

PEACE MEDIATION IN ELECTORAL PROCESSES

METHODOLOGY AND PRACTICAL GUIDE

Summary

Table of Contents

| | |
|--|-----------|
| I. Introduction to the methodology | 2 |
| a) What is Peace Mediation in Electoral Processes?..... | 2 |
| b) What are some of the important gaps filled by Peace Mediation in Electoral Processes? | 2 |
| c) How can the Peace Mediation in Electoral methodology be used? | 3 |
| d) Existing publications with relevance | 3 |
| II. Mediation support and its place within broader peace-building agendas..... | 4 |
| a) Policy Framework for EUs Peace Mediation | 4 |
| b) EU Concept on Peace Mediation | 6 |
| III. Electoral Support and Existing Frameworks..... | 7 |
| a) Legal and value-laden foundation of electoral support | 7 |
| b) Election Observation and Electoral Assistance | 9 |
| c) The electoral cycle | 10 |
| IV. What role for Peace Mediation in Electoral Processes? | 12 |

I. Introduction to the methodology

a) What is Peace Mediation in Electoral Processes?

The methodology on electoral mediation fills an important gap by offering concrete guidance when attempting to mediate – or support peace mediation efforts in electoral processes or crises that arise or escalate due to flawed elections. **The focus of electoral mediation goes beyond preventing electoral violence** and focuses on unlocking the potential of mediation and dialogue as a tool that hold great value all-around the electoral process. Peace mediation in electoral processes should be embedded in each phase of the electoral cycle as a preventative measure, installing or reviving an infrastructure of dialogue across and amongst stakeholders at all tracks.

International and EU-led mediation support in electoral processes or crises is currently undertaken ad-hoc and without a rudimentary guiding framework that marry mediation and dialogue techniques with technical knowledge of the electoral cycle including the legal framework.

Bringing peace mediation closer to the technical aspects of electoral processes does two things: 1) it allows entry points for mediation support to emerge clearer 2) it visualises the risks and limitations of mediation and provides a realistic timeline.

b) What are some of the important gaps filled by Peace Mediation in Electoral Processes?

Mediation support – and mediation actors - in electoral processes overlook technical aspects of elections in fragile countries at times, in particular the legal framework and electoral system as well as the electoral calendar. Mediation actors may **risk misjudging both the entry points to resolve or de-escalate conflict** but may also face limitations in assessing and staying clear of major risks that would appear more obvious to electoral experts. The latter would however not have any mandate to advise on, or actively engage in mediation processes¹.

The peace mediation in electoral processes methodology does not suggest that electoral and mediation actors *should* coordinate or interact in a particular way: there are sensitivities around perceptions of impartiality since both strands of activities are highly sensitive political processes. To bridge the fact that there might be strong sensitivities on the ground that warrants a distance between mediation and electoral actors - at least those commissioned, affiliated or hired directly by the EU or EU funded activities - this methodology **aims to give actors on both sides sufficient insights not to miss obvious risks or opportunities** for conflict settlement in electoral processes.

The methodology offers knowledge of the intersection of two closely related – but still separate thematic fields – and unpacks risks and opportunities for mediation support around the electoral cycle.

¹ The only existing exception to this is the SADCs Electoral Advisory Council (SEAC) that identify and actively attempt to mediate and report on simmering conflicts as a preventative measure during election observation missions. They do this in coordination with Mediation, Conflict Prevention and Preventative Diplomacy Structures (i.e the Panel of Elders (PoE), the Mediation Reference Group (MRG) and the Mediation Support Unit (MSU).

While mediation is often an open-ended process entered into freely, largely dictated by the commitment and will of conflict parties, electoral processes on the other hand are lined with many cut-off dates and unfold according to an electoral calendar that often cannot be changed: **the electoral calendar begs mediation support to fit into a frame that it may not be familiar with.**

c) **How can the Peace Mediation in Electoral methodology be used?**

The methodology on peace mediation in electoral processes aims at capacitating both mediation and electoral expert communities as well as national and international actors including EU member state diplomats, EU officials and international and regional organisations and think tanks. It can also be offered to electoral commissions and ministries or the wider mediation practitioner community.

The electoral mediation methodology can be **delivered as a training programme**, tailored to a particular context. Training can be carried out IRL, virtual or hybrid in the form of one-on-one coaching or to a group of participants.

The electoral mediation methodology can be **built into the design of programmes and projects** in fragile contexts: either mediation support efforts (all tracks) that intersect with electoral processes or in electoral support that would benefit from employing mediation and dialogue as a tool for conflict prevention or management.

The Peace mediation in Electoral Processes methodology is a lens that can be applied to any context in order to offer more concrete and practical guidance to see – and cease opportunities for timely conflict settlement – and stay clear of common pitfalls within both mediation and electoral support. As such, the methodology is well suited to complement **conflict analysis**.

d) **Existing publications with relevance**

There are several papers that discuss the value of predictable and ingrained coordination between mediation and electoral support, mainly produced by the practitioner community. Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue produced a background paper in 2009 on “Mediating election-related conflicts”² stressing the importance of drawing on insight gathered through election observation on root causes to conflicts and to predict flashpoints to find and support mediated solutions. *“Election observation missions – in both the pre-election period and on election day – gather useful data and insights on (...) the electoral process and thereby easily can identify flashpoints for potential conflict. Building synergies between election observers and mediators can be mutually beneficial to each set of actors and to the electoral and political processes of the country.”*

The EU itself has produced a fact sheet on “Mediation and Dialogue in electoral processes to prevent and mitigate electoral related violence”³. The factsheet, dating from November 2012, suggest that *“EU staff engaged in mediation and dialogue should take a comprehensive and*

² https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/A7166CC9938069D6852575F4006DFD6E-Full_Report.pdf

³ https://eeas.europa.eu/archives/docs/cfsp/conflict_prevention/docs/2013_eeas_mediation_support_factsheet_electoral_process_en.pdf

*long-term approach to elections”. Moreover that “A strategy for **mediation and dialogue also needs to be embedded in the EU’s broader framework of electoral assistance and conflict management. The EU has so far mostly separated electoral support (...) from on-going peace-building measures of which mediation and dialogue are important tools. Combining the two fields and linking the electoral cycle approach with conflict analysis can enable the EU to identify points where preventive mediation measures are helpful (...).***

More recent publications explore some of the more notorious cases of wide-spread electoral violence and draw up lessons from high-fatality elections, mainly in the African continent. International IDEA commissioned a paper in 2016, “Electoral Crisis Mediation - Responding to a rare but recurring challenge”⁴, illustrating some of the structural and institutional weaknesses in the conduct of elections that has led to mass violence - and suggest ways through mediation and/or electoral support to remedy these.

Folke Bernadotte Academy share key lessons in their “Brief 2020 Mitigating Election Violence through Dialogue and Mediation in West Africa”⁵ of capacitating electoral stakeholders in mediation and dialogue techniques. Raising mediation and dialogue capacities amongst women was reportedly a particularly effective way to prevent election violence and at the same time further the WPS agenda.

The methodology on peace mediation in electoral processes may draw upon experiences documented previously, all with valuable insights on how the mediation and electoral field are mutually reinforcing. However, essential gaps persist. Not only is the focus very often limited to election violence per se and not electoral conflicts writ large. Election violence is the least common form of electoral conflicts but may naturally cause havoc. But also, concrete mediation opportunities to prevent, mitigate or manage potential or actual crises around the entire electoral process are largely absent in existing and available literature.

In response, this methodology **unpacks peace mediation opportunities and risks in electoral processes in unprecedented detail**. It uses the electoral cycle, and each of its phases; common electoral systems and legal frameworks to look at potential entry points – and challenges to avoid for peace mediation efforts. The methodology also looks at the electoral and mediation vocabulary and suggest ways to render the language of electoral and mediation actors more conflict sensitive.

II. Mediation support and its place within broader peace-building agendas

a) Policy Framework for EUs Peace Mediation

The EU has a robust policy framework for mediation that is built into its very foundation, enshrined in the Treaty of the European Union to “**promote peace, its values and the well-being of its peoples**” (TEU Art 3(1) as amended by the Lisbon Treaty) and to “preserve peace, prevent conflicts and strengthen international security” (Article 21(2)). The EU is concerned with crises that affect the EU, its Member States and Europe, but also those external to its borders in its neighbourhood and beyond.

⁴ <https://www.idea.int/sites/default/files/publications/electoral-crisis-mediation.pdf>

⁵ <https://fba.se/contentassets/a6cb5634b9b447328439f6705386e19f/mitigating-election-violence-through-dialogue-and-mediation-in-west-africa.pdf>

The EU Global Strategy sets out the EU's core interests and principles for engaging globally giving the Union a joint direction. Its ambition is to strengthen Europe; making it an even more united and influential actor on the world stage that keeps citizens safe, preserves European interests, and upholds its stated values. The EU Global Strategy focuses on energy, security, migration, climate change, violent extremism, and hybrid warfare. These are all emerging challenges that in and of themselves are increasing in relevance. As such, these themes also intersect with peace mediation and are prominently featured in the new EU Concept on Peace Mediation (2020).

The EU's Integrated Approach was established as a result of the 2016 EU Global Strategy on Foreign and Security Policy that prompted **increased coherence between the EU's political and operational response to conflict** in a broader sense. The integrated approach (IA) is a result of combining key pillars of the EU's work as global peacemaker and supporter, such as through shared analysis, institutional cooperation, and expertise to enhance prevention, crisis response, stabilisation and peacebuilding, and promote more sustainable peace⁶.

The **EU approach to peace mediation is increasingly holistic** and revolves around coherence and its commitment to peace mediation, from the conceptual understanding to increasing visible attributes of the EU's work in this area, both as a mediation actor and supporter.

The EU has **identified mediation as the method of choice** to prevent, mitigate and manage crises. (Peace) mediation has evolved from being part of the EU's on-the-ground preventive diplomacy and a component of the EU's conflict prevention and peace-building toolbox for conflict countries to the EU's political and operational response to crises and conflict as a **first response**. Peace mediation is an **explicit top priority for EEAS**.

At the analytical level, conflict dynamics must be sufficiently understood and are crucial to capture the various dimensions more accurately for conflict sensitivity and embodiment of the do-no-harm principle. The EU has therefore established a new generation of quality conflict analysis when using and also building upon conflict sensitive indicators (evolving and subject to updates) and risk and monitoring frameworks, still drawing largely on good existing guidance such as the Guidance Note on the Use of Conflict Analysis in Support of EU External Action and EU Conflict Early Warning System: Objectives, Process and Guidance for Implementation.

The EU also has an established framework of mediation actors and capacities, within:

- EEAS Mediation Support Team, a Mediation Task Force & a Pool of EU Mediators;
- EEAS geographic divisions, EU Special Representatives, EU Delegations & CSPD missions that contribute to mediation efforts;
- EU Member States bring their own expertise, including via Council bodies.
- External support is available via:
 - EEAS Framework Contract on conflict prevention & mediation (inward-looking support to EEAS);
 - European Resources for Mediation Support Project (outward-looking support to third parties managed by FPI).

⁶ The IA refers to the Multi-dimensional–Alignment of EU policies and instruments, Multiphase–Readiness to intervene in all stages of conflict, Multilateral–Engagement of all relevant actors through partnerships and consultations, and Multilevel–Working across all peace mediation ‘tracks’ at the local, national, regional and global levels.

b) EU Concept on Peace Mediation

Based on the Concept on Strengthening EU Mediation and Dialogue Capacities adopted in November 2009, the **EU has developed its own mediation support capacity**, which is also mirrored in an increasingly robust framework and the various EU actors that are directly engaging in peace mediation (ref. above). The Council welcomed an updated EU Concept on Peace Mediation in December 2020⁷. The new concept, accompanied by peace mediation guidelines⁸, aims to guide the practitioner community and identify new challenges and threats, such as cyberspace, mis/disinformation and the increasing threat of radicalised groups.

In the new concept on peace mediation, the EU places emphasis on more complex dynamics of peace and conflict and conflict parties. Proxy dynamics are said to be an increasingly prominent attribute of conflicts that contribute to blurred borders around actors and the geography of conflicts. Terrorism and radicalisation are continuously a major security threat, so are tensions related to environmental degradation, irregular migration and forced displacement, shrinking space for civil society, and infringement on women's and human rights. Elements such as the use of digital technologies, social media and the exponential and increasingly visible impact of climate change also change the ways and speed in which conflicts evolve. This begs a more coherent, integrated, flexible, and agile response.

The key messages laid out in the concept on EU peace mediation 2020 are:

- EU mediation engagement is anchored in several of its fundamental pillars, is conducted and supported by many EU actors.
- EU mediation engagement can include direct mediation, facilitation, financial & technical support & accompanying measures. It should **bridge and inform EU programming**.
- The EU is well placed to support the inclusivity of processes, e.g. by “connecting the tracks” and by bring together different EU, Member State, international & civil society actors.
- Mediation is an increasingly professionalised field, with a range of **capacity building support** available.
- Mediation & other EU policies are complementary, with their precise interaction depending on the local context & the engagement of other actors
- The EU highlight 15 thematic areas that merit more targeted mediation support. One such area is **preventing election violence**.

Mediation practices and mediation support have gained a lot of traction amongst organisations with global remit, notably the UN and OSCE, as well as amongst EU Member States. Peace mediation is becoming the most prevalent tool to respond to conflicts and the EU is uniquely placed to lead such work as well as to coordinate the efforts of others.

The UN General Assembly unanimously adopted the UN Guidance for effective mediation following the High-Level Panel on Threats. This UN Guidance fleshes out eight core principles of mediation: preparedness, consent, impartiality, inclusivity, local ownership, international law and normative frameworks, coherence, coordination, and complementarity adding to the

⁷ <https://eeas.europa.eu/sites/default/files/st13951.en20.pdf>

⁸ https://eeas.europa.eu/sites/default/files/eeas_mediation_guidelines_14122020.pdf

overall durability of peace agreements. The UN Guidance is meant as a tool for professionalisation and to assist local and international actors set a joint direction for their efforts. The EU and UN coordinate often, and successfully, on peace mediation efforts where the best placed actor leads supported by the other.

The EU, as a peace mediation actor and supporter, is leading on increased professionalisation of the field. The EU works closely with the UN Mediation Support Unit, and partly finances its Mediation Standby Team of Mediators. **The EU is engaging in peace mediation where it can bring an added value** either in its own right or supporting other well-placed actors or entities. The EU is making targeted contributions but also supporting long-term processes, such as in Yemen and the Syrian Peace talks, where it seeks to lead some streams of the work while also complementing other already well-covered areas.

The EU supports the OSCE with capacity building and is engaged in local dialogue efforts as well as OSCE's operational aspects. Synergies and coordination between the EU and OSCE on peace mediation, currently (2021) under the Swedish Chairmanship, are intensifying. The EU is integrating peace mediation and the opportunities to direct facilitation through EU Special Envoys and Heads of Delegations. The EEAS mediation Support Team continuously offers support to the latter and a wider range of EU staff in Brussels or in Delegations. The EU is also actively seeking and cultivating effective partnerships with regional and local organisations worldwide.

EU-led and supported peace mediation is naturally placed amidst EU Cooperation in a broader sense, which has also undergone significant restructuring – notably through the Neighborhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument (NDICI) (2021-2027). The NDICI cooperation will continue to be guided by existing strategies, agendas, and agreements, specifically through the:

- 2030 Agenda
- Paris Agreement
- Addis Ababa Action Agenda
- Global Strategy for the EU's Foreign & Security Policy
- New European Consensus on Development

Some of the new challenges the EU is responding to through the NDICI are: a) new global and trans-regional challenges: migration, terrorism, climate change and environmental degradation, global disinformation, and cybersecurity with an increased focus on promoting EU values; b) creating a more inclusive (women, youth, minorities), human rights-based and conflict sensitive approach; c) the increased need for coordination and complementarity (EU, EU MS, EU partners – the so-called “EU team approach”); d) renewed partnership with Civil Society in the framework of the development of new criteria for aid effectiveness and shrinking space for freedom of expression; and e) a strategic multilateral approach and partnership with international and regional organisations in changed and changing geopolitical scenarios.

III. Electoral Support and Existing Frameworks

a) Legal and value-laden foundation of electoral support

Support for elections are often embedded in a broader governance enhancement strategy which includes civil society support and institution-building activities, with the **promotion of democracy, human rights and the rule of law at the core** of its objective. The field of

electoral support has been growing exponentially since the early 1990s. Today it is arguably the most developed sector in democracy support.⁹ The European Union, the United Nations and the United States are the biggest global players in this field. The importance of the EU relies in its unparalleled toolbox of foreign policy instruments that provides the means for the promotion of democratic elections worldwide.

EU electoral support comprises election observation and electoral assistance. While election observation focuses on the process close to the electoral event, electoral assistance may be provided throughout the entire electoral cycle. The essential difference lies in the fact that while election observation is based on the principle of ensuring an independent and impartial assessment of an election process, electoral assistance focus is in the process, directly supporting national authorities and other electoral stakeholders, while refraining from making public comments on the electoral process as such.

Both activities, when embedded in a broader institution-building and democracy support strategy, have a political finality. Election observation is the most visible action, with the presence of hundreds of observers deployed throughout a country around election day. However, its longer-term impact depends on accompanying programmes to implement broader reforms which entail assistance to the entire political and electoral cycle. In order to **foster real and durable change, such support activities should target a broad range of electoral stakeholders**¹⁰, including but not limited to election management bodies (EMB).

Electoral support has increasingly been a priority area for the EU and its Member States. This interest and attention are translated into funding of election observation and election assistance activities. Respect for democracy, the rule of law, and civil and political rights are an integral part of **EU's political dialogue with selected partner countries** that receive development cooperation funds. These fundamental themes cut across all EU geographical financial instruments that fund development cooperation.

The legal and moral justification for periodic elections were laid in article 21 of the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR, 1948)¹¹ and subsequently in article 25 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR, 1966).¹² As the Cold War ended, the international community shifted the **attention from the definition of international human rights norms and standards to a more active implementation of those standards and democratic principles**. Election missions, as actions in support of democratisation and respect for human rights, including the right to participate in the establishment of governments through free and fair elections, reflect this new approach. And the importance of supporting the establishment of functioning and transparent governance institutions was widely acknowledged as a priority to create more stable, peaceful and economically sustainable democracies.

⁹ Democracy Reporting International. Mapping of International Electoral Assistance. 2014.

¹⁰ Civil society organizations, parliaments, political parties, justice sector institutions, media actors, security forces, local authorities, religious groups, etc.

¹¹ Art 21: 1) Everyone has the right to take part in the government of his country, directly or through freely chosen representatives. 2) Everyone has the right to equal access to public service in his country. 3) The will of the people shall be the basis of the authority of government; this will shall be expressed in periodic and genuine elections which shall be by universal and equal suffrage and shall be held by secret vote or by equivalent free voting procedures. UN DHR is available at http://www.ohchr.org/EN/UDHR/Documents/UDHR_Translations/eng.pdf

¹² Art. 25: Every citizen shall have the right and the opportunity, without any of the distinctions mentioned in article 2 and without unreasonable restrictions: (a) To take part in the conduct of public affairs, directly or through freely chosen representatives; (b) To vote and to be elected at genuine periodic elections which shall be by universal and equal suffrage and shall be held by secret ballot, guaranteeing the free expression of the will of the electors; (c) To have access, on general terms of equality, to public service in his country. The ICCPR is available at: <http://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/ccpr.aspx>

b) Election Observation and Electoral Assistance

Democracy support activities evolved subsequently in two strands, electoral assistance and election observation. While the former is intended to increase the quality of electoral processes by improving electoral laws, procedures and institutions, the latter aims at assessing elections, conferring legitimacy to electoral processes and developing recommendations for further improvement of future elections, with an important emphasis in facilitating political dialogue. Technically speaking, “they are different activities, but essentially they should be considered and programmed in a complementary manner.”¹³

Before 1989, observers were dispatched occasionally to monitor elections, but most of the missions were small and usually arrived on election day, which led to unrealistic and scattered support. In fact, many internationally assisted elections adopting this event-based approach led to unsustainable processes and unachievable expectations.

After 1990, electoral observation and electoral assistance activities skyrocketed as many countries, in particular in Africa and post-communist Eastern Europe, held multiparty elections for the first time. **Larger scale EU electoral assistance projects commenced in 1994** with the technical and financial support provided to the legislative and presidential elections in Mozambique, based on the European Initiative of Democracy and Human Rights created at the request of the European Parliament. It was followed, two years later, with support to the elections in the West Bank and Gaza.

In 2000, the **European Commission adopted the Communication on EU Electoral Assistance and Observation**, a key document that enables the EU to undertake impartial, independent and long-term assessments of an electoral process in line with international standards for democratic elections. Including a policy to deploy election observation missions to complement broader EU efforts in supporting democracy, human rights and post-conflict transitions.

The accumulation of electoral experience, as well as the consolidation of international and regional legal instruments and authoritative jurisprudence relevant to this sector, contributed to a **gradual shift away from narrow, pinpointed electoral support activities, focused on election day, towards more long-term, cyclical and process-oriented support.** In order to address criticism to the disproportionate attention given to the electoral event itself, the Electoral Cycle Approach emerged as an essential tool for the programming of elections and electoral support.

In 2009 the EU Council Conclusions laid out in the EU Strategic Framework and Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy, defined strategic orientations to further improve the coherence and the effectiveness of EU action.

In addition, in 2010 the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD)-Development Assistance Committee’ Governance Network invited a broad group of global stakeholders to the 1st Roundtable on International Support for Elections: Effective Strategies and Accountability Systems.

The 34 Member States of the OECD constitute the largest international donors to election support activities worldwide. The roundtable eventually led to a set of Draft Strategic Principles for International Support for Elections, with additional recommendations crafted by Commissioners and representatives of the Election Management Bodies of the Democratic Republic of Congo, Mozambique, Sierra Leone, Zambia and the Electoral Commission Forum of the South African Development Community (ECF-SADC). The draft principles were

¹³ COM (2000) 191 Final, p.5

discussed at the 5th Global Electoral Organization (GEO) meeting, held in March 2011 in Gaborone, Botswana. During that occasion, the GEO brought together over 300 participants from all over the world. The conclusions of these discussions ultimately resulted in the **Gaborone Declaration, which emphasised the universal value of electoral processes and their interdependence with an added focus on the damaging consequences of electoral mismanagement.** It recommends a greater focus on strengthening and professionalising electoral institutions. The declaration also establishes that activities focusing on preventing election-related violence and on promoting gender equality (in political participation pertaining to electoral processes, especially regarding, but not only limited to voting) are equally important.

In June 2012, the **EU Council’s Strategic Framework and Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy took a decisive step to link electoral observation and electoral assistance from a policy perspective.** In that document, it was agreed to “systematize the use of EU EOMs and their reports in support of the whole electoral cycle” to ensure coherent policy objectives in support of democracy. Since then, the idea of achieving greater coherence and complementarity between EU instruments was maintained in all subsequent plans, 2015-2019 and 2020-2024.

In 2017, the European Court of Auditors, on their report “Election Observation Missions – efforts made to follow up recommendations, but better monitoring needed”¹⁴ conclude that “the European External Action Service and the European Commission had made reasonable efforts to support the implementation of the recommendations using the tools at their disposal. Nevertheless, more consultation is needed on the ground and follow-up missions could be deployed more often.”

Within this evolving framework, **EU electoral assistance has grown considerably** in numbers and scope. Between 2014 and 2019, the EU and its Member States invested some 280 million euros in electoral assistance for more than 50 countries. This, in a context where, from 2008 to 2018, a total of 1.4 billion euros were invested in democracy aid in 128 countries.

c) The electoral cycle

The Electoral Cycle Approach became the methodology of reference in 2006. This approach was developed by electoral specialists as a collaborative effort to bring theory closer to reality in electoral process. Drawing on extensive field experience from the European Commission and the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (International IDEA), the electoral cycle approach was crafted¹⁵ **as a response to the lack of a coherent methodology for electoral assistance programming.** All interventions to support the consolidation of democracies effectively take place during the pre-electoral, electoral and post-electoral phases in each country.

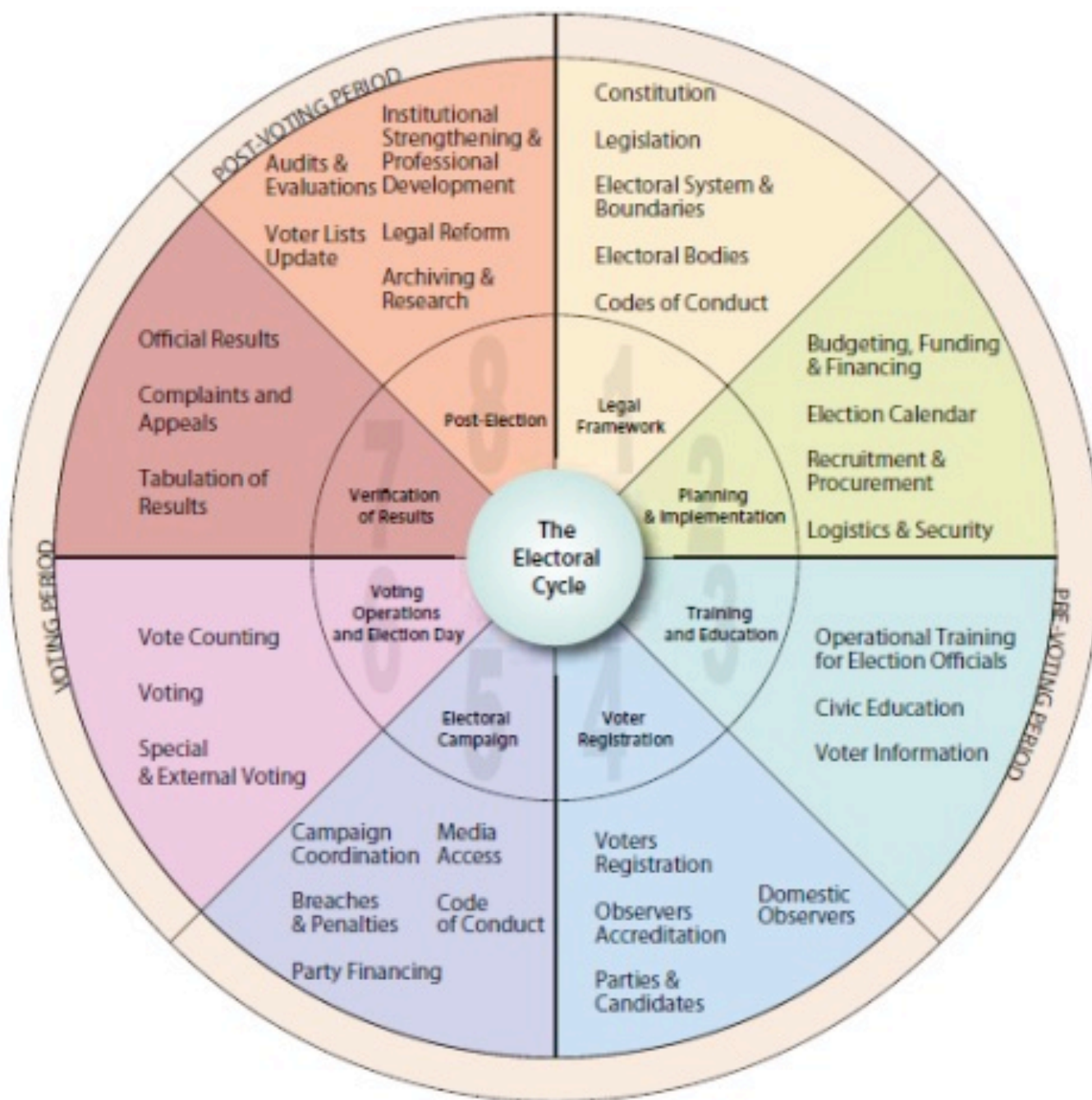
Furthermore, an electoral cycle perspective with specific attention to the post or inter-election periods, coupled with a careful assessment of local dynamics through electoral political analysis, allows for:

- Awareness of the multi-layered set of **long-term interactions** among national and local, governmental and non-governmental actors involved in electoral and political processes;

¹⁴ Special Report 22

¹⁵ F. Bargiacchi, P. Guerin, D. Tuccinardi of the European Commission, A. Spinelli and T. Laanela of International IDEA. The Electoral Cycle approach was then explained in detail in October 2006 in the EC Methodological Guide on Electoral Assistance, in the IDEA Handbook on Electoral Management Design (December 2006) and later also in the UNDP Implementation Guide on Electoral Assistance (November 2007).

- Understanding all **potential triggers** as well as **all potential dynamics** for positive change and reform;
- More **targeted identification of needs**, including more urgent short-term responses;
- Advance planning, to improve the overall **coherence and complementarity of actions**.



Source: EC Methodological Guide on Electoral Assistance (2006)

IV. What role for Peace Mediation in Electoral Processes?

Peace mediation in electoral processes has currently been undertaken by a vast number of global, regional and national actors, including the EU directly or by supporting peace mediation (including co-mediating, funding, leveraging, and promoting peace mediation).

Both peace mediation and electoral support activities are guided by robust frameworks and are key pillars in the EUs greater ambition to contribute to peace and prosperity – within and beyond the union. While regional bodies, notably the AU and SADC, have progressed to increasingly seek synergies and systematic coordination between peace mediation and electoral activities, the latter so much so that joint workshops and joint strategy documents have been produced, the EU is still predominantly cautious in how peace mediation and electoral support can be coordinated - and often opts out.

While the practitioner community can argue, which it has since more than a decade, that there are more gains than drawbacks from greater synergies between peace mediation and electoral support, there are no concrete steps that point in that direction in 2021. The new EU concept on **peace mediation explicitly mention preventing election violence as one of the top 15 priorities** of EU-led and supported peace mediation. This is a good development that invite the electoral practitioner community to provide a concrete contribution how to fully exploit peace mediation in such context.

- Firstly, peace mediation has a far greater role to play than preventing election related violence. Although this is the most impactful and visible attribute of electoral conflicts, at times, protracted, structural and more slow-burning conflict may have more detrimental consequences for the entire democratic architecture and culture. Peace mediation has its place all around the electoral cycle and can be used as a preventative measure as well as to mitigate and manage all sort of electoral conflicts that are lurking or have already erupted (the parable to climate change where a burning forest is far more likely to receive attention than our day-to-day garbage waste).
- Secondly, the development of a robust methodology on how to conduct peace mediation in electoral processes appear the best way to circumvent that eventual synergies, coordination, and cooperation between EU-led, supported, and funded peace mediation and electoral support activities are ultimately a political, and sovereign decision.
- Thirdly, literature on peace mediation and its role in electoral processes has so far been using remarkably flawed and high-profile elections with high fatalities as examples to draw lessons from both failed and successful peace mediation efforts. Also, the literature relies on cases of track 1 or 1.5 more often with limited information and insights of the preparatory or follow up work. This provide some, but still inadequate guidance for what the major risks and opportunities are for peace mediation in electoral processes.
- Fourthly, electoral processes are often incredibly complex technical processes. Some countries adopt multiple electoral systems at the local level (ex. South Africa employs the proportionate *and* FPTF electoral system in their municipal elections). Each step of any given election is regulated by either an electoral law (electoral systems and laws can also be part of the constitution) and electoral code of conduct. Each phase or activity comes with a budget, a time frame and division of task and responsibility. It is not unconceivable that peace mediation in electoral processes face several risks of missing

windows of opportunities or struggle with knowledge gaps because of not fully grasping the technical nuts and bolts of elections. Peace mediators and those supporting peace mediation processes does not have to evolve into fully fledged electoral experts: but peace mediation may up its chances to succeed if capacitation on technical electoral aspects were available in a suitable format: when can stakeholders truly speak of delays when election results may still be announced within the permitted period? how to best put into question the adherence to protocol at the polling station level without having a statistical significant sample gathered by election observers and whether questioning the election results (outside of the legal system through specifically appointed prosecutors) are constitutional or not? All these questions are of outmost importance for peace mediation to successfully navigate and support others navigating electoral processes. The single-most common trap of all for peace mediators are calls for election reruns. While each country has its own electoral architecture, there are enough communalities between electoral systems, regime types and democratic climates to draw some broader lessons. The strength or the methodology lies however in is ability to provide customized cases to guide peace mediation efforts, fitted to the very context in question.

- Lastly, it is also worth mentioning that the peace mediation in electoral processes methodology also provide guidance on local or municipal elections and goes down to the track three level. These are usually not the target of internationally or regionally supported electoral- or peace mediation activities but would certainly merit to be. Some of the most protracted and detrimental electoral crises has emerged through local elections, like protest and uprisings that has grown to shake entire continents: supporting peace mediation at all dialogue tracks is highly relevant in all electoral processes since conflict dynamics that assume a national or even regional scale are almost always at play in local elections but are left unaddressed.