

# Expert Seminar Report

## Missing a Trick? Building Bridges between EU Mediation and EU Electoral Support in Conflict-affected Countries

Antje Herrberg

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## About mediatEUr

mediatEUr is a new venture in international peace mediation. Our goal is to promote the peaceful transformation of intra- and inter-state conflicts by using and promoting effective methods of mediation.

mediatEUr brings together a network of proven and qualified mediators and experts. We support professionals and policy makers working in this field with the latest techniques and proven methodologies, with sound knowledge of the field. We work to help the EU develop its capacities to support successful peacemaking across the world.

This project is funded by the Belgian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and implemented in partnership with the Crisis Management Initiative (CMI).

To find out more, visit [www.themediateur.eu](http://www.themediateur.eu).

## About ECES

The European Centre for Electoral Support (ECES) is a non-profit and nongovernmental organisation based in Brussels with a global scope.

ECES promotes sustainable democratic development through the provision of advisory services and operational support in favour of electoral management bodies and national, regional and international organisations dealing with the implementation of the different steps of an electoral process.

Capacity development, one of ECES' main activities, is provided at country, regional and global levels through the facilitation of peer reviews, exchange of experiences, south-south collaborations and leadership development.

To find out more, visit [www.eces.eu](http://www.eces.eu) and [www.facebook.com/eces.eu](https://www.facebook.com/eces.eu)

## Introduction

In order to explore how the EU might strengthen its capacity to respond to electoral conflicts and violence, mediatEUr and ECES convened a small expert seminar on 25 September 2012. The meeting aimed to:

1. Support the creation of greater linkages between conflict prevention and electoral assistance and overall policy support to address these issues together.
2. Outline the complexities and opportunities for electoral observation, assistance, mediation and conflict resolution in the context of conflict and violence.
3. Generate recommendations to the EU to strengthen its capacity to better respond to electoral violence through mediation and conflict resolution measures.
4. Outline elements for a specialised training curriculum on electoral violence, electoral assistance, mediation and conflict resolution, as well as leadership development for EU audiences.

This meeting formed part of the project “Creating Improved Capacities for International Peace Mediation”, implemented by mediatEUr, and funded by the Belgian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. This support is gratefully acknowledged and appreciated.

This short report provides a summary of the discussions<sup>1</sup>.

## The mediation perspective to elections

Attended by 18 experts and policy makers from the field of election observation / technical assistance and conflict prevention/ mediation, the main aim of this meeting was to instigate thinking on what approaches, policies, skills, foci and methods apply to creating a connection between electoral assistance and mediation. The meeting also looked at how these can be applied to develop training approaches for actors who need to respond to situations of election-related violence.

As a framing introduction, **Antje Herrberg** from mediatEUr provided a mediation perspective to election-related violence: In intra-state conflicts, elections often represent a milestone after a peace agreement. Sometimes, elections are also a litmus test of the quality of a negotiation process leading to a peace agreement, indicating whether all underlying issues were sufficiently discussed and resolved at the table. Critical questions relate to what architects and facilitators of peace processes need to consider, and how they can include aspects of electoral assistance in negotiations.

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<sup>1</sup> This report is benefited from the notes and inputs of mediatEUr and ECES. Many thanks to Canan Gündüz and Raphaël Pouyé in particular.

In other instances, peace processes are a direct result of electoral violence, such as in Kenya or to some extent in Zimbabwe, sometimes resulting in power-sharing agreements, by some considered as 'quick-fixes' to quell violence. A key question is of course how the root causes of a conflict can be addressed in such arrangements, especially with regard to sustainable outcomes, including peaceful elections.

In these contexts, the international community has been confronted with the question of how to strike a balance between perceived or real 'interventionism' in countries' affairs, and at the same time the responsibility to protect individuals from violence. Local and international mediators may have a critical role to play in violence reduction in political transition processes, in a way that is interest-based and not perceived as 'undue outside intervention.'

Especially the gap of skills for electoral assistance actor to deal with various aspects of conflict resolution has provided as a motivation for a dialogue between specialised organisations like ECES and mediatEUr in respective fields, so **Fabio Bargiacchi** from ECES in his introduction.

“Elections are incidental, violence happens because of the opening of political space”

The fact that electoral violence is rarely an isolated phenomenon but rather a symptom of the complex interplay of societal forces, requiring a solid understanding of the conflict setting, was vividly illustrated by **Richard Atwood** from the International Crisis Group. Atwood, who recently authored a report for the European Parliament on the topic, found that African transitions often happen within presidential systems, and carry with them a struggle over control of resources for the winners, as “little is left for the losers”. In this context enormous stakes are at hand when it comes to electoral processes.

Whilst the EU engagement in electoral support must be carefully calibrated, there is a need to shift the attention away from Electoral Management Bodies as the sole actors responsible for the electoral process. Indeed the role of the judiciary, police, political parties and state institutions must also be considered. In many cases, these actors can be seen to be the core perpetrators of violence. The mitigation of electoral violence is in fact an emblematic problem relating to the persistence of authoritarian power and often the associated control of the security sector.

“No cure has been found to the issue of electoral violence; we are trying to keep the patient stable, that’s all”

Although the field of Electoral Assistance has been working and dealing with issues of electoral violence for some years, no effective remedies for addressing violence throughout the electoral cycle have been found. Striving to fill this gap **Sead Alihodzic** from International IDEA, alongside different actors in the field of electoral support and assistance, continues to search for effective tools. IT tools for detecting and possibly preventing electoral violence represent one possible answer. Indeed, if incidences of violence are well documented, the incentives for violence may be reduced. IDEA is currently developing a tool to assist understanding about what could go wrong in an electoral process and identify indicators to inspire preventive approaches and policies. Such work can also be conducted with NGOs that have contributed to the fourth generation of crowd-sourcing.

**Fabio Bargiacchi** gave a perspective of how ECES responds to the challenge. He highlighted the need for the enhancement of leadership skills for especially, but not exclusively, electoral management bodies. Existing training methodologies provided in conventional election-related training programmes such as BRIDGE<sup>2</sup> have no specific focus on leadership and conflict resolution or management. This is why current members of ECES have been working at creating the “Leadership and Electoral Conflict Prevention’ (LEAD) curriculum. It has been implemented with the member states of the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS), and Togo, Burkina Faso and Madagascar. ECES favours an approach that broadens the audience for these training programmes to all electoral stakeholders. This is illustrated with the further implementation of LEAD with young East African politicians in Uganda in August, with civil society and electoral stakeholders in Libya, and with the countries of the Southern African Development Community (SADC) in upcoming training seminars. This leadership development initiative, stemming from previous field work of current ECES members is being developed in partnership with the Center for Creative Leadership (CCL).

For these trainings, visual elements such as the film “an African Election” directed by Jarreth Merz are used as a pedagogical tool to create direct relevance and empathic understanding about the challenges of

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<sup>2</sup> BRIDGE is a modular professional development programme with a particular focus on electoral processes. It was developed since 1999 by five leading organisations in the democracy and governance field jointly committed to developing, implementing and maintaining the most comprehensive curriculum and workshop package available. BRIDGE was the recipient of the 2010 United Nations Public Service Award. The five partners are the Australian Electoral Commission, International IDEA, IFES, the UNDP and the UN Electoral Assistance Division. See [www.bridge-project.org](http://www.bridge-project.org)

preventing electoral violence and managing free and fair elections. (See section below “Next Steps”, p. 7)

“We need to approach the issues with modesty and in the principle of partnership”

**Andrew Bradley**, also from International IDEA, reminded and cautioned the group that that states are sovereign and the international community needs to approach the question of electoral violence with the necessary modesty and the correct attitude. Within the field of electoral work, as often in the field of crisis management and conflict resolution, there is a flaw in the deployment of staff: “once you’ve gone through the cycle, people leave, and the knowledge capacity goes with them”. This also raises the question whether critical capacities should rather be built at the local level.

Both global and local capacities for election systems must be built. The Global Commission on Elections Democracy and Security, chaired by Kofi Annan brings attention to the issue of electoral violence at the global level.

Participants also provided evidence of the influence that the international community can have on efficient, and violence-free elections. With the case study of the election processes of the DRC in 2006 and 2011 at hand, **Dunia Ramazani**, of the EFEAC featured the differences and lessons learned, with **Michal Golabek** from the EEAS providing some explanations from the EU point of view. Both elections were conducted differently, due to a number of circumstances, and due to a different level of international support during these periods: whereas a fully committed European Union supported the conduct of peaceful elections through the provision of peacekeepers (MONUC) and elections monitors, with considerable funding in 2006, it is believed that for 2011 there was much less international commitment to the provision of the same level of support for holding free and transparent elections. Unlike in 2006, the 2011 elections had no built-in mechanisms for conflict prevention and the majority of parties refused to sign the code of conduct. In terms of efficiency of election management, the 2011 elections created high tensions, a setback to democracy and a loss of human life.

The DRC electoral process in 2006 provided a number of entry points for mediation approaches that were not apparent during 2011:

1. At the political level (through an international committee that accompanied the process), which included the role of Aldo Ajello, the EU Special Representative who worked to bridge differences between the parties before the elections;
2. At the technical level through the very useful role of a 'Comité des Sages', which allowed for discussions of issues such as voter registration and candidate registration
3. The role of the catholic church which provided local mediation capacity
4. Agreements were facilitated between different candidates on how to deal with specific issues: these agreements, signed prior to the elections, later helped to deal with disputes.

The importance of the lessons learned from 2006 was underrated. The recommendations of the EU EOM elections report were not utilised by the election management body working on the 2011 elections. Although there seemed to be strong local support for an Election Observation Mission for 2011, the mission also suffered from the challenges of calendar changes and the increasingly polarised political environment, which possibly contributed to the lack of political dialogue.

The more limited engagement of the EU in the 2011 DRC elections made local actors feel as if "they had been forgotten by the European Union". This case study raises the question of the ability and awareness of international partners in the electoral process to manage expectations as well as the issue of continuity, the importance of follow up, and again coherence and consistency.

Other opportunities for tackling election-related conflicts:  
SRSGs and Panel(s) of the Wise

The lack of political dialogue overall during the election period has been lamented for years, and was also echoed during this seminar. In this context it is worth considering the roles of Special Representatives (of the Secretary General) of the UN or the EU who play a special and different role in the particular regions to which they are assigned during times of elections and electoral conflict. According to Atwood, in Africa, political actors often look to the SRSGs for a decision regarding the legitimacy of elections, and they can thus play a critical role in conflict prevention. Due to their 'detached' functions (i.e. they have a different status to ambassadors) and their relative independence from the Electoral Observation Teams, they can play an important role in helping to address conflicts by engaging in political dialogue with the parties.

**Dunia Ramazani** pointed out the useful role of the Panel of the Wise or Committee des Sages during the election period in the DRC. The trend to provide such Panels for Elections Processes appears to be helpful in Africa in particular.

## The EU and its Electoral Observation Missions: What role?

The role of external election observers in preventing and/or mitigating violence was viewed with scepticism and caution. Election observers should not be considered as central actors for mitigating electoral violence. Conversely, in fragile states, EU election observation missions can play a role in helping to prevent outbreaks of violence as they are often deployed in large numbers and their reporting (whether intentional or not) feeds into the electoral dynamics both in the positive and negative sense. A clear understanding of conflict-sensitive reporting in these cases is an essential skill, which is too often disregarded. The key actors and audiences to work with in this context are chief observers and deputy chief observers. These require a suitable skill-set conducive to managing high tensions, and an ability to communicate in a conflict-sensitive fashion.

## Systematising the bigger picture

A broad consensus emerged on how electoral support and mediation, within the EU, can be merged and support one another. A critical question that should be asked first is: what are the key issues at stake in democracy promotion in relation to electoral issues? If the problem must be fixed in a comprehensive fashion, a "higher level map" of the key issues at stake is required, as **Ingrid Wetterquist** from the EEAS noted. Participants agreed that in order to come up with a 'higher level' map, a revision of the 2006 Communication on Electoral Observation would be

required, as this could integrate the novel challenges identified since it was first issued.

In terms of the prevention of election-related conflict, three different relations between elections and violence are worth distinguishing, which point towards different approaches in terms of violence reduction:

1. The first is a situation of pre-existing conflict and risk of violence, where elections are just a trigger.
2. The second is the violence used to contest election results; and
3. Third are those disputes arising from the technicalities and process of conducting elections.

All three require different approaches to conflict prevention and mediation along the electoral cycle, which in turn can be supported by different actors.

What is the role of mediation with regard to election-related violence? Participants agree that electoral observation is not a tool for mediating elections, as electoral observers' primary mandate is not conflict prevention or resolution. Instead, a more suitable question to pose may be, to what extent can election observation methodology be made more conflict-sensitive?

“We are trying to get better at understanding what the opportunities are within the EU on working on these issues – EU mediation and dialogue practice is much less well understood than long-standing existing practice, such as electoral observation”.

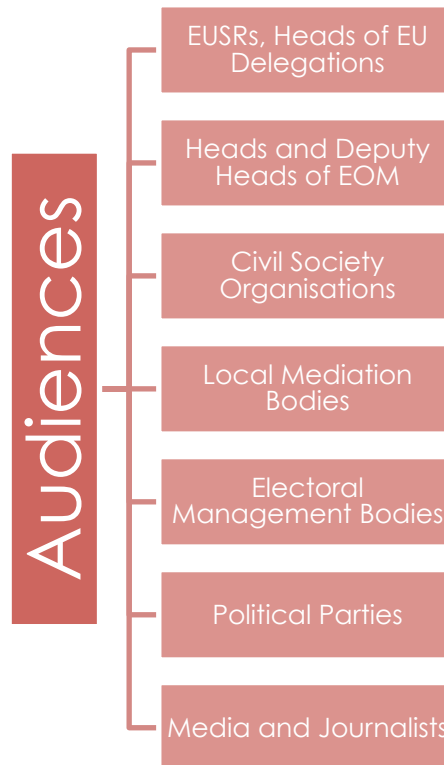
A more relevant question for EU actors is, what can be done to identify the entry point for effective engagement across the electoral cycle, without ‘superimposing’ its role as a mediator in these conflicts. The EU is well placed to aid the prevention of electoral violence by investing in local initiatives. Participants broadly agree that in this context, the capacities of local civil society should be built, not only with regard to “E-day” but also as a long-term measure.

Within its conflict prevention work, the EEAS – formerly DG Relex- has been working for years on conflict early warning systems. One question is whether specifically tailored early warning systems for electoral violence should be created, or whether there should be a single comprehensive approach to early warning indicators which would also electoral, but also other, conflict issues.

## Connecting the dots to create communities of practice: Training audience and approach

In the third and final session, facilitated by **Canan Gündüz**, participants elaborated on critical questions regarding training approaches to tackling election-related violence

1. Who are key audiences for acquiring skills to deal with election-related violence and conflict resolution?
2. In this context what do they need to know/be able to do?



## What do these audiences need to know?

- ✓ What conflict risks exist around elections and what can actors such as EUSRs, Ambassadors, or EU Heads of Mission do within their own mandates to help prevent outbreaks of violence?
- ✓ The tools that can be used for conflict resolution without the necessary involvement of an 'outside' actor
- ✓ Gender issues related to mediation and electoral violence
- ✓ How to use innovative methods for data gathering
- ✓ How to engage and work with local populations in times of electoral tensions
- ✓ How to lead effectively? What leadership skills can cause changes in attitude?
- ✓ What are the driving factors behind electoral violence?
- ✓ Intervention in conflicts: methods and approaches
- ✓ The situation of fragile contexts and elections
- ✓ Communication skills during highly escalated situations in electoral environment
- ✓ Conflict sensitive reporting during electoral periods

## What training needs to be delivered (and how?)

- ✓ Provide comparative knowledge rather than prescribe generic lessons
- ✓ Need to stress the comprehensive approach to electoral assistance
- ✓ Place elections within a broader political context

- ✓ Enforced communication and coordination between training providers
- ✓ Provide multi-disciplinary training teams
- ✓ Provide for more peer to peer knowledge exchange and mobilise peers for this
- ✓ Use audio visual tools/practical tool-box approach and lessons learned
- ✓ Develop a curriculum together with key audiences from specific countries and allow for customisation
- ✓ Specific initial focus areas for training programmes could be: voter registration and the creation of dispute resolution boards

## Next steps

mediatEUr and ECES foresee a collaboration on the training front to pilot and test mediation modules within the LEAD training, to be launched for the first time in Barcelona on 10-14 December 2012 with the Barcelona International Peace Resource Center (BIPRC).

The overall objective of the five day LEAD workshop will be to look into ways in which very diverse electoral stakeholders can improve their leadership skills and take on board innovative tools to better prevent and/or mitigate the escalation of election-related violence and conflict throughout the electoral cycles they are engaged in.

The *target audience* of this programme are representatives of all types of electoral stakeholders with a role in the success or failure of an electoral process.

The training will be provided by staff and experts of ECES, mediatEUr, the CCL's Leadership Beyond Boundaries, and Osservatorio di Pavia, all with extensive experience of working in the areas of leadership, conflict management, mediation and media monitoring. Further information can be found at <http://www.eces.eu/index.php/training/lead/lead-mediation-skills-2>

In addition, mediatEUr together with ECES, endeavours to develop a training/coaching module to be provided to the European External Action Service on the topic of mediation during electoral crises.

## Agenda

Time	Session
09:45	<b>Arrival, registration and coffee</b>
10:00 – 11:00	<b>Welcome, Introductions and Objectives of the day (10-15 Minutes Antje and Fabio)</b> Antje Herrberg, Co-founder and CEO, mediatEUR Fabio Bargiacchi, Executive Director, ECES Richard Atwood, Director of Research, International Crisis Group – The EU and electoral violence in sub-Saharan Africa
10:00 – 11:15	<b>Coffee Break</b>
11:15 – 12:30	<b>Overview of thematic strands in electoral violence and mediation</b>  <b>Facilitator:</b> Antje Herrberg <b>Speakers:</b> Sead Alihodzic, Programme Officer, Global Programme (Electoral Processes), International IDEA Guy Banim, Conflict Prevention, Peacebuilding and Mediation Division, European External Action Service Fabio Bargiacchi, Executive Director, ECES
12:30 – 13:15	<b>Lunch Break</b>
13:15 – 14h30	<b>Case study, the Democratic Republic of Congo, and the EU</b>  <b>Facilitator:</b> Raphaël Pouyé, Head of Programmes, ECES <b>Speakers:</b> <b>Dunia Ramazani</b> , Director of Technology and Operations, Central African School for Electoral Training (EFEAC) <b>Michal Golabek</b> , Democracy Support and Elections Division, European External Action Service
14:30 – 14:45	<b>Coffee Break</b>
14:45 – 15:30	<b>Facilitated discussion on training needs, and possible design features</b> <b>Facilitator:</b> Canan Gündüz, mediatEUR
15:30 – 16:00	<b>Feedback discussion and next steps</b> <b>What have we learned, what can we do with it, and what does need to be further done?</b> Antje Herrberg, mediatEUR Fabio Bargiacchi, ECES

## Participants

Richard Atwood, ICG

Sead Alidhodzic, International IDEA

Guy Banim, EEAS

Fabio Bargiacchi, ECES

Andrew Bradley, International IDEA

Irina Bratosin, mediatEUR

Eiman Elnaiem, ERIS

Carlos Hernández Ferreira, EPD

Andebrhan Giorgis, ECES

Michal Golabek, EEAS

Canan Gündüz, mediatEUR

Antje Herrberg, mediatEUR

Eva Palmans, ECES

Stefania Perna, ECES

Raphaël Pouyé, ECES

Dunia Ramazani, EFEAC

Ingrid Wetterquist, EEAS



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MediatEUR in Brussels:  
Avenue des Arts, 24, 10th floor, letter box no.8

B-1000, Brussels, Belgium  
Phone: + 32 2 230 00 15

E-Mail: [info@themediateur.eu](mailto:info@themediateur.eu)  
Web: [www.themediateur.eu](http://www.themediateur.eu)