSS such as Norway and Switzerland have reflected and revised their models based on the changing global landscape for mediation. Spain commissioned a policy paper on its possible trajectories in international mediation; France has been conducting a systematic study on its role in mediation.

From its end, Italy has made limited progress in this direction. Yet, in the last couple of years, interest from political institutions, CSOs, and universities in mediation, and more broadly in peacebuilding has been growing. It is therefore the right moment for a timely reflection on if and how Italy can strengthen its mediation capacities by relying on the model of a mediation support structure.

⁸⁸ Venturi, Bernardo, Stefano Marinelli. [‘Italy and Peacebuilding’](#), Agency for Peacebuilding, May 2022.

⁸⁹ 3IM. [‘Italian Initiative On International Mediation’](#).

From the interviews conducted for this paper, two overall approaches emerged in order to structure mediation capacities. The first underlines the need for a clear vision: MSS should follow precise objectives and a clear mission. Each activity should be part of a plan. For example, training should be a means to an end with clear objectives, targets, and professional trajectories established for those who are trained. At the same time, without political engagement, the initiative risks being weak and not sustainable.

Conversely, the second approach highlights the importance of taking a first, concrete step - even if only a small one. For example, the MSS can be built up as a first core group of experts, and through a close partnership between the MFA and specialised CSOs, perhaps under the guidance of an experienced figure. A pilot initiative can also help to launch the process and to get experience and test assumptions and ideas.

This second step-by-step approach – or, reflecting what some might call a start-up attitude – sounds more adequate for the Italian context and its political culture. Moving from the vision and a grand strategy risk being too broad and not achieving concrete results.

In terms of models, the second section of this study presents three categories of MSS: within foreign ministries, as an external independent entity, or a mixed model of these two approaches. Most of the MSS are different forms of mixed models and Italy could invest in this direction. This option can support a valuable level of collaboration and integration between the MFA and prominent CSOs. Italy is anchored in rigid and historic alliances (EU and NATO chief among them). In this context, an independent mediation group with a light tie to the MFA could represent an added value both to Italy and its traditional allies, as they might be able to reach groups that official diplomats could not and support their engagement in mediation processes.

Italy can also invest in its historical diplomatic relations, for instance, where peace operations are deployed. This does not mean defining a geographic focus *a priori*. Instead, such an option can represent a pragmatic way to start engaging in certain areas based on previous expertise and direct knowledge. Furthermore, most of the time, Italy presents a balanced position in international relations. This approach can help to have access to irregular groups or to other complex actors. For example, during the Ethiopian war in Tigray, Italy maintained a balanced posture and had more access to the Ethiopian government than the EU. Heading in this direction, Italy can also reflect on its peculiarities and value-added in the EU's perimeter.

In terms of structure, the hybrid model can be represented by a unit at the MFA in close coordination with a specialised CSO, or a contact group, coordinating other NGOs. It is paramount that MFA-CSO relations are well-defined and structured through regular joint meetings and activities. At the same time, the mediation unit should not act in a vacuum and be isolated from other units and DGs. The role of the mediation unit should be clarified from the beginning also in terms of relations and procedures in order to avoid misunderstandings and problems originating from the legitimacy of the mediation unit. When necessary, a task force can be created by pulling people from geographic and thematic sectors together for a specific objective, for example, a mediation process.

A question that can arise is if and how to connect the MSS with the peacebuilding domain. Despite the fact that peace mediation has some peculiarities compared to the whole peacebuilding area, an integrated approach can certainly be beneficial both to boost consistent efforts and to avoid isolation. Preliminary connections can be established with three current areas of work: (i) the humanitarian-development-peacebuilding nexus (or triple nexus), (ii) women, peace and security, and (iii) youth, peace and security (YPS). YPS is an emerging field for Italy and can be beneficial to establish a clear connection from the very beginning. WPS is a well-established area of work and now Italy needs to venture into concrete mediation experience and put its experience into practice. Finally, the triple nexus can help to create synergies between mediation, development cooperation, and humanitarian aid. Indeed, Italian NGOs such as Sant'Egidio have often connected humanitarian efforts and peace mediation.

As already analysed, mediation processes are complex, and some states are supporting in some specific aspects and not necessarily leading. According to its national experiences, Italy could specialise in one or more aspects of mediation support. For example, in humanitarian mediation and/or in track 1.5 processes, in which the top leadership of one or both conflict parties are engaged in the peace process, but in an informal setting and/or in their personal capacity.⁹⁰

In conclusion, Italy appears well-positioned to strengthen its capacity through an MSS. A step-by-step approach can be the most appropriate to advance this effort. Yet, it does not mean relying on short-term projects and a small budget. Precise leaps forward should be in place, from establishing a hybrid MSS in synergy with chosen CSOs to investing in a pilot project or a particular specialisation.

⁹⁰ [‘Peace Mediation Platform’](#).

RECOMMENDATIONS

“In this complex world of multilateral institutions what is now needed is to empower systems that are more nimble and agile and have flexibility to act with both heft and speed.”⁹¹

While the global scenario shows a deep transformation in armed conflicts mirrored by a changing landscape for peace mediation, a clear trend in establishing mediation support structures in European and non-European countries and regional organisations has emerged in the last two decades. So far, Italy has not invested in MSS but appears well-positioned to strengthen its capacity for peace mediation.

The following recommendations are offered to help guide future programming in this direction.

Build trust and invest in joint capabilities between civil society organisations and institutions

Italy reached significant results in peace mediation when political institutions and CSOs established a certain level of collaboration. These actors should invest in building mutual trust and in strengthening a group of contact on international mediation.

Establish an Italian mediation support structure

The Italian MFA has already established a “Coordinator for Women, Peace and Security, Youth and Mediation”. Yet a single diplomat cannot, alone, cover such vast responsibilities. A leap forward can be establishing a unit composed of 3 or 4 members. Then, to progressively invest in a specific support to mediation. The new unit should avoid isolation and plan regular collaboration with geographic and thematic desks. The MSS will also mainstream meaningful roles for women and young people in peace and security.

Invest in a hybrid model of the mediation support structure

Most of the MSS are different forms of mixed models and Italy could invest in this direction. This option can support a valuable level of collaboration and integration between the MFA and prominent CSOs. Since Italy is anchored in rigid and historic alliances, an independent mediation group with a light tie to the MFA could therefore reach groups which diplomatic officials could not. In terms of structure, the

⁹¹ Rifkind, Gabrielle and Giandomenico Picco, *The Fog of Peace*, I.B. Tauris, 2014, p. 245.

hybrid model can be represented by a unit at the MFA working in close coordination with a specialised CSO, or a contact group, coordinating other NGOs. It is paramount that the MFA-CSO relations are well-defined and structured through regular joint meetings and activities.

Strengthen training in peace mediation

The Italian MFA should mainstream training for junior and counsellor-level diplomats on peace mediation. Similarly, mid-career and senior Italian independent mediators and diplomats should regularly attend high-level professional courses such as the “Peace Mediation Course” funded by the Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs.

Define a medium and long-term budget

The establishment of an Italian mediation support structure should be funded by a specific budget with a medium to long-term perspective. A first step forward can be to secure some limited funds through the Decree on International Missions. Yet, the fund should be planned progressively as part of a longer strategy, in order to support continuity.

Involve real peace mediators

From this study emerged how most of the discussions on peace mediation are without real mediation with solid experience. Both CSOs and institutions should have an honest discussion and they should envisage learning perspectives from international experts, mediation support structure in other states and regular exchange and mentoring.

Establish a roster of international mediators

Italy can benefit from a roster of international mediators to be involved in pilot projects, training, mentoring and other specific activities. A more traditional approach based on ad hoc selections and already established connections with some familiar experts can present a significant constraint to establishing a solid structure for mediation. Even though peace mediation has some peculiarities compared to the whole peacebuilding area, the roster can also include broader capacities in the peace sector to strengthen an integrated approach to the area.



AGENCY FOR
PEACEBUILDING

www.peaceagency.org