

Developing a Dialogue on the Theory and Practice of International Peace Mediation

This note describes a workshop on International Peace Mediation hosted by Dublin City University in 2010. The workshop was an output of the project “Mediating Peace Agreements: The Capacity of the European Union as Multi-track Mediator”, funded by the Irish Research Council for the Humanities and Social Sciences and the Department of Foreign Affairs. It was intended to deepen understanding of the conceptual framework of international peace mediation and facilitate lesson learning from past practice of mediation initiatives. It provided participants with an insight into how international peace mediation can be used effectively and successfully as a conflict resolution tool.

The Irish Research Council of Humanities and Social Sciences (IRCHSS) identified “international conflict mediation” as a priority research theme in its Research Development Initiative Scheme 2009, defining it as “one of the most important tools for conflict resolution, spanning from initial engagement with conflicting parties to the implementation of peace agreements” (IRCHSS, 2009, p. 17). Applications on the topic of mediation were invited under this scheme, and funded by the Conflict Resolution Unit of the Irish Department of Foreign Affairs. A total of €79,716 was awarded to researchers in the Centre for International Studies, Dublin City University to fund a project from December 2009 to December 2010, entitled “Mediating Peace Agreements: The Capacity of the European Union as Multi-track Mediator”, whose preliminary objectives were to examine how the European Union (EU) has acted as a mediator in armed conflict situations in the past and to highlight its capacity to function as a multi-

track mediator in armed conflict resolution in the future. The project seeks to analyse the unique nature and characteristics of the EU - its power, leverage, resources, perceived neutrality / bias and so on - and to examine its use of mediation as a conflict resolution tool in certain conflict situations, where it has worked with other Track I actors, that is, states and other regional actors such as ASEAN and Track II actors, for example, Non-governmental Organisations, such as the Crisis Management Initiative and the Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue. It focuses on how the EU has harnessed and co-ordinated the resources and capabilities of states, NGOs and other organisations in mediation contexts and also considers how the EU can develop its potential to be a potent and effective mediator in future conflicts.

The main objectives of the project are:

- to investigate the nature and effectiveness of Track I, Track II and multi-track mediation
- to undertake empirical research on how the EU has acted as a multi-track mediator in conflicts in the case-study areas of Georgia, Aceh, and Cyprus, by undertaking semi-structured interviews with key personnel from international mediation centres, civil service personnel within the EU institutions involved in EU mediation efforts and personnel involved in mediation efforts in case study areas
- to analyse how the EU has harnessed and co-ordinated the resources and capabilities of other mediation actors in conflict resolution efforts
- to analyse the factors which influence the level of role the EU takes in specific mediation contexts
- to assess how the EU can optimise its potential as a mediator

While the project highlights how the EU has developed and evolved as an actor in international peace mediation over time, the researchers felt that a broader discussion on the theoretical framework underpinning international peace mediation and on the practice of international peace mediation in general was first needed, in order to provide a firm foundation for an evaluation of the EU's role in this field. Therefore, on June 1 2010, the Centre for International Studies at Dublin City University hosted a one day workshop on the topic of "The Theory and Practice of International Peace Mediation". It was felt that this would lead to a better understanding of why and how the EU carved out its current role as a mediator in armed conflict situations.

The International Peace Mediation Workshop

The workshop attracted over 40 participants, including practitioners, and academics involved in both international peace mediation and domestic mediation, from Ireland, the UK and Europe. A number of international embassy representatives based in Dublin as well as DCU postgraduate students also attended. The main aim of the workshop was to provide the participants with a platform to discuss the theory and practice of international peace mediation. It also provided an opportunity to learn from the experiences of people who have worked in the field of international peace mediation and reflect on past successes and future challenges of international peace mediation. In addition, the workshop included a simulation exercise, where the participants took on the roles of mediators, States, and non-State actors, interacting with each other in a simulated mediation process. This allowed the participants to appreciate how a mediation process works in practice.

The workshop facilitators were Dr David Bloomfield, from the Glencree Centre for Peace and Reconciliation, based in Ireland and Dr Antje Herrberg, from Crisis Management Initiative, based in Belgium and Finland. The facilitators discussed their understandings of international peace mediation and also shared their experiences of past mediation efforts, in which they were involved, with the participants. The facilitators responded to participants' questions and guided the group's discussion on various aspects of mediation theory and practice. The workshop was divided into three sessions, the first of which dealt with the Conceptualisation of International Peace Mediation and the second of which focused on Experiences from the Field. The simulation exercise took place in Session 3.

Session 1: Conceptualising International Peace Mediation

The first session sought to facilitate discussion and analysis of the theoretical underpinnings of international peace mediation. It attempted to clarify the framework of international peace mediation and evaluate it. One of the strategies of the wider project was to draw on the traditional categorisation of domestic mediation into facilitative, evaluative and transformative mediation and to ascertain if this categorisation is also applicable to situations of international peace mediation. From the workshop discussion on the international peace mediation framework, it seems, however, that there is no consensus on terminology or categorisation of mediation approaches in the context of armed conflict. The strong theoretical framework which is accepted and applied in situations of domestic mediation, for example, in cases of family law, medical law and so on, is unfortunately missing from the international peace mediation discourse. Indeed, while international peace mediation has become an increasingly popular choice as a

conflict resolution tool, it has evolved and developed in the absence of a clear and consistent framework, leading to the situation where “[c]ontemporary peace mediation is a crowded and increasingly competitive field currently lacking established accountability mechanisms” (Lanz et al, 2008). The first session provided an interesting discussion on the paradigm shifts within mediation and international peace mediation discourse and practice over time. This discussion concluded that there has been a lack of a uniform and accepted understanding of international peace mediation to date. This was identified as one of the challenges to the development and effective employment of international peace mediation as a conflict resolution tool in the future.

Session 2: Experiences from the Field

During the second session, the workshop facilitators provided an insight into their own experiences of mediation in action. The facilitators discussed their experiences of the process of mediation, negotiation and dialogue facilitation in numerous places across the globe, including Ireland, Iraq, Aceh and Georgia. This session centred on the practical challenges faced by mediators attempting to resolve armed conflicts, including actor leverage, impartiality, resources, inclusivity and interaction with other actors in the mediation process. The workshop facilitators provided an invaluable insight into the practicalities of mediation processes. The facilitators shared their experiences of dialogue facilitation, relationship building and mediation, which sometimes resulted in a brittle peace, as in the case of Northern Ireland, and other times resulted in a successful peace agreement, such as in the case of the *Memorandum of Understanding*, signed after 25 years of bitter violence in Aceh in Indonesia. Drawing on their experiences, the

workshop facilitators highlighted the importance of monitoring mediated agreements and post conflict follow-up to ensure that such agreements are sustainable in the long-term.

The role of the EU as a mediator was also discussed and evaluated during this session. It was underlined that political will does exist within the EU to attempt to resolve armed conflict situations through mediation, and other approaches. The discussion highlighted the perceived EU policy of non-recognition but engagement with regard to mediation, and also focused on current developments within the EU to embrace mediation more fully as a conflict resolution tool, particularly in light of the evolution of the EU External Action Service. It was concluded that peace mediation is an area for development within EU policy-making and that there is room for practitioners to inform the nature of its development, through ongoing EU consultations via the European Peace-building Liaison Office.

Session 3: International Peace Mediation Simulation

In Session 3, the participants were divided into two groups in two rooms to undertake a simulation activity. The simulation question focused on the fictitious State of Alvia and a separatist movement within its territory, the Markian Freedom Movement, who were demanding and fighting for independence for Markia from Alvia. Roles were assigned to the participants, who represented State officials, mediators, and members of the freedom movement and the participants were asked to simulate a mediation meeting between the conflicting groups. The participants grouped together to discuss their positions and their strategies for the mediation process.

The workshop facilitators each gave advice to one of the groups in a preliminary discussion period of 10-15 minutes. The facilitators interacted with each group providing guidance and direction. The participants then assumed their assigned roles and the simulated mediation process began. The participants entered fully into the spirit of the activity and argued their positions with enthusiasm and passion. All parties in both of the simulation rooms vowed their commitment to concluding an acceptable peace deal between the conflicting sides. This simulation illustrated some of the difficulties that mediators can encounter when all parties are trying to ensure that their demands are heard and are included on the mediation agenda. It also highlighted the importance of flexibility and compromise on the part of the conflicting parties, and openness and fairness on the part of the mediators. For example, in one group the mediators decided to engage in preliminary dialogue with the participants representing the State officials prior to the commencement of the mediation simulation, actions which resulted in the other participants expressing concern about the mediators' ability to treat both sides fairly and equitably. The mediators found that the brokering of a peace deal, agreeable to both conflicting parties was not easy. While the workshop facilitators assisted the mediators in both simulation rooms to overcome various impasses, the simulated mediation processes highlighted the fact that commitment to peace is not all that is necessary to ensure the adoption of a peace agreement. Only one of the two groups was able to agree to a temporary peace within the time limits of the simulation activity.

Concluding Comments

After the simulation all participants were brought together to hear some final comments on their simulated mediation process from the workshop facilitators and to reflect on the

day's activities. The feedback on the workshop from the participants was very positive, with requests for similar activities on the topic of mediation to be run in the future. One of the key challenges of the day was that of time, with some participants requesting that future activities be spread over two days if possible.

Outputs and dissemination

The workshop has fed into outputs of the wider project, which have and will be disseminated in peer-reviewed journals, policy documents, at conferences and through a project website (<http://www.dcu.ie/~cis/peace-mediation/index.html>). A workshop blog (<http://ipmdcu.blogspot.com>) was also created, which hosts a podcast, a slideshow of pictures from the event and workshop information. The workshop participants will be invited to future activities organised by the Centre for International Studies on the topic of mediation.

Future Work

The wider project on the Role of the EU in International Peace Mediation will run until December 2010, with research outputs to be disseminated in 2010 and 2011. The project will culminate with a one day conference on the topic of EU mediation activities, to be hosted by the Centre for International Studies at Dublin City University in December 2010. Speakers will include representatives of the EU, NGOs and regional experts on conflict mediation efforts.

Acknowledgements

The project researchers wish to acknowledge the funding and support of the Conflict Resolution Unit of the Irish Department of Foreign Affairs under the Irish Research Council of Humanities and Social Sciences Research Development Initiative. We also wish to acknowledge our workshop facilitators who gave generously of their time and knowledge and made the workshop a success.

References

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