

What the Belgrade-Pristina dialogue says about the EU's role as a peace mediator

What conditions influence EU effectiveness in international mediation? A recent study by [Julian Bergmann](#) and [Arne Niemann](#) assesses how we can better evaluate the role of the EU institutions as a peace mediator by investigating the case of the Belgrade – Pristina dialogue, brokered by the EU between 2011 and 2013.



In November 2009, the European Union adopted the [Concept on Strengthening EU Mediation and Dialogue Capacities](#). In this document, which is the first policy document exclusively dealing with mediation and dialogue, the EU formulates the ambition to systematically enhance its mediation capacities and to strengthen its overall ability to engage in non-military conflict prevention and crisis management missions. The Concept represents the main conceptual and policy reference for the EU's approach to mediation and spells out different roles and guiding principles of EU mediation.



Mediation is not a new element in the EU's foreign policy toolbox. In fact, the EU has a considerable track record of mediation involvement in a number of cases in the European Neighbourhood and beyond. For example, the EU together with the US was engaged in mediating the [Ohrid Framework Agreement](#) between the Macedonian government and the Albanian minority in 2001.

In the same year and thereafter, the EU played a key role in mediating the [Belgrade Agreement](#) between Serbia and Montenegro on the formation of a state union. Since 2008, the EU acts as a mediator and co-chair of the Geneva International Discussions on Georgia's territorial conflicts. In addition, the EU has played a significant role in a number of collective coordination mechanisms to support peace processes such as UN Contact Groups and Groups of Friends.

Despite an increasing interest in the EU's engagement in international mediation by policy-analysts and practitioners, as yet the academic literature has not paid much attention to the EU's role in peace negotiations. In particular, two questions have been insufficiently addressed so far. First, how can EU mediator effectiveness be appropriately conceptualised and evaluated? And second, what conditions influence EU effectiveness in international mediation?

The EU as a peace mediator

In a [recent study](#), which is part of a larger [research project on EU mediation](#) funded by the [German Foundation for Peace Research](#), we have tackled these questions. Our point of departure is that both mediation research and EU foreign policy studies provide fruitful concepts and theoretical underpinning to study EU mediation, but are rarely combined and seldom speak to each other. To contribute to 'bridge-building' between these fields, we draw on concepts and empirical insights from both literatures and develop a conceptual framework for analysing EU mediator effectiveness that is intended to be applicable across cases.

We propose a two-dimensional conceptualisation of EU mediator effectiveness, including both an EU-specific and conflict-specific perspective on effectiveness. The internal EU perspective assesses whether the EU has successfully achieved its objectives as a mediator in a particular conflict. The external conflict-perspective evaluates whether the EU mediation effort had some positive impact on the conflict and its management in terms of settlement of conflict issues. Integrating these two perspectives on effectiveness into the framework allows for a more nuanced evaluation of EU mediation that goes beyond the signing of an agreement as sole reference point for assessing EU mediator effectiveness.

The investigation of the conditions of mediator effectiveness is structured around four key sets of variables: mediator leverage, defined as resources and instruments the EU can bring to the negotiation table to spur an agreement between the disputants; mediation strategy, referring to the degree of control the EU exerts on the negotiation process; coherence, describing the degree of coordination and substantive agreement between individual member states' policies towards a conflict, and the mediation activities carried out by EU institutions; and finally the conflict context, capturing variables such as conflict parties' internal cohesiveness and mediation timing.

To probe the empirical utility of the framework, we investigate the first phase of the EU-facilitated dialogue between Belgrade and Pristina from 2011 to 2013. In this unique case of EU mediation, the EU managed to broker a number of agreements between the parties, including issues such as integrated border management, mutual recognition of diplomas, customs regulations and the representation of Kosovo in regional institutions. In particular, the [First Agreement of Principles Governing the Normalization of Relations](#) that focuses on the governance of Northern Kosovo and was signed in April 2013 has been widely applauded as ground-breaking and historic.

The findings of our empirical analysis suggest that the EU's success in mediating a number of agreements between Belgrade and Pristina so far can be explained firstly by its great leverage vis-à-vis the conflict parties due to their aspirations for EU accession, and secondly by its mix of a strategy of formulation and manipulation that draws on this leverage to move parties toward agreement through the use of positive incentives.

Both Serbia and Kosovo strongly aspire to move forward on their path toward EU accession and seek to win EU appeal in the dialogue process to improve their prospects of future membership. This also explains their governments' strong political will to stay committed to the dialogue. Explicitly linking the dialogue on normalisation with the accession process has proven instrumental for the EU to further back the parties in their efforts to find compromise solutions to the issues in dispute.

In a number of cases, progress in the talks has been directly followed by EU rewards and incentives for further cooperation. For example, only two days after the conflict parties had signed the April 2013 agreement, the European Commission recommended starting the EU membership negotiations process with Serbia in January 2014.

In addition, the right timing of the mediation initiative during a window of opportunity in 2010/11 has also been conducive to EU effectiveness. After the [International Court of Justice](#) had issued its [advisory opinion](#) that Kosovo's unilateral declaration of independence did not violate any applicable rule of international law, the EU seized the moment to bring the parties to the negotiating table to achieve substantial progress before the parliamentary and presidential elections in Serbia in spring 2012. The initial focus on rather technical issues in the first phase of the dialogue certainly further contributed to a low level of politicisation of the process.

Given that the dialogue process is ongoing and the terms of implementation of a number of agreements are still being negotiated, it is certainly too early to draw some final conclusions and generalisations on EU mediator effectiveness based on this case study. However, the empirical analysis demonstrates the utility of the conceptual framework to understand and evaluate EU effectiveness in international mediation and suggests that there is substantial ground for further research emanating from this study.

For example, studying EU mediation initiatives in conflicts where the incentive of EU accession is less tangible, as in the case of Kosovo and Serbia, may enrich our understanding of the extent to which EU mediator success is contingent on the EU enlargement perspective. In addition, it may be worthwhile to further investigate in what ways this framework – or a modified version of it – helps us to understand the EU's effectiveness in supporting peace processes beyond the role of acting as formally recognised mediator in negotiations.

Finally, recent developments such as the establishment of the [European Institute of Peace](#) illustrate that mediation remains a vibrant field of EU foreign policy, which makes it even more an interesting topic for future academic inquiry.

[Please read our comments policy before commenting.](#)

Note: For a longer discussion of this topic, see the authors' recent publication in the [Journal of Common Market Studies](#). This article gives the views of the authors, and not the position of EUROPP – European Politics and Policy, nor of the London School of Economics. Featured image credit: eeas.europa.eu.

Shortened URL for this post: <http://bit.ly/1IK9Pvo>

About the authors

Julian Bergmann – *Johannes Gutenberg-Universität Mainz*

Julian Bergmann is research fellow and lecturer with the Chair of International Politics at the Johannes Gutenberg University Mainz. His main research interests are international conflict management and EU foreign policy.



Arne Niemann – *Johannes Gutenberg-Universität Mainz*

Arne Niemann is Professor of International Politics and Jean Monnet Professor of European Integration Studies at the Department of Political Science of the Johannes Gutenberg University Mainz, Germany. His research focuses on the European integration process and European Union politics and policies, especially the EU's external relations.



-