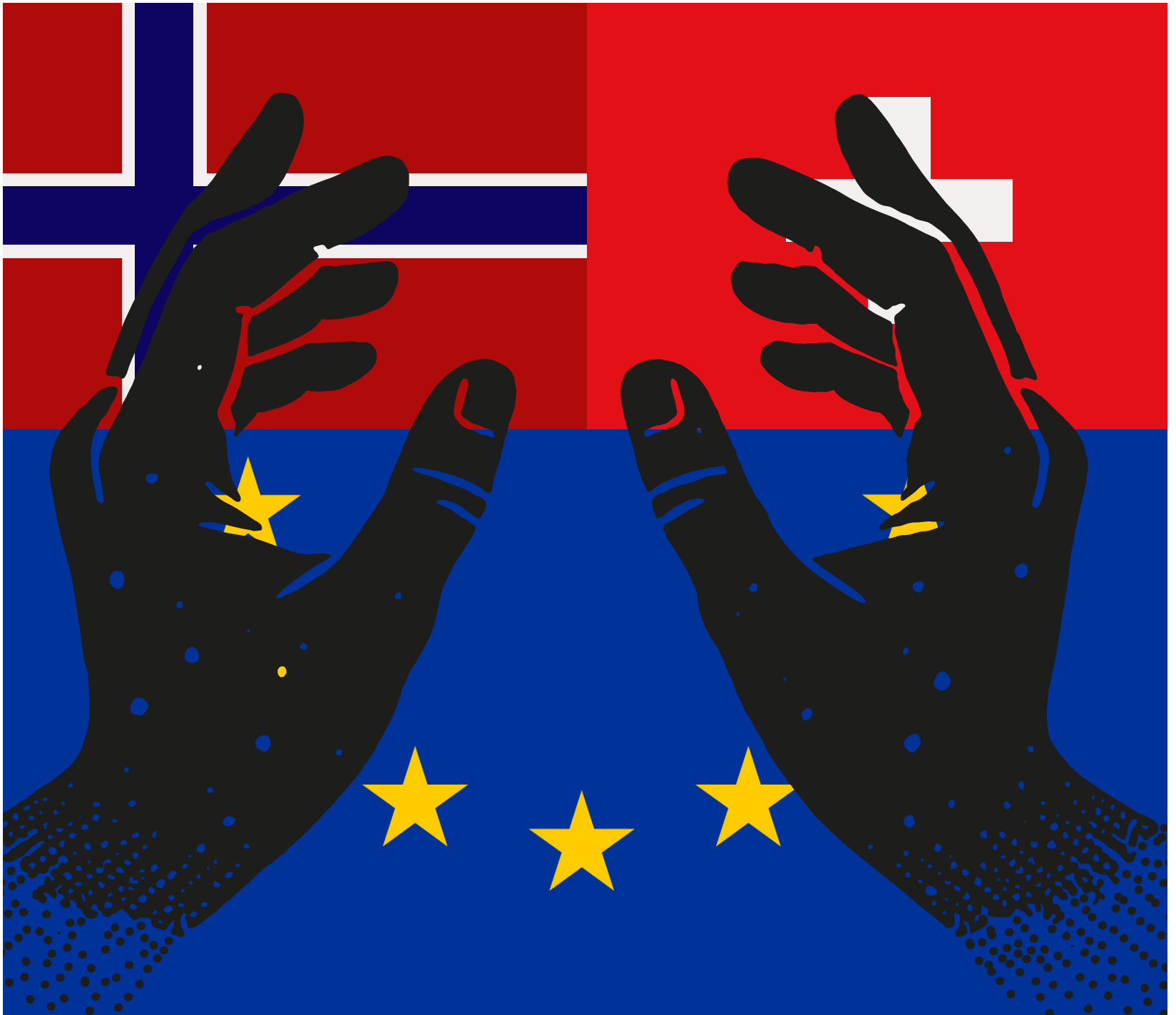


MEDIATING PEACE IN A FRAGMENTED WORLD ORDER THE ROLES OF EUROPEAN MEDIATORS

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Abstract

This report examines the evolving role of four European countries — Finland, Germany, Norway, and Switzerland — as third-party mediators in preventing, managing, or resolving conflicts. It explores their mediation strategies, highlighting both commonalities and differences, as well as the key strengths and challenges they face, such as the emergence of new conflicts, non-state armed groups, shifting geopolitical dynamics, and changing international expectations. Through the case studies of Sudan and Ukraine, the report evaluates the successes and limitations of European mediation in both intra-state and inter-state conflicts. In conclusion, the report offers recommendations to strengthen European mediation efforts, drawing on past and current experiences to navigate the complexities of modern conflicts and adapt to an increasingly fragmented global order.

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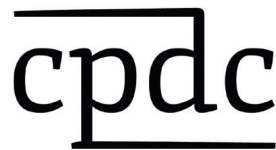
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Key Findings

- Peace mediation is a fundamental aspect of the foreign policies of Finland, Norway, and Switzerland. While it is not as central to Germany's foreign policy, it still holds considerable importance. The four countries are united by shared values such as respect for human rights, democratic principles, and gender equality, which shape their mediation practices. Their strategies prioritise neutrality, sustainable peacebuilding, and multilateral cooperation.
- Finland, Germany, Norway and Switzerland each approach conflict mediation in distinct ways, shaped by their historical contexts, evolving foreign policy priorities, and institutional frameworks. Norway and Switzerland are the most actively engaged, employing impartial, humanitarian-driven methods, while Finland emphasises sustainable peacebuilding with a more discreet role. Germany, by contrast, adopts a more pragmatic approach, frequently working through international bodies like the UN, EU, and OSCE and positioning itself as a supportive player rather than a leading mediator in high-stakes conflicts.
- Finland, Germany, Norway, and Switzerland bring key strengths to international conflict resolution, including professional expertise, robust institutional structures, and, in the cases of Switzerland, Norway and Finland, a long-standing reputation as mediators. They have developed specialised mediation support systems (MSS) which effectively harness resources from both government and civil society to enhance their efforts. They leverage their diplomatic networks, particularly within the EU and UN, and are known for their gender and inclusive mediation strategies, engaging a wide range of stakeholders to address the root causes of conflicts.
- Despite their successes, European mediators face internal challenges, including disconnects between political decision-makers, technical institutions, and practitioners, which can hinder mediation efforts. Amidst rising global instability and the security implications of the war in Ukraine, there has been a shift towards prioritising hard security over development aid and peacebuilding. This shift has reduced funding for those affected by conflict, undermining conflict resolution efforts. Coordination among European mediators is often fragmented, with competing interests leading to inefficiencies and missed opportunities for collective action. Additionally, the lack of systematic evaluation of mediation activities hampers efforts to assess impact and improve strategies.
- Externally, European mediators face challenges stemming from the shifting policies and practices of neutrality, especially as they navigate conflicts such as the wars in Ukraine and Gaza. These developments may affect their perceived role as impartial mediators in future peace processes. The rise of emerging powers such as China, Qatar, and Türkiye has introduced alternative mediation models, challenging European strategies, priorities, and their convening power. Engaging non-state armed groups, which dominate contemporary conflicts, remains difficult for European governments, while technological advancements both present new opportunities and pose challenges for peacebuilding efforts.

- The case studies of Sudan and Ukraine highlight the challenges European mediation faces in complex conflicts. In Sudan, European efforts have been undermined by political divisions, entrenched governance issues, and competing interests among multiple mediation actors, all while the humanitarian crisis continues. In Ukraine, Europe's mediation is hindered by deep distrust between Russia and the West, significant geopolitical divides, and limited leverage over Russia.

Recommendations

- Enhance coordination among European mediators: Strengthening coordination between European mediators will create a more unified, efficient approach to peace efforts, reducing redundancy and improving resource use. Building on platforms like the EU Community of Practice on Peace Mediation can help create a more cohesive mediation strategy.
- Collaborate with emerging powers for multilateral frameworks: As global power dynamics shift, European mediators should prioritise partnerships with non-traditional, emerging powers to build multilateral frameworks. Collaborating with these actors will leverage complementary strengths and enhance the legitimacy and effectiveness of peace efforts.
- Revise strategies to engage non-state armed groups (NSAGs): European governments should revise their approaches to engaging NSAGs. Even groups like Hamas and Hezbollah, designated as terrorist organisations by most Western countries, play pivotal roles in regional dynamics. Finding ways of engaging with elements of these groups who are genuinely interested in peace will help transform NSAGs from spoilers into constructive participants in peace processes.
- Leverage technology in mediation with ethical safeguards: European mediators should embrace digital tools like AI for peace mediation, particularly in areas such as data management, research, communication, and facilitating dialogue and collaboration. However, ethical considerations and human rights must guide the use of these technologies to avoid fuelling violence, targeting vulnerable populations, or exacerbating power imbalances. Unlike some emerging actors, European mediators are well-positioned to embed AI within a normative, values-based framework. Scaling AI for peacebuilding requires substantial investment, and Finland, Germany, Norway, and Switzerland should prioritise funding for research and development to ensure these tools are used ethically and effectively.
- Implement systematic monitoring, evaluation, and learning (MEL) frameworks: As conflicts become more intense, complex, and protracted, and the global mediation landscape rapidly evolves, European mediators should implement systematic MEL frameworks to assess both immediate and long-term impacts of peace interventions. This will help align political leadership, technical institutions, and practitioners, guide future strategies, improve mediation practices, and ensure that European mediators remain effective in the face of emerging, adaptable, and innovative actors.

- Enhance investments in developing and training mediation experts: European countries, including Finland, Germany, Norway, and Switzerland, should increase investment in the training and selection of skilled mediation experts who can be quickly deployed when needed. As conflicts grow increasingly complex, mediators must not only possess diplomatic expertise and the ability to manage peace processes but also have a deep understanding of local contexts, conflict drivers, regional dynamics, and, at the very least, basic AI literacy. Such investments will improve the effectiveness and timeliness of mediation efforts

I. Introduction

The nature of conflict in today's global landscape has become increasingly complex and multifaceted (Badanjak & Peter, 2024). It is marked by a rise in conflicts and political violence (IEP, 2024; ACLED, 2024), the proliferation of non-state armed groups (NSAGs) with ties to various international actors, and intensifying geopolitical competition, all of which significantly influence local and regional conflicts. The emergence of diverse actors, each with their own visions of peace and governance, further complicates international conflict dynamics and peace resolution efforts. In this fragmented and often violent international system, peace mediation — defined as third-party involvement, with the consent of all parties, in preventing, managing, or resolving conflict through the facilitation of mutually acceptable agreements (UN, 2012) — remains an essential and cost-effective tool for reducing violence and promoting long-term peace and stability.

For decades, European mediators have been at the forefront of global peacebuilding efforts, utilising both state-led diplomacy and non-state initiatives. Countries like Switzerland, Norway, and Finland have developed unique mediation models based on impartiality, diplomacy, and humanitarian values, which continue to play a critical role in conflict management worldwide. Germany, on the other hand, is seen more as a supportive player than a leading mediator in high-stakes conflicts. While European mediators remain central to global conflict resolution, they face increasing challenges, including declining funding for peace and conflict prevention, and the rise of emerging powers such as China, Qatar, and Türkiye, who are asserting their influence in conflict resolution and questioning the role of established European players (Mariani, 2024).

This report examines the role and effectiveness of European mediation efforts, with a particular focus on Finland, Germany, Norway, and Switzerland, while exploring the challenges they encounter in an evolving geopolitical environment. Through two case studies — Sudan and Ukraine — the research evaluates the successes and limitations of European mediation efforts in both intra-state and inter-state conflicts. The report provides insights into the strategies and frameworks employed by European mediators, as well as the broader implications of these models within the global landscape of conflict resolution. Furthermore, it assesses how European mediation models can be enhanced to respond more effectively to emerging global trends and challenges in peacebuilding.

The authors acknowledge the significant contributions to the field of mediation made by other individual countries and key regional and global actors, such as the European Union and the United Nations. However, the

primary focus of this research is on European countries which have long prioritised mediation as a central element of their foreign policies, or, in the case of Germany, those with a unique position and potential for growth in international peace mediation. The report addresses the following key questions:

- How do countries like Finland, Germany, Norway, and Switzerland approach conflict mediation, including their values, frameworks, and adaptability to different conflict contexts and the evolving mediation landscape?
- How effective are European mediators in contemporary international peace mediation, and what are the strengths and limitations of their strategies and approaches?
- How can European actors maintain their relevance and impact in global peace initiatives in the evolving international mediation landscape?

Through a deeper understanding of European mediation models, their strengths and limitations, and strategies for enhancing their mediation capacity, this report aims to provide valuable insights into the future of European involvement in global peace efforts.

Section II outlines the form and substance of European mediation models, with a focus on the approaches of Finland, Germany, Norway, and Switzerland. Section III examines the strengths and limitations of European mediation efforts, using the case studies of Sudan and Ukraine to analyse how European mediators have responded to major contemporary conflicts. Finally, Section IV offers recommendations for strengthening the impact of European peace mediators, focusing on practical measures to ensure

relevance and effectiveness in global peace efforts within the evolving landscape of international mediation.

The research draws on a wide range of sources, including official documents, academic literature, expert publications, and media reports, offering a combination of theoretical, policy-oriented, and case-specific perspectives. Additionally, insights from seventeen policy experts were gathered through semi-structured interviews

II. Key Features of European Mediation Models

This section explores the form and substance of European mediation models, focusing on the roles of Finland, Germany, Norway, and Switzerland. It examines how these countries have utilised their distinctive diplomatic, political, and humanitarian strengths to promote dialogue, peace, and conflict resolution on the global stage. By assessing their respective approaches, the chapter illustrates how each country contributes to international peace mediation in unique yet complementary ways. It also discusses the challenges they face in navigating emerging global trends and an increasingly complex mediation landscape.

2.1 Finland

Over the past thirty years, Finland has solidified its role as a key contributor to fostering dialogue and pursuing sustainable solutions to conflicts across Europe, the Middle East, Africa, and Asia. A key figure in establishing Finland's global reputation as a peace mediator was former President Martti Ahtisaari. Ahtisaari, who started his career in the Finnish diplomatic service and later joined the UN in high-ranking posts, helped elevate peace mediation as a foreign policy

priority for Finland through his involvement in high-stakes peace processes in countries such as Namibia, Indonesia, and Kosovo (CMI, 2023). His Nobel Peace Prize in 2008 further highlighted Finland's mediation capabilities on the international stage. In the wake of Ahtisaari's recognition, Finland began to formalise its commitment to mediation, with a more systematic approach to promoting peace at the global level.

Finland's approach to peace mediation is anchored in core principles of human security, inclusivity, respect for human rights, and a commitment to long-term peacebuilding. While Finland is a relatively recent participant in international peace mediation compared to countries like Norway and Switzerland, it has developed a unique model centred on collaboration, impartiality, and strict adherence to international law. Finland's strong commitment to human rights, coupled with its former policy of military non-alignment, has enhanced the credibility and legitimacy of its mediation efforts. This positions the country as a trusted and neutral actor in conflict zones, where other parties may have competing interests. Finland's mediation priorities (MFA of Finland, 2024) include:

- Promoting meaningful participation of women in peace processes;
- Enhancing the involvement of young people in peacebuilding efforts;
- Strengthening the role of religious and traditional peacemakers; and
- Advancing water diplomacy.

Further solidifying its peace mediation capacity, Finland established the Centre for

Peace Mediation within its Ministry of Foreign Affairs in 2020. This centre has become a focal point for designing, coordinating, and advancing peace mediation initiatives, both nationally and internationally. Its key objectives (MFA of Finland, 2025) include:

- Developing and implementing peace mediation strategies;
- Monitoring and influencing peace mediation policies;
- Advancing thematic priorities within the peace mediation field;
- Offering mediation training and capacity-building programmes; and
- Managing funding for NGOs and civil society organisations involved in peace processes.

Finland's mediation efforts are grounded in strong collaboration between the government and NGOs (Taalas et al., 2022), with the country playing a pivotal role in funding organisations focused on conflict prevention and peacebuilding. Key partnerships with groups like the Crisis Management Initiative (CMI) - Martti Ahtisaari Peace Foundation, Finn Church Aid (FCA), and the Finnish Evangelical Lutheran Mission (FELM) are central to Finland's approach (Mason & Mpeiwa, 2023). Additionally, Finland supports networks such as Nordic Women Mediators (NWM), which advocates for the inclusion of women in peace processes (NWM, 2024), and the Network for Religious and Traditional Peacemakers (NRTP), which links grassroots peacebuilders with global stakeholders (NRTP, 2024).

Recognising the importance of collaborating with emerging powers on

joint mediation efforts, Finland has actively worked to establish both multilateral and bilateral frameworks for mediation co-operation (Interview with Claus Lindroos, 2025). In 2010, Finland, in collaboration with Türkiye, launched the United Nations “Group of Friends of Mediation” to advocate for mediation as a key element of national, regional, and international policies. Initially co-chaired by Finland and Türkiye, this group has expanded to include fifty-three member states, reflecting growing global support for mediation as a tool for conflict resolution (UN, 2024). Building on this achievement, Finland, together with Türkiye and the Swiss presidency of the OSCE, established the “Group of Friends of Mediation” within the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) in 2014 (MFA of Finland, 2014). This initiative seeks to raise awareness about the importance of mediation, exchange best practices, and enhance the role of mediation within the OSCE framework. On 4 September 2024, Finland and Qatar signed a memorandum of understanding on co-operation in peace mediation and conflict resolution through their ministries of foreign affairs (Embassy of Finland, 2024). Later, on 21 September 2024, Qatar participated in the ministerial meeting of the Group of Friends of Mediation, held on the margins of the 77th United Nations General Assembly in New York, at the invitation of Türkiye and Finland (MFA of Qatar, 2024). Finland has also played a key role in supporting the African Union (AU)’s efforts to enhance mediation capacity, particularly through its ongoing support for mediation projects across Africa, often facilitated by CMI (MFA of Finland, 2024). In June 2024, Finland announced a joint initiative with South Africa to launch a mentoring programme for young peace mediators (Finland Abroad, 2024), aligned with the 2015 UN Security Council Resolution on Youth, Peace and Security (UN, 2022).

Finland has embraced innovative technological solutions in its conflict management approach, integrating digital tools to facilitate dialogue, particularly in conflict areas where in-person meetings may be difficult or unsafe. For instance, the Special Envoy of the Finnish Minister for Foreign Affairs to the Horn of Africa has engaged in extensive „WhatsApp diplomacy“ (Ruohomäki, 2024). Finnish organisations like CMI have also explored technologies such as AI-supported digital dialogues in Sudan. These dialogues, held in July 2023, gathered qualitative insights from local stakeholders, including women’s groups, youth, and Resistance Committees, after the onset of the Sudanese conflict. By overcoming geographic barriers, these digital platforms informed CMI’s peace initiatives in Sudan (Thompson & Piirtola, 2024).

Although Finland has earned a distinguished reputation as a peace mediator, its role faces both internal and external challenges. The significant reduction in Finland’s official development assistance (ODA) budget and the reform of its foreign service (OECD, 2024) may impact the country’s ability to support global mediation and peacebuilding efforts, especially at the grassroots level, as well as its influence in conflict resolution. Externally, Finland must navigate a complex geopolitical landscape, with shifting political and security dynamics, such as its NATO membership, potentially affecting its image as a neutral actor and complicating mediation efforts, particularly in conflicts involving Russia. However, Finland’s opportunities for mediation are unlikely to diminish; they may simply evolve. As seen with Norway, NATO membership and peace mediation can coexist effectively (Taalas et al., 2022). As long as peace mediation remains a core element of Finland’s foreign policy, its continued adaptation to geopolitical

changes, along with innovation and strategic partnerships, will ensure the long-term effectiveness of its contributions to international conflict resolution.

2.2 Germany

Germany has traditionally not been a leading actor in peace mediation but has built a strong track record in supporting mediation efforts, viewing its role as complementary to traditional mediators and seeking coordination with them (FFO, 2022). This includes providing capacity development, financial assistance, and political support for the mediation initiatives of international organisations. Driven by its commitment to diplomacy, multilateralism, and long-term peacebuilding, Germany's mediation efforts are shaped by both pragmatic considerations and its strategic interests within the European Union (EU) and the broader international system. As a key EU member, Germany leverages its diplomatic, economic, and institutional power in peace efforts. Multilateral diplomacy, often within the frameworks of the EU, the United Nations, and the OSCE, is central to its approach. In such fora, aligning with its feminist foreign policy, Germany has prioritised the Women, Peace, and Security Agenda, actively promoting women's participation in peace negotiations (FFO, 2022).

Over the past fifteen years, Germany has become more strategic in its approach to conflict management and resolution. The 2004 Action Plan on Civilian Crisis Prevention, Conflict Resolution, and Post-Conflict Peacebuilding integrated civilian crisis management, including mediation, into Germany's foreign and development policies (Hennig & Elges, 2008). This plan acknowledged the role of non-governmental actors and focused on supporting civil society

through capacity building, financial aid, and logistical support. The 2014 foreign policy review and the creation of the Directorate-General "S" in 2015 further strengthened Germany's crisis prevention capabilities. In 2017, the government introduced the "Preventing Crises, Resolving Conflicts, Building Peace" guidelines (The Federal Government, 2017), reaffirming its commitment to international crisis prevention, conflict management, stabilisation, and peacebuilding, with an emphasis on expanding Germany's mediation capacities (Dworack & Kugel, 2018). The Federal Foreign Office's 2019 Concept for Peace Mediation (FFO, 2019), aligned with UN guidelines (UN, 2012), outlines Germany's mediation goals and principles, including consent, impartiality, inclusivity, and national ownership (FFO, 2019).

Germany contributes to global mediation through financial, logistical, and technical support, as well as capacity building. It supports mediation initiatives of organisations like the UN Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs (DPPA), the OSCE, and the AU, funding projects in countries such as Colombia, Yemen, and Sudan. Germany also supports capacity building by seconding mediation experts to peace operations and working with regional and sub-regional mediation support actors in Africa to aid the AU's peace and security initiatives. While Germany's direct involvement in high-level mediation is uncommon, it took a leading role in 2014 and 2015, in the negotiation of the two Minsk agreements following Russia's annexation of Crimea and the war in Donbass, and played a key part in the 2015 Iran nuclear deal. In 2019, it launched the Berlin Process on Libya to foster peace by engaging international actors with influence over the conflict parties (FFO, 2022).

Germany has established a robust mediation support structure to enhance collaboration between government institutions, particularly the Directorate-General S within the Federal Foreign Office (FFO), NGOs, and academic bodies involved in conflict management and post-conflict stabilisation (FFO, 2022). As part of a hybrid mediation support model (Mason & Mpeiwa, 2023), the German government actively partners with civil society and academic institutions. Central to this effort is the Initiative Mediation Support Germany (IMSD), which unites five prominent organisations working in peace mediation and mediation support (Stenner, 2017): the Berghof Foundation, European University Viadrina, Inmedio – Institute for Mediation and Conflict Management, the Berlin Centre for Integrative Mediation (BCIM), and the Centre for International Peace Operations (ZIF)¹ (Friedensmediation Deutschland, 2025). This coalition is dedicated to shaping and implementing Germany’s mediation strategies (Interview with Luxshi Vimalarajah, 2025). Among these organisations, the Berghof Foundation is globally recognised for its impartial and longstanding contributions to mediation. It plays a key role as both a project partner and implementing organisation in peace mediation, with the Federal Foreign Office (FFO) acting as its strategic donor (Berghof Foundation, 2021). The Foundation operates independently, leveraging its expertise to mediate conflicts without political interference from the German government in the mediation process or its outcomes.

Germany’s Strategy for International Digital Policy calls for strong partnerships and active involvement at all levels to ensure

¹ ZIF was founded in 2002 by the German Federal Government and Parliament with the aim of enhancing international civilian capabilities in crisis prevention, conflict resolution, and peacebuilding. It operates as a non-profit limited liability company, with its sole shareholder being the Federal Republic of Germany, represented by the German Federal Foreign Office (Reliefweb, 2024)

a resilient, human-centric digital future (Diplo, 2021). Germany supports digital transformation initiatives such as the UN Global Pulse, which promotes the ethical use of data and AI in addressing global issues (UN Global Pulse, 2024). Since 2018, the Aspen Institute Germany, has held conferences and “AI Tech dialogues” on the economic, political, ethical and security implications of AI technologies (Aspen Institute, 2025). While Germany is not yet a leader in AI-based peace mediation, it is investing in research at the intersection of AI, ethics, and conflict resolution. Institutions like the German Institute for International and Security Affairs (SWP) play a critical role in advancing this research (Dickow & Jacob, 2018; Stanzel & Voelsen, 2022).

Well-positioned to contribute to international conflict resolution efforts, Germany benefits from its economic and political power, long-term commitment to international development, mediation expertise, and a solid support structure, as well as its relatively limited colonial history (Dworack & Kugel, 2018). However, several constraints affect its mediation efforts. Recent significant cuts to development and humanitarian aid, peace, and stability programmes (Hill, 2024), and funds for NGOs (Ainsworth, 2024), raise concerns about the impact on peacebuilding initiatives. These cuts could reduce support for NGO-led efforts, weaken local capacities in conflict zones, and diminish diplomatic influence. Externally, Germany’s ability to lead high-level mediation is limited in conflicts involving major global powers, such as the war in Ukraine. Additionally, as with other European countries, Germany’s influence is increasingly challenged by the shifting global balance of power, and the growing influence of regional actors in conflict zones. While traditionally seen as neutral due to its post-World War II legacy, Germany has faced criticism for lacking impartiality in supporting

Israel during the Gaza war (Greenstein, 2024; Ruck, 2024). Given these factors, Germany is likely to continue playing a supportive rather than leading role in high-stakes conflicts.

2.3 Norway

For several decades, Norway — the home of the Nobel Peace Prize — has played a pivotal role in global peace processes, with conflict resolution and reconciliation at the heart of its foreign policy (Government of Norway, 2024). Leveraging its humanitarian profile, promotion of inclusiveness and close cooperation with partners, Norway has been involved in peace mediation in a number of countries. Key examples of its mediation efforts include the 1993 and 1995 Oslo Accords between Israel and Palestine, peace talks during the Sri Lankan civil war, negotiations for the Colombian peace agreement, and the Venezuelan peace process (Government of Norway, 2024; Marín Nicolás, 2024). While not without setbacks, including in the Middle East, Afghanistan and Sudan, Norway's mediation efforts have been instrumental in fostering dialogue and promoting peace. Norway's continued involvement in peace mediation, which has strong domestic support (Interview with Torunn L. Tryggestad, 2025), highlights its dedication to promoting world peace as "a core interest" (Government of Norway, 2022) and cements its reputation as a respected global mediator.

Norwegian peace diplomacy is guided by democratic values, respect for the individual's fundamental rights and the rule of law, all of which Norway considers as prerequisites for lasting peace and stability (Government of Norway, 2020). Norway's model of peace and reconciliation is shaped by a number of key characteristics, or "hallmarks" (Government of Norway, 2024), including:

- Willingness to talk to all parties: Norway engages with all conflict parties aiming for political solutions, enhancing communication and understanding;
- Long-term Commitment: Norway maintains a sustained effort, with broad support across governments and a reputation for reliability;
- Impartiality: Norway remains neutral in facilitation but upholds strong values, promoting democracy, human rights, and the rule of law;
- Risk Acceptance: Norway acknowledges the high risk of failure but sees unsuccessful attempts as stepping stones for future success;
- Experience and Knowledge: Leveraging vast experience in peace processes, Norway adapts to each conflict's unique context;
- Resources: Norway allocates human and financial resources to support peace processes and implementation, with a dedicated ministry section and substantial grants;
- Networks and Collaboration: Norway works closely with a broad network of international partners, including diplomats, NGOs, and institutions, to support conflict resolution;
- Inclusion: Norway prioritises inclusive peace processes, particularly by involving women and victims, ensuring more sustainable peace agreements.

These key characteristics are widely recognised by Norwegian officials and diplomats as the distinct strengths that define

Norway's approach to peace diplomacy. They are seen as the unique advantages that set Norway apart in its efforts to mediate and facilitate conflict resolution, enabling the country to play a prominent and trusted role in global peace processes (Interviews with Torunn L. Tryggestad and Stine A. Bosheim, 2025).

Norway's mediation initiatives are spearheaded by the Section for Peace and Reconciliation within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) (Government of Norway, 2024), which was created in 2001-2002. This work is bolstered by the expertise and resources of several prominent NGOs, notably the Norwegian Centre for Conflict Resolution (NOREF) and the Peace Research Institute Oslo (PRIO). These organisations play a critical role in enhancing Norway's diplomatic capabilities by providing in-depth research, analysis, and training. NOREF, for example, supports conflict parties in preventing, easing, and resolving disputes through informal diplomacy while also assisting both Norwegian and international peace efforts (NOREF, 2024). Likewise, PRIO conducts innovative research on the factors that promote peaceful relations, offering valuable insights that inform Norway's mediation approach (PRIO, 2024). The collaboration between these institutions and the Norwegian government ensures a holistic, multifaceted strategy for conflict resolution, blending policy expertise with grassroots understanding. Through these strategic partnerships, Norway has built a reputation as a neutral and trusted mediator, enabling its successful engagement in a wide range of global peace efforts, from regional disputes to international peace processes. The country's steadfast commitment to dialogue and peaceful solutions, supported by these influential organisations, solidifies its role as a key actor in global diplomacy and conflict management.

An important feature of Norwegian peace diplomacy is the inclusion of women, youth, victims, and other groups in peace processes, driven by the belief that such inclusion fosters greater local ownership and results in better peace agreements (MFA of Norway, 2022). Although initially limited, the Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) agenda became a priority following the adoption of UN Security Council Resolution 1325 in 2000 and Norway's national action plan in 2006 (Government of Norway, 2023). Norway has since established itself as a leader in promoting women's inclusion in peace processes and increasing the representation of women as mediators (MFA of Norway, 2024). The Nordic Women Mediators (NWM)-Norway network, part of the broader NWM initiative launched in 2015, is dedicated to ensuring the meaningful inclusion of women mediators and peacebuilders in global peace dialogues. With around forty members from diverse backgrounds, including diplomats and military officers, the network engages in peace efforts in regions such as the Philippines, Colombia, and Syria. NWM-Norway emphasises amplifying women's voices, fostering collaborative partnerships, and offering its members opportunities for knowledge sharing and networking. Key partners include the PRIO Centre on Gender, Peace, and Security, and NOREF (Tryggestad, 2015). Despite its strong reputation in advancing women's inclusion in peace processes, Norwegian peace diplomacy faces increased competition in this space. The inclusion of women, especially in countries like Colombia and Afghanistan, has presented significant challenges and dilemmas (Interviews with Torunn L. Tryggestad and Stine A. Bosheim, 2025).

Norway is exploring how technological innovations can enhance conflict resolution efforts. With its goal of becoming

the most digitised country by 2030 (Ministry of Digitalisation and Public Governance, 2024), Norway is well-positioned to leverage technology to bridge accessibility gaps, enable remote negotiations, and expand participation in peacebuilding initiatives, even in conflict-affected regions with limited infrastructure. Institutions like PRIO are leading research on how digital innovations can complement traditional peacebuilding approaches, particularly by ensuring that marginalised actors — such as women, youth, and refugees — are more actively involved in shaping peace outcomes. Additionally, PRIO and other Norwegian organisations are developing methodologies which use big data, machine learning, and AI to predict violent conflicts, assess risks, and create more effective prevention and intervention strategies. By exploring how these advanced technologies can be integrated into conflict resolution, Norway is establishing itself as a leader in utilising digital innovations to enhance the inclusivity and effectiveness of peace processes (Delaney, 2023; Tholens & Rolandsen, 2024; VIEWS, 2024).

Despite its established reputation as a peace mediator in complex and sensitive conflicts, and its strong political commitment to peace mediation (Bui Duong & Pitts, 2024), Norway faces several challenges. A key difficulty is balancing its core values — democracy, humanitarian principles, and the rule of law — with the diverse interests of conflict parties, all while continuing to mediate in an increasingly difficult environment for international cooperation. For example, Norway's principled stance on upholding humanitarian law in the Gaza conflict has garnered praise but also provoked criticism from Israel and the USA (Abrams, 2024), potentially complicating its role in Middle Eastern reconciliation efforts. Additionally, setbacks are common, as seen

in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and the Afghan and Colombian peace processes, and given the scale of Norway's engagement, assessing systematically its role in peace mediation remains limited (Interview with Torunn L. Tryggestad, 2025). Coordination among diverse actors, including non-state and regional players, is particularly challenging in volatile environments like Sudan, where Norway is seeking to promote peace negotiations. Furthermore, securing adequate human and financial resources for sustained peace efforts remains a challenge, even for a resource-rich country like Norway, which is facing cuts to its peace funding (Donor Tracker, 2024). Nevertheless, Norway's commitment to peace diplomacy, its principled values, and its experience and expertise continue to drive its significant contributions to conflict management and resolution.

2.4 Switzerland

Switzerland has a long tradition of acting as a key player in global peace mediation. The promotion of “a just and peaceful international order” is explicitly outlined in the Swiss Federal Constitution (Federal Constitution, 1999) and is one of Switzerland's central foreign policy objectives. Traditionally, Switzerland has provided a safe and neutral environment for peace talks, facilitating numerous international negotiations. In recent years, Switzerland has played a key role in supporting seventeen peace processes and facilitating ceasefire negotiations in six countries through its diplomatic efforts (FDFA, 2024). Notable examples include the Maputo Accord for Peace and National Reconciliation in Mozambique signed in 2019 (Turner & Palmiano Federer, 2024), the 2016 peace agreement between the Colombian government and the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia — People's Army (FARC-

EP) (FDFA, 2023) and the Comprehensive Peace Accord between the Government of Nepal and Maoist rebels signed in 2006 (Bondolfi & Unterfinger, 2022).

Switzerland's role in peace mediation is grounded in its commitment to neutrality, humanitarian principles, and extensive experience. Its independence, impartiality, and lack of a colonial legacy make it an effective, unbiased facilitator, fostering an environment conducive to dialogue (Interview with Thomas Greminger, 2025). Switzerland also emphasises multilateral collaboration, partnering with international organisations like the UN and OSCE to ensure peace processes are inclusive and supported by diverse actors and resources. Moreover, Switzerland's strong dedication to humanitarian law, particularly through its role in the Geneva Conventions, enables it to approach conflicts with a focus on upholding humanitarian principles.

Switzerland's experience and expertise centre on providing "good offices" as an impartial third party (The Federal Council, 2024). This includes three key roles:

- Hosting peace talks or negotiations;
- Acting as a facilitator or mediator in peace processes; and
- Fulfilling protection power mandates, where Switzerland, with the consent of all parties involved, represents a state's interests, or protects its citizens when diplomatic relations are severed.

Switzerland's neutrality, convening power, expertise in facilitation and mediation, and role as a protecting power have established it as a trusted mediator in complex conflicts. Additionally, its inclusive,

consensus-oriented political system enhances the credibility and appeal of its good offices. A 2023 study by the Military Academy and the Centre for Security Studies (CSS) at ETH Zurich revealed that 78% of the Swiss population supports an increased role in conflict mediation (Szvircsev Tresch et al., 2023), demonstrating strong, cross-party agreement on the significance of this work.

To reinforce its role in peace mediation and to advance mediation as a systematic, professional practice (Mason & Mpeiwa, 2023) Switzerland launched the Mediation Support Project (MSP) in 2005 (Willig, 2018). It is a collaborative initiative between Swisspeace and the Center for Security Studies (CSS) at ETH Zürich, in cooperation with the Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs (FDFA). This hybrid model of mediation support draws on both in-house governmental expertise and external partnerships with facilitators, mediators, and subject matter experts. By leveraging the strengths of both CSS and Swisspeace's mediation programmes, MSP seeks to enhance both Swiss and global mediation efforts. The project integrates process support, training, and research to equip mediators and conflict parties with the knowledge and tools necessary for effective peace negotiations. In this endeavour, MSP collaborates closely with the Federal Department of Foreign Affairs' (FDFA) Human Security Division, as well as with international partners such as the UN DPPA (Willig, 2018).

As part of Switzerland's efforts to professionalise peace mediation, the Federal Institute of Technology Zurich launched the Master of Advanced Studies ETH Mediation in Peace Processes (MAS ETH MPP) in 2017. This unique two-year programme, developed in collaboration with FDFA and the foreign ministries of Germany and Finland (CSS, 2025), focuses on mediation

in peace processes. Its main objectives are to equip participants with the knowledge, skills, attitudes, and networks to mediate violent political conflicts, and to strengthen cooperation among the MAS ETH MPP's strategic partners in peace mediation. An external evaluation is currently assessing the first four cycles of the programme, from 2017 to 2025, focusing on its relevance, coherence, effectiveness, and efficiency (ETH Zürich, 2024).

Switzerland strongly supports the active participation of women in conflict prevention, peacebuilding, reconstruction, and post-conflict reconciliation efforts. Simultaneously, it emphasises the need for enhanced protection of women, particularly from sexual violence. This commitment is reiterated in Switzerland's national action plan for implementing UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace, and Security (FDFA, 2024). In 2021, the FDFA launched the "Swiss Women in Peace Processes" Network (SWiPP), bringing together fifteen Swiss women engaged in peace processes across various sectors, including the FDFA, NGOs, and international organisations (House of Switzerland, 2024).

Switzerland actively promotes peace and security through technology, fostering international dialogue on the dual role of digital tools in both polarising societies and advancing peace (CR, 2022). A strong advocate for the ethical use of AI, Switzerland partners with organisations like the UN and the World Economic Forum to shape policies on its responsible application in peacebuilding. While acknowledging AI's potential in conflict analysis, early warning systems, and peace efforts, Switzerland also emphasises the risks it presents. To mitigate these, Switzerland advocates for regulatory benchmarks, a shared AI framework, human-centred design,

and accountability to promote equality and prevent discrimination (Permanent Mission of Switzerland to the UN, 2023). The "CyberMediation Initiative", launched in 2018 by the UN Department of Political Affairs, DiploFoundation, the Geneva Internet Platform, the Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue, Swisspeace, and researchers from Harvard University, explores the impact of digital tools in conflict prevention and resolution, identifying potential safeguards and addressing the challenges of technology misuse (Diplo, 2018). Experts from institutions like Swisspeace and the Geneva Graduate Institute further examine how digital tools can address emerging peacebuilding challenges and enhance peace processes (Swisspeace, 2025; Hirblinger et al., 2023). The Swiss PeaceTech Alliance (SAPT), founded in 2022 by EPFL, the Geneva Graduate Institute, and the Geneva Peacebuilding Platform, works to leverage multi-stakeholder collaborations to integrate peacebuilding into technological innovation (GGI, 2022).

Despite its long-standing success in peace processes, Switzerland now faces challenges in maintaining its traditional role due to evolving global dynamics and the competing demands of security and economic interests. Domestically, efforts to reallocate budgets and manage rising military expenditures have led to significant cuts in both bilateral and multilateral development cooperation (The Federal Council, 2025), along with reductions in funding for UN agencies and NGOs (Langrand, 2025). These shifts in funding priorities raise concerns about their potential impact on resources for peace efforts (Interview with Thomas Greminger, 2025). Externally, Switzerland's neutrality has been increasingly tested by recent global events, notably the conflicts in Ukraine and Gaza. In response to Russia's 2022 invasion of Ukraine, Switzerland imposed economic

sanctions on Russia and excluded the country from the June 2024 peace summit in Bürgenstock (HURI, 2024). Additionally, in December 2024, the Swiss parliament approved a five-year ban on Hamas (Fedlex, 2024), effectively ending a “discreet but at times intensive dialogue” with the group (Rigendinger, 2024). While experts note that Switzerland’s neutrality policy has evolved over time (Greminger & Rickli, 2023), its alignment with EU policies on Ukraine and Gaza highlights the growing pressures on this principle. These stem from modern global challenges as well as Switzerland’s own shifting security and economic priorities. Despite these challenges, Switzerland’s commitment to neutral diplomacy, humanitarian values, and multilateral cooperation ensures its continued role as a key player in peace mediation, even as it navigates the complexities of a changing world order.

2.5 Commonalities and Differences

Peace mediation is a cornerstone of the foreign policies of Finland, Norway, and Switzerland, and although it is not as central in Germany, it still plays a significant role in its foreign policy. The four nations share core principles, including respect for human rights, democratic values, and gender sensitivity, which guide their mediation efforts. Their approaches emphasise neutrality, long-term peacebuilding, and multilateral collaboration, often through international organisations like the UN, the EU, and the OSCE.

All four countries prioritise impartiality, which fosters trust among conflicting parties and facilitates dialogue. Finland, Norway, and Switzerland are particularly recognised for their neutral stances, while Germany, despite its larger geopolitical role within the EU, also emphasises neutrality in its mediation efforts. These nations focus on

addressing the root causes of conflict, ensuring that peace processes go beyond ceasefires so as to foster sustainable reconciliation. Civil society, including NGOs and local actors, plays a significant role, making peace agreements more inclusive and reflective of diverse community needs. Another shared characteristic, as explored in the following section, is their commitment to professionalising and coordinating international mediation. These countries have established structures to better leverage both government and civil society resources, ensuring more efficient and sustainable mediation processes.

However, differences emerge in the scope and approach of their mediation efforts. Norway and Switzerland are the most actively involved, with a strong tradition of independent and impartial mediation. Norway’s approach is often driven by long-term engagement, relying on NGOs and grassroots efforts while Switzerland’s mediation is more institutionally supported, grounded in humanitarian law and international conventions. Finland, with its emerging role, focuses on collaboration with international organisations and sustainable peacebuilding. Germany, while being a key player in European diplomacy, tends to align its mediation efforts more closely with its geopolitical interests, particularly within the EU.

In summary, while these countries share many values and principles, their distinct historical, political, and institutional contexts shape their mediation strategies, influencing both their engagement and the scope of their impact on global peace processes.

III. Strengths and Limitations of European Mediators

European mediators have been instrumental in resolving a variety of conflicts, but their effectiveness is influenced by numerous factors. This section examines the key strengths that contribute to their success in mediation, as well as the limitations that shape their overall impact.

3.1 Strengths

Finland, Germany, Norway, and Switzerland offer several key strengths in international conflict management and resolution.

Expertise and Strong Mediation Capacities

Finland, Germany, Norway, and Switzerland have built strong mediation capacities, gaining international expertise through institutionalising mediation support structures (MSS). These structures combine state-led and non-state elements, offering training, research, and operational support for peace processes (Mason and Mpeiwa, 2023). Governments lead with diplomatic ties and political influence, while NGOs, independent mediators, and academic institutions bring neutrality, expertise, and local networks. This collaborative approach integrates government resources and diplomatic channels with civil society expertise, creating a flexible, comprehensive approach to peacebuilding which blends high-level negotiations with grassroots and informal mediation efforts.

Experience and Reputation

Finland, Norway, and Switzerland have developed extensive mediation experience and earned strong reputations as neutral, effective brokers, which gives them leverage and credibility. Germany, while preferring not

to take a prominent or leading role, continues to support mediation efforts, notably through funding organisations like the Berghof Foundation. Although the perception of neutrality has somewhat diminished and varies across countries, these nations are still generally viewed as more impartial than other international actors. This perception allows them to facilitate dialogue without pushing a geopolitical or strategic agenda, thereby increasing the likelihood of productive negotiations — especially with conflict parties wary of more powerful or heavily involved nations.

Strong Diplomatic Networks

Another strength is the robust diplomatic capital these countries wield. They all have well-established networks and strong relationships within international organisations such as the UN, the EU, and various regional bodies. Finland and Germany can leverage their connections within the EU, helping to mobilise wider engagement across Europe. The diplomatic efforts of Finland, Germany, Norway, and Switzerland are often guided by a commitment to multilateralism, human rights, and sustainable peace, values that resonate globally. They have proven their ability to bridge divides, acting as mediators between opposing factions in high-stakes negotiations around the world.

Inclusive Peace

European mediation efforts are widely recognised for promoting inclusivity by actively engaging local actors, including conflict parties, civil society, women, and youth, to ensure peace processes reflect all stakeholders' perspectives. However, achieving inclusivity can be difficult when engaging with groups like Hamas or Hezbollah, which are designated as terrorist organisations by many European countries. As new challenges like climate change and

migration arise, Europe's ability to engage local actors inclusively remains a key strength and comparative advantage, offering unique opportunities to foster sustainable peace.

Women's Participation in Peace Processes

The involvement of women leaders, gender experts, and women's organisations plays a critical role in strengthening peace efforts by tackling the root causes of conflict and crafting more inclusive, effective initiatives. Their participation brings diverse perspectives and a wider range of mediation skills which enhance the overall effectiveness of peace processes. The countries explored in this report have, to varying degrees, advanced the Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) agenda and actively promoted women's inclusion in peace negotiations, demonstrating a growing recognition of the value of gender-sensitive approaches in conflict resolution.

3.2 Challenges and Limitations

Based on the literature review and interviews conducted for this research, European mediators — despite their extensive expertise and notable achievements in international mediation — face key challenges which can undermine their effectiveness.

Political-Technical Gap

Ensuring alignment between political leadership, technical institutions, and practitioners is crucial to the effectiveness of peace processes. While all the countries examined in this paper have been active in international peacebuilding — providing technical, financial, and political support while strengthening their mediation capacities — a gap sometimes exists between the political and technical levels. Political leaders often fail to view conflicts through the lens of peace mediation, and the political, technical, and practitioner levels frequently operate in iso-

lation from one another. This lack of alignment diminishes the overall impact of international peacebuilding efforts.

Financial Constraints

Financial constraints are a challenge for European mediators, including Finland, Germany, Norway, and Switzerland. While these countries remain committed to peace and post-conflict processes, their financial contributions to grassroots peace efforts have been reduced. Additionally, the reallocation of funds towards military spending in response to the war in Ukraine has further strained resources, diverting them away from foreign aid, peacebuilding, and humanitarian initiatives. Although European governments continue to support their official mediation structures, as well as NGOs and civil society actors, budget cuts — even by long-time supporters like Switzerland and Norway — threaten to undermine their capacity to sustain long-term peace and conflict resolution efforts. This highlights the challenge of maintaining influence without continued financial commitment (Interviews with Jonathan Cohen and Thomas Greminger, 2025).

Coordination Challenges

Coordination among European mediators is also inconsistent. Despite existing platforms like the EU Community of Practice on Peace Mediation (CoP), which convenes international actors, policymakers, and experts (EEAS, 2024), there is no unified approach to mediation, with efforts often fragmented or "ad hoc." This fragmentation, driven by competing geopolitical interests and a preference for bilateral or "mini-lateral" approaches, hampers the collective use of resources, leading to redundancy, inefficiencies, and confusion, diminishing the overall impact of European mediation efforts (Interview with Jonathan Cohen, 2025).

Policies and Practices of Neutrality

The traditional role of European countries as neutral mediators is under increasing scrutiny, especially considering their involvement in the conflicts in Ukraine and Gaza. This scrutiny is set against a backdrop of growing divisions between the Global North and South, with many countries in the South accusing the North of fostering an “à la carte” international order marked by double standards which hinders collective action in the UN and other multilateral organisations. For example, Switzerland’s neutrality has been questioned due to its support for sanctions against Russia (Jones, 2022) and its ban on Hamas (Langrand, 2024) while Germany and Norway’s strong diplomatic and military support for Ukraine challenges their neutral stances. Sweden and Finland’s accession to NATO further distances them from their former positions as neutral or non-aligned states. Additionally, Germany’s backing of Israel in the Gaza conflict has raised concerns about bias and double standards, particularly amidst accusations of genocide against Israel (Greenstein, 2024). The evolving neutrality policies of these European nations may affect their perceived role as impartial mediators in future peace processes.

Emerging Powers

The rise of emerging powers has introduced new complexities to the mediation landscape. Non-Western actors, particularly from the Middle East and China, are becoming increasingly influential, offering significant resources and alternative mediation models. Cities like Doha, Jeddah, Istanbul, and Beijing are emerging as viable alternatives to traditional venues like Geneva, New York, and Vienna for peace talks. A recent study highlights that these new players tend to prioritise stability through humanitarian aid and economic interests rather than focusing

on human rights, democracy, and gender equality, as European mediators do. Their approach to inclusivity often emphasises the participation of armed groups over civil society, women, and youth (Mariani, 2024), which challenges the strategies of Western mediators and complicates the overall mediation environment.

Engagement with Non-State Armed Groups (NSAGs)

Effectively engaging NSAGs, which play a dominant role in modern conflicts (Hofmann, 2016), remains a challenge for European mediators. Countries like Finland, Germany, Norway, and Switzerland have developed strategies to involve these groups in peace processes through both direct and indirect dialogue. Organisations such as the Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue provide effective models for how NGOs can facilitate such engagement (Whitfield, 2010). Their approach focuses on transforming NSAGs from armed adversaries into constructive participants by building trust, advocating for ceasefires, and supporting their reintegration into political frameworks. While there have been notable successes, such as Norway’s involvement in Colombia, the complexity of engaging with NSAGs remains, particularly with groups like Hamas and Hezbollah, which are designated as terrorist organisations by several states, including Germany and Finland. Switzerland recently passed legislation banning Hamas-related activities within its borders (FedLex, 2024).

Technological Advancements

Technological advancements, particularly in AI and social media, offer both opportunities and challenges for European mediators (Giovanardi, 2024; Hawke, 2024; Höne, 2019). Digital tools can either exacerbate divisions and incite violence or reshape conflict narratives and support

peacebuilding efforts. As a digital tool, AI has significant potential in peacebuilding, especially in areas like data management and background research, communication, and the facilitation of dialogue, consultation, and collaboration (Build Up, 2025; Hawke, 2024; Höne, 2019). However, experts caution that AI's role in mediation will only be effective if its limitations and barriers are fully acknowledged (Höne, 2019). For example, predicting conflicts with AI-powered EWEA systems is unreliable due to the unpredictability of human behaviour, biases in data, feedback loops, and the difficulty of forecasting rare events. Additionally, the complex and context-dependent nature of social systems further complicates accurate predictions (Interview with Roy Gardner, 2025). Countries like Finland, Germany, Norway, and Switzerland are grappling with the technological, political, and ethical challenges of integrating innovative technologies into mediation strategies. Although research funding typically supports innovation, additional resources are needed for research, development, and engineering (RDE) to create and sustain ethically sound digital tools that can be effectively used in complex conflict environments.

Evaluations of Mediation Activities

A key challenge for European mediators is effectively learning from past experiences, assessing their impact, and measuring outcomes. Robust monitoring, evaluation and learning (MEL) mechanisms are essential for optimising resource use, ensuring that mediation efforts remain responsive to local needs and evolving global dynamics, and building credibility. Without regular and systematic MEL processes, identifying successes, addressing shortcomings and failed attempts, and refining strategies for future efforts becomes difficult. The lack of such processes can hinder the improvement

of mediation practices, reduce accountability, and make it harder to demonstrate tangible results to both domestic and international stakeholders.

3.3 Case studies: Sudan and Ukraine

This section examines two case studies — the wars in Sudan and Ukraine — to explore the strengths and challenges of European mediation efforts in addressing two deeply complex and protracted conflicts. These cases highlight the potential of European diplomacy to foster dialogue and peace while also revealing the significant obstacles in resolving conflicts shaped by long-standing political, ethnic, and economic divisions in Sudan, or by a combination of political, and historical factors fuelled by geopolitical rivalry in Ukraine. Despite European mediators' efforts to contribute to peacebuilding, the ongoing complexities of these conflicts underscore the limitations of external mediation, particularly in the face of entrenched local dynamics and the influence of powerful international actors.

The War in Sudan

Since the eruption of conflict between the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) and the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) on 15 April 2023, Sudan has been plunged into a devastating war, precipitating a severe humanitarian crisis. Nearly two years into the conflict, with a tragic death toll (Dahab et al., 2024), the country is grappling with unprecedented levels of need. Currently, twenty-five million people, including over fourteen million children, require urgent humanitarian aid (OCHA, 2024). Alarming, 17.7 million people — more than one third of the population — are facing severe food insecurity while over 8.6 million, or 16% of Sudan's population, have been displaced, creating the largest displacement crisis globally (ibid.). Both parties

have committed heinous acts, with the UN reporting war crimes (OHCHR, 2024) and the RSF facing accusations of genocide (U.S. DoS, 2025).

The ongoing conflict has spurred numerous mediation efforts. In May 2023, the USA and Saudi Arabia launched the Jeddah Process to facilitate ceasefire talks between the SAF and RSF, which led to the Jeddah Declaration aimed at protecting civilians (U.S. DoS, 2023). However, this agreement has yet to be implemented. Critics argue that the process excluded Sudan's civilian leadership and other armed groups, exacerbating the situation and polarising the conflict (Berhe, 2024). Although the USA and Saudi Arabia sought to involve the AU and engage with civilian groups, disputes over representation hindered progress. The failure to secure a ceasefire prompted further involvement from the UAE, Bahrain, Egypt, and Chad, which initiated the Cairo Initiative (Lewis, 2023). Yet these efforts were similarly stymied by obstacles, including the inability to facilitate direct meetings between the warring leaders. Since the conflict began, various groups have been invited to peace talks hosted in cities such as Jeddah, Cairo, Djibouti, Addis Ababa, and Geneva, each under different sponsors and formats (Berhe, 2024).

European actors have been involved in peace efforts since the outset of the conflict. The European Union (EU), through its Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP), has deployed both humanitarian aid and diplomatic pressure to support peace initiatives. The EU has also relied on its Special Representative for the Horn of Africa to advocate for a ceasefire and negotiations. In collaboration with Switzerland and Norway — both of which have appointed special envoys for Sudan — the EU has focused on both humanitarian assistance

and diplomatic engagement. Norway, which, alongside the USA and the UK, forms part of the Troika group of three countries in Sudan, has made attempts to facilitate a peace dialogue through its Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Switzerland, leveraging its tradition of neutrality, has offered mediation services and coordinated humanitarian efforts. Finland has also contributed by providing humanitarian assistance and engaging in regional diplomatic initiatives in coordination with the EU.

As the conflict endures, European actors have increasingly emphasised multi-lateral diplomacy and information exchange. Officials from the EU, Switzerland, Norway, and other European countries frequently have joint meetings with the UN and the AU to align their efforts and avoid duplicating initiatives. Regular information-sharing between government actors, peace foundations, and NGOs aims to ensure that interventions are complementary (Interview with Jan Pospisil, 2025). However, challenges persist in achieving coherence, as differing priorities sometimes complicate coordination.

On 15 April 2024, France, Germany, and the EU hosted an international humanitarian conference in Paris to address the crisis. The conference brought together representatives from fifty-eight states, regional organisations, UN agencies, international NGOs, and financial institutions, culminating in the Paris Declaration of Principles (MEAE, 2024). This declaration focused on urgent humanitarian goals, including the cessation of hostilities, ensuring compliance with international humanitarian law, and providing unimpeded access for aid. The conference also pledged over €2 billion in funding for Sudanese citizens and refugees in neighbouring countries, where over two million people have sought refuge. Despite these pledges, a

substantial portion of the funding has yet to be utilised, as the Sudanese government often restricts aid distribution, preventing access to areas such as Darfur (Interview with Jan Pospisil, January 2025). On 25 September 2024, a Ministerial Meeting on Sudan was convened in New York by Germany, France, the USA, and the EU during the UN General Assembly's High-Level Week. This meeting reaffirmed the commitments made in the Paris Declaration of Principles and called for the immediate cessation of hostilities. It also stressed the necessity of an inclusive political process, with active participation from civilian actors, including women and youth, to address the long-term aspirations of the Sudanese people. Representatives from international organisations such as the UN, AU, IGAD, and the League of Arab States, alongside countries like Ethiopia, Egypt, and Saudi Arabia, participated in the meeting (EEAS, 2024).

Beyond governmental actors, European NGOs have played an integral role in Sudan's peace efforts. For example, the Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue (HD), the Berghof Foundation, and the CMI - Martti Ahtisaari Peace Foundation have been instrumental in fostering dialogue and facilitating peace talks. These organisations often collaborate with local civil society groups to ensure that peace initiatives reflect the needs and concerns of Sudanese communities. Civil society organisations (CSOs) within Sudan have also been active in peacebuilding at the grassroots level, creating platforms for dialogue between different ethnic and political groups. European governments have supported these efforts through funding and diplomatic backing.

The involvement of multiple mediation actors, each with their own interests, underscores the need for effective co-

ordination and cooperation to ensure a cohesive response to the crisis, particularly given the fluid nature of the conflict. Some analysts warn of the risks of "forum shopping" in Sudan (Chughtai & Murphy, 2023), where opposing parties may seek out mediation platforms offering more favourable terms, potentially bypassing less advantageous processes. This can cause delays and undermine genuine engagement in meaningful mediation. Other studies suggest that even when mediation results in a settlement, it can still fail if it deepens political divisions, marginalises vulnerable groups, or creates new patterns of exclusion (Rosoux, 2023). However, other experts argue that in such a fragmented and complex conflict context, multi-track mediation is inevitable and can contribute incrementally to resolving the crisis (Interview with Ian Pospisil, 2025). While these efforts may sometimes lack coherence, they can still help "unwind dimensions of a fragmented conflict" (Bell, 2024) and play a vital role in building a peace process with the diplomatic weight necessary for progress.

European and emerging power mediators engaged in Sudan should find more effective ways to cooperate, leveraging their distinct strengths to address the complex and multifaceted nature of the conflict. The mediation landscape in Sudan is currently characterised by a blend of traditional European diplomacy and the approaches of emerging powers such as Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Türkiye, and Egypt. Enhanced communication, coordination, and complementarity between these groups could present valuable opportunities for more effective conflict resolution.

Emerging powers bring significant advantages to the table, including substantial diplomatic and political influence, strong

relations with key actors on the ground, and access to financial resources. Their approach, often more transactional, employs a “carrots and sticks” strategy which could appeal to the belligerent factions, potentially pressuring them into a ceasefire or temporary halt to hostilities. The involvement of senior political figures can also lend credibility and urgency to peace efforts. In contrast, European actors, with their extensive experience in mediation and peacebuilding, possess strengths rooted in diplomacy, multilateralism, and engagement with civil society. Through initiatives within the EU and UN frameworks, European mediators are well-positioned to foster inclusivity, ensuring that peace processes are not only focused on a ceasefire but also grounded in addressing the root causes of conflict.

European mediators have also demonstrated expertise in engaging a broad range of local stakeholders to address the structural issues fuelling conflict. Their focus on building sustainable peace by working with civil society organisations, women, youth, and marginalised groups is critical in addressing the root causes of Sudan’s political and governance failures. If these two sets of actors — European and emerging powers — can combine their efforts, they would create a more holistic and coordinated approach to mediation in Sudan. European mediators could provide the multilateral diplomatic backing necessary to legitimise and amplify the efforts of emerging powers while the latter could offer a more direct, effective approach to bringing the warring factions to the table. Such constructive collaboration would maximise the potential for lasting peace by balancing immediate ceasefire agreements with long-term efforts to tackle Sudan’s governance challenges.

As peace remains elusive in Sudan, it is crucial to continue strengthening peace mediation efforts while addressing the underlying causes of the conflict. Although a ceasefire is essential to halt the immediate violence and alleviate the humanitarian crisis, the war in Sudan is symptomatic of broader nation-building and governance failures. The conflict is not merely a product of immediate power struggles but reflects deeper, long-standing challenges in Sudan’s political and social structure, including struggles over national identity, weak state institutions, poor governance, and the marginalisation of certain groups. To break the cycle of violence, current mediation efforts must lay the groundwork for a comprehensive peacebuilding process which addresses these fundamental issues. Looking ahead, the combined efforts of both governmental and non-governmental actors will be pivotal in promoting peace in Sudan. Adopting an inclusive approach to negotiations — one that involves not only the warring parties but also all democratic groups and militias unaffiliated with the factions in conflict — will be essential for long-term stability and national reconciliation. Drawing on their expertise and experience, European mediators are uniquely positioned to facilitate this process.

The War in Ukraine

Russia’s invasion of Ukraine in 2022 marked a pivotal moment for European security, initiating the most destructive war in Europe since World War II and fracturing the post-Cold War international order. The conflict has resulted in immense human suffering, with record-high combatant casualties (Gadzo, 2024), a high civilian death toll, and millions displaced. Nearly seven million people have sought refuge abroad (UNHCR, 2025) while over 3.5 million remain displaced within Ukraine itself (IOM, 2024). Beyond the physical toll, the psychological

scars inflicted on the population are likely to endure for generations. This war is not only a major European conflict but also a global geopolitical crisis, disrupting food security, energy markets, and posing the risk of direct confrontation between Russia and NATO countries.

Three years into the conflict, the protracted war and rising geopolitical tensions have highlighted the limitations of European actors in mediating a peaceful resolution. European mediation efforts face significant challenges, notably the overshadowing influence of major global powers, particularly Russia and the USA, who often pursue their own strategic interests. The complexity of the war — shaped by shifting military dynamics, including North Korea's involvement, and influenced by political, historical, and security factors — presents additional challenges for both European and non-European mediators, as any resolution must address issues at national, regional, and global levels. Europe's strong alignment with Ukraine, based on shared values and security interests, also complicates its mediation role. While European states led mediation efforts after 2014, including the Minsk agreements, these ended following Russia's 2022 invasion, as Europe's full alignment with Ukraine made further dialogue with Russia extremely difficult.²

However, studies suggest that the main challenge to Europe's mediation role lies elsewhere: Russia's approach to conflict resolution favours a "peace by force" model (Lewis, 2022; Mariani, 2022), where power and military force are paramount. In this

² Switzerland hosted a Summit on Peace in Ukraine from 15 to 16 June 2024, bringing together representatives from ninety-two nations and eight international organisations to explore pathways to a just peace. Notably, Russia was excluded, and on the eve of the summit, President Vladimir Putin presented a set of uncompromising demands, with no concessions offered, strategically timed to undermine the peace conference before it even began.

context, major global powers — as opposed to smaller, neutral states — are seen as better positioned to mediate. The Kremlin continues to prioritise spheres of influence and great power politics, positioning Russia as one of the world's leading powers. From this perspective, the war in Ukraine is merely one front in Russia's broader struggle with the USA, with Europe framed as weak, strategically dependent, and largely irrelevant to the negotiations (Karaganov, 2016; Rosenberg, 2024). The current US administration's policy reinforces this view, signalling a shift in US foreign policy that seeks to sideline, or at least minimise, both Ukrainian and European involvement in negotiations (US DoS, 2025; Gray et al., 2025). The peace talks between the US and Russia, held in Saudi Arabia on 18 February 2025, excluded both Europe and Ukraine, focusing solely on direct negotiations between the two powers. This raises critical questions about the ability of European countries to effectively engage with peace initiatives that seek to exclude or marginalise them.

Experts interviewed for this research argue that European actors have, to date, struggled to play a prominent role in mediating peace — not due to their support for Ukraine or any inherent lack of impartiality but because their leverage is limited. While Europe can exert some pressure on Russia, primarily through sanctions and frozen Russian assets, it has not fully utilised this influence to create the conditions necessary for effective mediation (Interview with Jonathan Cohen, 2025). One expert notes that the European approach to mediation traditionally relies on neutrality and impartiality, which has worked in regions like Africa, Asia, and Latin America, where European countries had little direct stake and could maintain this stance. However, this strategy is less effective in the case of Ukraine,

where European nations find themselves caught between their usual approach and the need for a more decisive, assertive role. As a result, they have tried to balance both approaches but have struggled to fully commit to either, limiting their influence over the conflict's trajectory (Interview with Duncan Hiscock, 2025). Other experts distinguish between current and future leverage that Europe might have with Russia. They argue that while Europe's current leverage is limited, future opportunities may emerge, especially in determining Russia's potential re-entry into a European security framework. Furthermore, with the prospect of resuming economic relations, Europe's leverage could increase (Interview with Thomas Greminger, 2025).

Achieving durable peace in Ukraine will require a comprehensive geopolitical agreement, with security guarantees and effective deterrence mechanisms being essential for its success. While the political process and commitment to negotiate rest with the warring parties, the involvement of external stakeholders will be critical to ending the war and securing a sustainable solution. Despite their differences, a range of key actors — including Ukraine, Russia, the USA, and European countries — should be involved in shaping the resolution of the conflict. The precise form of the geopolitical agreement remains uncertain, dependent on the evolving battlefield situation and the willingness of the combatants to negotiate. Given the starkly opposing peace conditions outlined by Russia and Ukraine, only a compromise can resolve the conflict. The final peace terms will likely differ from the current demands of both sides, suggesting diplomatic evolution rather than straightforward resolution.

IV. Recommendations

To remain relevant and effective in global peace efforts, European mediators must adapt to the growing complexity of modern conflicts and the changing landscape of international mediation. This section examines how European mediation models can evolve by strengthening coordination, collaborating with emerging powers, refining strategies to engage non-state armed groups, integrating technology, building capacity, and implementing systematic MEL processes.

4.1 Improve Coordination Among European Mediators to Avoid Redundant Efforts and Enhance Resource Use

Coordination among European mediators should be strengthened to ensure a unified and more effective approach to peace mediation, especially in light of dwindling resources. Existing platforms, such as the EU Community of Practice on Peace Mediation, should be enhanced to address current inconsistencies and fragmentation. A more strategic, cooperative approach should be adopted to maximise synergies among European actors, avoiding redundant efforts and wasted resources. By fostering a coordinated response, European states and organisations can better support conflict parties in resolving their disputes. Moving away from competitive “forum shopping” will help create a more cohesive and resource-efficient mediation effort.

4.2 Foster Strategic Engagement with Emerging Powers, to Build Multilateral Frameworks and Leverage Complementary Strengths

As global power dynamics shift, European mediators should prioritise collaboration with emerging, non-traditional

powers while upholding core values such as human rights, democracy, and gender equality. Recent initiatives, such as joint ceasefire efforts by Qatar, Egypt, and the USA in Israel-Hamas negotiations or attempts at coordinated peace efforts in Sudan, emphasise the importance of engaging new global players. Initiatives such as the “Group of Friends of Mediation” within the UN and OSCE further highlight the need for multi-lateral frameworks to enhance the legitimacy and effectiveness of peace efforts. By collaborating with emerging powers such as China, Qatar, Türkiye, and the UAE, European actors can leverage complementary strengths in influence, expertise, resources, and experience, thereby enhancing their capacity to address complex conflicts like that in Sudan. The UN’s “Pact for the Future” and calls for renewed multilateralism offer a valuable opportunity to develop more inclusive and coordinated mediation strategies, boosting the international legitimacy and effectiveness of peacebuilding efforts. Strengthening communication between Western and non-Western actors is crucial for fostering mutual trust, facilitating knowledge exchange, and improving collaboration (Ehrmann & Haron, 2024).

4.3 Improve Strategies to Engage Non-State Armed Groups (NSAGs) and Integrate them Into Peace Processes

Banning non-state armed groups (NSAGs) is a blunt strategy. While supporters argue that it isolates extremists by cutting off their financial and political support, peacebuilders recognise from experience that proscription often backfires, fuelling extremism and aggression instead (Newton, 2023). European mediators should develop more nuanced approaches to engaging NSAGs, including behind-the-scenes dialogue with groups or factions willing

to renounce violence and pursue political solutions, and involving them in broader peace processes. Groups like Hamas and Hezbollah, though designated as terrorist organisations by some states, are influential regional actors with significant roles in the conflicts they are part of. Engaging with these groups is essential to advancing peace efforts. Strengthening partnerships with NGOs and private entities can enhance engagement, as these organisations often have the access and expertise to connect with factions or individuals committed to peace and seeking to break free from isolation. By fostering positive engagement, mediators can help transform these groups from potential spoilers into constructive participants, supporting a more inclusive and sustainable resolution of conflicts.

4.4 Embrace Technology in Peace Mediation while Safeguarding Core Ethical Standards

European mediators must adapt to the challenges of a rapidly evolving, multipolar world, where technological advancements and digital transformation are playing an increasingly vital role. Digital tools, such as online platforms and AI-powered analytics, offer significant potential to enhance peace mediation by improving conflict mapping, risk assessment, and communication with local communities. However, ethical considerations and human rights must remain a priority in the deployment of these tools, ensuring that AI is used responsibly to avoid bias, protect human agency, and prevent power imbalances. European mediators are uniquely positioned to anchor these technologies in ethical frameworks, a step forward compared to emerging actors whose methods often lack such a foundation. Transitioning from small-scale trials to large-scale implementations will require significant investment. Finland, Germany,

Norway, and Switzerland should increase funding for the research and development of effective and ethical peace-oriented technologies, including AI-driven tools.

4.5 Establish Systematic Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (MEL) Frameworks to Assess Mediation Efforts and Guide Future Interventions

To enhance the effectiveness of peace mediation, it is crucial for mediators, including Finland, Germany, Norway, and Switzerland, to implement comprehensive MEL frameworks which assess both short-term results and long-term impacts on sustainable peace. These frameworks should go beyond traditional assessments, measuring broader peacebuilding goals such as societal reconciliation, institutional reform, and the inclusion of marginalised groups. By learning from strengths and weaknesses through impact evaluations, these frameworks can guide future interventions, refine mediation strategies, and inform cooperation with emerging powers.

4.6 Enhance Investments in Developing and Training Skilled Mediation Experts

To effectively address the complexities of modern conflicts and remain relevant in an increasingly fragmented global landscape, European mediators — including those from Finland, Germany, Norway, and Switzerland — should prioritise ongoing investment in training mediation and support experts who can be swiftly deployed to any situation. As global conflicts become more intricate, involving diverse actors and issues, mediators need not only strong diplomatic and negotiation skills but also a deep understanding of local dynamics, conflict drivers, and regional power relations. Basic AI literacy is also essential (Höne, 2019).

Even if mediators do not directly engage with AI tools, they must understand their growing influence in conflict resolution, as they are likely to play a more significant role in future conflicts. By strengthening mediation capacity with advanced, context-specific, and technology-oriented training, European actors can ensure their teams are agile, adaptable, and well-prepared for complex peace processes. Increased investment in these areas will enhance European mediation efforts, making them more timely, effective, and impactful while contributing to long-term stability and conflict resolution in a rapidly evolving world.

V. Conclusions

The global landscape of conflict mediation is rapidly evolving. For decades, European mediators have played a leading role in trying to manage and resolve conflicts worldwide, drawing on their diplomatic and humanitarian values as well as their unique strengths. While European mediation successes are evident in numerous historical examples, recent crises like those in Ukraine and Sudan highlight the challenges posed by the rise of global armed conflicts, regional and global power struggles, and the increasing dominance of a “might makes right” mentality in international relations.

European mediation models are evolving in response to emerging global trends, yet concerns are growing that political support and resources for peacebuilding efforts are waning. To remain relevant and effective in this shifting landscape, European countries must proactively adapt to changing global dynamics. This includes forging stronger partnerships with emerging powers and capitalising on the transformative potential of digital tools in peace processes. By embracing these changes, European mediators can and should stay true to their values, leveraging

their diplomatic experience and influence to navigate the complexities of modern conflicts. A forward-looking approach — rooted in innovation, collaboration, and systematic MEL frameworks — will help ensure their sustained impact in fostering long-term peace and stability in an increasingly fragmented, multipolar world.

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