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## Broadening the OSCE's Mediation Scope: A Case for Engaging in Insider Mediation

### *Introduction*

As an influential regional diplomatic entity, the OSCE enjoys a mandate from its participating States for track I intervention into conflicts in the OSCE area, from conflict prevention, through crisis prevention and crisis management, to dispute settlement and conflict resolution. To this end, mediation, mediation support, trust/confidence building, and dialogue facilitation have become part of the OSCE's repertoire. In recent decades in particular, the OSCE has strengthened mediation as an important instrument, and as a cost-effective mode of intervention in and prevention of (violent) conflict. The Mediation Support Team at the Conflict Prevention Centre (CPC) in Vienna supports and advises ongoing mediation processes. It offers request-based, targeted assistance to OSCE special representatives, heads of field operations, and other mediators. Many OSCE staff, both in the field missions and in Vienna, have years of mediation expertise. Some of the OSCE field operations have mediation and dialogue facilitation in their mandates.

The OSCE's mediation (support) capacity has proved useful to mitigate and/or manage violent conflicts in various contexts in the OSCE area. Nonetheless, recurring violent conflict in the OSCE area indicates that there are limitations to the effectiveness of track I interventions in sustaining peace. This has been a growing realization in the broader field of international peacebuilding regarding "outsider"/international diplomatic, mediation, and dialogue efforts.<sup>1</sup> There is a recognition that a more inclusive whole-of-society perspective on conflict prevention and peacebuilding can inform a move away from power mediation to dialogue support and multi-track diplomacy. Along these lines, the OSCE has been advised to enhance the coherence of and the interplay between different tracks of mediation and to interlink mediation activities with other political processes and reform efforts.<sup>2</sup> This is where deliberation on "insider mediation" becomes relevant for the OSCE, since there could be potential for complementarity between insider processes and outsider track I interventions.

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1 Cf. Karin Göldner-Ebenthal/Véronique Dudouet, *From Power Mediation to Dialogue Support? Assessing the European Union's Capabilities for Multi-Track Diplomacy*, Berghof Foundation, Berlin 2017, at: [https://www.berghof-foundation.org/fileadmin/redaktion/Publications/Papers/Berghof\\_Woscap\\_MTD\\_Goeldner-Ebenthal\\_Dudouet.pdf](https://www.berghof-foundation.org/fileadmin/redaktion/Publications/Papers/Berghof_Woscap_MTD_Goeldner-Ebenthal_Dudouet.pdf).

2 Cf. Federal Foreign Office/Initiative Mediation Support Germany (IMSD), *The OSCE as Mediator. Instruments – Challenges – Potentials*. German OSCE Chairmanship 2016 Conference, Berlin, 6 July 2016, Conference Report, at: [http://www.peacemediation.de/uploads/7/3/9/1/73911539/aa-imsd\\_conference\\_report\\_2016\\_the\\_osce\\_as\\_mediator.pdf](http://www.peacemediation.de/uploads/7/3/9/1/73911539/aa-imsd_conference_report_2016_the_osce_as_mediator.pdf).

This article reflects on ways in which the OSCE's mediation scope could be broadened through engagement in insider mediation. The following first unpacks the term "insider mediation" and articulates the rationale for engagement in it. Second, it analyses a few OSCE field operation projects on conflict prevention and resolution, as well as peacebuilding, to highlight how they may have already contributed to insider mediation. Finally, some deliberations are made on considerations for sustained engagement in insider mediation.<sup>3</sup>

### *Recognizing and Engaging in Insider Mediation*

#### *Recognition*

The "insider" in insider mediation denotes the entity or individual who owns and leads the mediation. Outsider mediation is led by international and/or regional track I actors, such as diplomats, politicians, or state officials. Outsiders may indeed engage in insider mediation at times, but they tend to play the role of technical and process supporters, advisors or act as a sounding board. "Insider mediation", however, substantially differs in scope from the professional field of mediation, or the conceptual and practical framework of mediation within which OSCE operates.<sup>4</sup> The following elaborates on these nuances.

*Insiders.* Simply speaking, these are actors "intrinsic" to the conflict context, i.e. they are part of the social fabric of the conflict, their life is directly affected by it, and therefore they have a stake in it. They will also continue to live in the area when outsiders have left, which is their primary distinction from outsiders. Of course, not all insiders of a conflict would play a constructive role in the conflict. Those involved in insider mediation prefer constructive and non-violent means of addressing conflict and act accordingly. A member of OSCE field mission staff can in fact be such an insider, and may, in a personal capacity, be involved in insider mediation and perhaps endeavour to feed their experience into the mission's work.

*Legitimacy and access.* International mediation assumes a need for outsider-neutral mediators who have a physical and emotional distance from the conflict context. In many cultures, however, local people would rather confide in insiders who may be partial, but whom they already trust because of their social standing or function, and their "fairness" and long-term commitment to peacemaking.<sup>5</sup> Their personal connection to the conflict, and their

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3 The authors are grateful to Dr Christina Stenner (OSCE) for her feedback, edits and suggestions on this contribution.

4 Cf. OSCE, *Mediation and Dialogue Facilitation in the OSCE*, Reference Guide, Vienna 2014, available at: <https://www.osce.org/secretariat/126646>.

5 Cf. Paul Wehr/John Paul Lederach, *Mediating Conflict in Central America*, *Journal of Peace Research* 1/1991, pp 85–98, at: <http://www.colorado.edu/conflict/5025/lederach.htm>.

cultural, religious, ethnic, and linguistic proximity to the conflict actors, render them legitimate to these actors. Insiders have access to and influence over them, and can therefore attempt to build bridges between them, both horizontally (between actors on one track) and vertically (between actors on different tracks). Their legitimacy is not necessarily based on impartiality but on the fact that they are rooted in the context. Their strongest resource is their inside knowledge of the conflict context and of subtleties in mood and the positions of actors within or across constituencies. Insiders are thereby able to reach out to a wide spectrum of conflict stakeholders, especially in engaging with difficult yet crucial actors, such as hardliners and violent non-state armed actors, often taking dire personal risks. Outsiders, in most cases, cannot (or would not want to) access these hard-to-reach actors. Indeed, a great number of examples in armed intrastate conflicts around the world demonstrate the crucial role played by insiders who risk their lives to talk to armed non-state actors. This is a crucial aspect, since the OSCE has legal restrictions around engaging in certain contexts and with certain actors.

*Background.* An insider can be a state or non-state individual or entity from a variety of backgrounds and societal functions, e.g. a politician, public servant, ministry, semi-formal court, community leader, CSO, artist, educator, celebrity, traditional/religious/spiritual leader,<sup>6</sup> elder, entrepreneur, ex-combatant, youth<sup>7</sup> or women's group, a civil society or community-based (including faith-based and non-governmental) organization, or labour union. They are generally not professionally trained mediators (although some are). "Insider mediator" is a term commonly used for these actors; however, it is not a profession or function but rather an analytical label.

*Goal and approach.* Insider mediation is less about reaching agreements and resolving conflicts with a short-term goal, and more about (re-)building intra- and inter-group trust and relationships through dialogue. The long-term goal is to sustain peace by transforming conflict (i.e. working on interests, needs, fears, and root causes of conflict). Insider mediation takes place in both inter-group and intra-group settings. Indeed, some insiders play a crucial role in diffusing intra-group tensions and divisions to prepare groups for inter-group dialogue. The OSCE has limited operational capacity and resource for dealing directly with entrenched local issues in protracted conflict contexts over a long period. In addition, the OSCE's self-imposed political constraints mean it is not able to delve into all the complicated socio-political layers of conflict contexts. Insiders often employ cultural, traditional and religious

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6 Cf. for example, Mir Mubashir/Luxshi Vimalarajah, Tradition- and Faith-Oriented Insider Mediators (TFIMs) as Crucial Actors in Conflict Transformation. Potential, Constraints, and Opportunities for Collaborative Support, The Network for Religious and Traditional Peacemakers, Baseline Study, Finland 2016, at: [http://image.berghof-foundation.org/fileadmin/redaktion/Publications/Other\\_Resources/TFIM\\_FullReport\\_final.pdf](http://image.berghof-foundation.org/fileadmin/redaktion/Publications/Other_Resources/TFIM_FullReport_final.pdf).

7 Cf., for example, Mir Mubashir/Irena Grizelj, The Youth Space of Dialogue and Mediation: An Exploration, Berlin 2018, at: <https://www.berghof-foundation.org/publications/publication/the-youth-space-of-dialogue-and-mediation-an-exploration>.

resources, either strategically or on principle, to build rapport with, pursue, convince, or empower conflict actors – something outsiders may be neither aware of nor equipped to do.

*Process and modality.* Insider mediation is a continuous socio-political process rather than a time- and resource-bound endeavour. It is informal or semi-formal and multi-layered. It tends to be less structured than outsider mediation, evolving organically and holistically. It also comprises the “everyday” of mediation in socio-political life.<sup>8</sup>

*“Mediative” roles.* With the above goal in mind, insider mediation does not typically involve a primary mediator or mediation teams as such, but it comprises dynamic and diverse “mediative” roles and functions that insiders perform within a mediation space. These include roles such as negotiator, interlocutor, conciliator, facilitator, enabler, dialogue facilitator, messenger, go-between, bridge-builder, and mentor. It may be argued that some of these roles (and the goal mentioned above) are not mediation in the professional sense, but rather peacebuilding work in general. Mediation is, however, in the true sense of its etymological root, a *dialogic* and *relational* endeavour, which is not necessarily true of all peacebuilding work (e.g. education, governance, economic development, advocacy, security sector work, etc.). These relational and dialogic roles help break deadlocks, catalyse change by moving things forward, and keep mediation processes alive. Insiders play the crucial role of continuing their mediative efforts to sustain peace after formal processes are wrapped up and the outsiders have left the scene.

*Mediative efforts.* Insider mediation comprises efforts by insiders in violence prevention, early warning, and early action. In contexts of (protracted) armed conflict, insiders constitute driving forces to facilitate peace processes from various angles. In other conflict contexts, such as societal violence, systemic/structural violence, and tension between social groups, insiders’ efforts in awareness raising, advocacy and non-formal dialogue often form the cornerstone of constructive manifestation of conflict (i.e. dealing with conflict non-violently) to ensure just peace and engender peaceful coexistence.

### *Engagement*

Over the last decade, “insider mediation” has been an increasingly important part of international peace-building and policy-making. UN agencies and the EU have supported insider mediation as an extension of their mediation support activities, complementing their high-level engagement. A UNDP Guidance Note in 2014 built on the experience of the UNDP and the EU in supporting national counterparts in preventing and resolving violent tensions.<sup>9</sup>

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8 Cf. *ibid.*, pp. 20-25.

9 UNDP, *Supporting Insider Mediation: Strengthening Resilience to Conflict and Turbulence*. Guidance Note, New York 2014, at: <http://www.undp.org/content/dam/undp/library/crisis%20prevention/Supporting-Insider-Mediation---Strengthening-Resilience-to-Conflict-and-Turbulence--EU%20Guidance%20Note.pdf>.

Among other non-state international organizations, the Berghof Foundation (Berlin) and the Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue (Geneva), for example, have long been immersed in this discourse.<sup>10</sup> Within the OSCE, there is also a growing appreciation of the fact that a holistic approach is required in its mediation (support) efforts, engaging with a diverse range societal actors to ensure sustainable, nationally-owned peace. This is exemplified by the fact that the OSCE commissioned a study by the Berghof Foundation in 2015-2016 to situate the insider mediation discourse within the OSCE, and further by the discussions that have taken place around this study at the OSCE premises.<sup>11</sup> The OSCE acknowledges the need not only to strengthen existing mediation processes but also to identify new entry-points and untapped mediative potential.<sup>12</sup>

The Berghof Foundation study highlighted the need for extending the OSCE's mediation support to insider mediation, building on existing insider mediation structures and processes, providing needs-based capacity development, facilitating networking, and finding potential for complementarity. These measures constitute a framework of long-term *engagement between insiders and outsiders*, rather than short term, *ad hoc support from outsiders to insiders*. This can be regarded as dialogic and interactive engagement, nurturing joint learning, methodological exchange, knowledge building, and problem solving. In some cases, outsiders simply act as a sounding board or as advisors. All this goes hand in hand with the crucial shift in terminology that has gained prominence in recent years: that outsiders need to “engage in” rather than “support” insider mediation. While “support” may (inadvertently) imply that insiders cannot do without outsider support, “engagement” implies taking into account the knowledge, agency, and strength of insiders, and building on what already exists in order to strengthen it further. An upcoming revision of the aforementioned UNDP Guidance Note is also likely to make a case for this shift, drawing on their continued experience of engaging in insider mediation in a number of conflict contexts worldwide.

For the OSCE, engaging in insider mediation is particularly relevant for the prevention of violent conflict by narrowing the gap between early warning and early action. The OSCE has been actively seeking strategies to deal with the growing need for information, procedures, and actors that facilitate the translation of early warning into political action. Insiders have the most knowledge regarding when and how to take timely action, and how to channel the

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10 Cf. Berghof Foundation, Feature: Insider Mediators, at: <https://www.berghof-foundation.org/featured-topics/insider-mediators>, and Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue, New Publications depicts the pivotal role of insider mediators in peacemaking, 30 June 2017, at: <https://www.hdcentre.org/updates/new-publication-depicts-the-pivotal-role-of-insider-mediators-in-peacemaking>.

11 Cf. Mir Mubashir/Engjellushe Morina/Luxshi Vimalarajah, OSCE support to Insider Mediation. Strengthening mediation capacities, networking and complementarity, OSCE, Vienna 2016, available at: <http://www.osce.org/support-to-insider-mediation>.

12 Cf. Christina Stenner, Teaming up with Insider Mediators, Security Community 3/2016, pp. 14–15, available at: <https://www.osce.org/magazine/285616>.

information to actors who have the resources and mandate to take further action. It is important to note that it is practically impossible or even unwise for an outsider to engage in the everyday monitoring of conflict or to take instinctual action. Working strategically with insiders may fare better in this respect.

Engaging in insider mediation is not merely a matter of supporting certain insiders and their efforts, but also involves recognizing this social engine as a whole – the actors involved, their resources and networks. It is about collaborating on how to strengthen this engine by identifying and addressing gaps in resources, connections, support, and political will. Engagement should put insider mediation at the centre and build around it, and not pull insiders into an outsider process. For the sake of complementarity, it is crucial to get a sense of which insider mediation efforts are affecting and influencing mediation efforts at the high levels. It is equally important to understand which actors and their efforts have the capacity but not yet the leverage to influence socio-political processes. Engaging in insider mediation is therefore about recognizing what *is*, and what *could be*.

Finally, it is important to be aware of red lines and constraining factors. When there is high-level tension between state and society (e.g. the state perceiving insiders as a threat to its authority), or when insiders impose patriarchal and exclusive values on societies, the engagement has to be cautiously strategized. There are also cases of extreme polarization and mistrust where outsiders become preferable to insiders. In other cases, insiders may be vulnerable to losing their legitimacy in their constituencies if they are seen to be engaging with outsiders. In all these cases, care needs to be taken to ensure that the mode of engagement is conflict-sensitive.

#### *Analysing OSCE Projects as Engagement in Insider Mediation*

The OSCE's field operation projects have not yet been (officially) framed as support to – or engagement in – insider mediation. This, however, does not mean that there are no elements in some projects that are conducive to insider mediation. The following looks at four cases with an insider mediation lens. In some of the cases, the OSCE attempted to build the capacities of a group of potential changemakers to function as multipliers for enabling ethnic harmony and reconciliation (Kosovo), to prevent and mitigate conflict (Kyrgyzstan), and to manage crises (Ukraine).<sup>13</sup> In Bosnia and Herzegovina, the OSCE Conflict Prevention Centre (CPC) has started a process of identifying insider mediation processes to engage in.<sup>14</sup>

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13 Based on research mentioned in: Mubashir/Morina/Vimalarajah, cited above Note 11. Disclaimer: The field studies were conducted during the period March-June 2016; assessments from the interviewees pertain to this period.

14 Based on ongoing deliberations between the OSCE and the Berghof Foundation on potential collaboration in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

*Kyrgyzstan: Leveraging Local Knowledge and Capacities*

Following the conflict in 2010 and other events in Osh in southern Kyrgyzstan, it was imperative to support the efforts of local mediators or informal leaders and other peacemakers. The OSCE's idea of support – through its Peace Messengers (Kyrgyz: *Yntymak Jarchylary*, Russian: *Vestniki Mira*) project, which ran from 2011-2014 – was to equip these leaders to disseminate valid information in order to prevent further and potentially violent conflict at the local level. The then OSCE Centre in Bishkek (renamed the OSCE Programme Office in 2017) collaborated with NGOs, executive partners, and state authorities in different regions of the country, and signed a three-way memorandum of cooperation supporting 34 Peace Messenger teams of 748 individuals.

The project's format was designed to include local decision makers and existing institutional structures, such as courts of elders (*aksakal*), women's committees, religious leaders, informal neighbourhood leaders (*mahalla*), head teachers, housing committees (*domkom*), and subdistrict committees. Young people, NGO workers and activists, law enforcement agencies, teachers, representatives of the media and local authorities were also included in the teams. Team members were an integral and respected part of their communities and as such, they had been involved in conflict mitigation in their daily life.

The mediation carried out by local traditional leaders in southern Kyrgyzstan was crucial in helping communities cope with social instability and maintain order. As such, these traditional practices of mediation were valued immensely as they contributed to fostering the peaceful co-existence of different groups by implementing local notions of harmony (*yntymak*), arbitration (*sot*), reconciliation (*dostoshuu*), forgiveness (*kechirimduu*), and resolution. All these rituals were practised actively by Peace Messengers in the aftermath of the conflict in Osh and Jalal-Abad.

The tasks of Peace Messengers encompassed a broad scope: carrying out educational work together with local authorities, identifying reasons for conflict, conducting preventive activities, responding to emergencies together with state and law enforcement bodies, mediating to decrease tensions, and providing information to decrease provocative rumours. Peace messengers prevented the escalation of conflict by actively interacting across ethnic lines. They not only mediated in existing conflicts and disputes among various people and groups, but also assisted in the prevention of conflict at an early stage and mitigated tensions in specific localities, such as places where there were water disputes, disputes between state and societies, or disputes in border villages. Peace Messengers were unique in many ways: they were in close contact with local people and at the same time were able to deal with state authorities – they served as a bridge between communities and the state by facilitating dialogue and establishing order in their communities.

Peace Messengers were also actively engaged in creating different platforms for dialogue. In many instances, the state authorities approached Peace Messengers for assistance in resolving local disputes. Local people also approached Peace Messengers in many instances, for example in Kara-Suu, people would approach Peace Messengers first in cases where they did not trust state authorities.

Gender also played a major role in contributing to inter-ethnic reconciliation and conflict prevention in Kyrgyzstan, especially since many of the disputes were handled along gendered lines in this particular local context, where everyday life and economic activities are gendered. This is best illustrated by the fact that conflicts around property rights, access to irrigation water, and land disputes are usually dealt with by men, whilst women focus mainly on dealing with family-related disputes like misunderstandings between husbands and wives, mothers- and daughters-in-law, and the like. This is because men are perceived to better understand technicalities and the usage of authoritative language, while women are believed to understand the importance of soft language and intricacies of local knowledge.

The Peace Messengers project had a strong impact in communities, mainly because it was rooted in the local context and built on existing informal and local structures, such as courts of elders, women's committees, informal neighbourhood leaders, house committees, local authorities and police and law enforcement personnel. The project participants were cognizant of local cultures and practices and informal decision making. By building on these structures, the OSCE contributed to empowering Peace Messengers to act on pressing and sensitive issues. Through this project, the OSCE also offered a space for communication, interaction, networking, peer coaching, and peer exchange. Moreover, the OSCE assisted the Peace Messengers in building their capacity for the prevention and resolution of violence in different ways: i) training for skills development on mediation and communication; ii) simulating exercises to prepare for handling crises; iii) raising awareness of the existence and activity of Peace Messengers; and iv) providing technical infrastructure for transportation, communication, and co-operation between teams based in different territories, for immediate action in crisis situations.

The Peace Messengers praised the project and its approach and pointed out the benefits of OSCE support. Through the project, they not only learned to appreciate the importance of gathering accurate information (conflict analysis) before entering into mediation, but they also realized the importance of being impartial and engaging in active listening. However, the Peace Messengers also noted the following shortcomings. Regional differences in the conflict context, mainly the north-south divide, were not adequately reflected in the project strategies. The local needs and fears of the Peace Messengers were not sufficiently taken into account, nor was there clear and proactive communication regarding negative perceptions about the OSCE (e.g. around the apparent "secrecy" of meetings). Most importantly, in view of sustainability,



the project was brought abruptly to an end without a clearly communicated exit strategy, and without a strategy for how the Peace Messengers could carry on their work without further support.

#### *Ukraine: Renewing and Strengthening Dialogue*

Mediation has been present and practiced in Ukraine since the 1990s, mainly revolving around the rule of law and justice reform. As such, the process of mediation was mainly regarded as co-operation with courts, police, and prosecutorial services. However, after the beginning of the crisis in 2014, it was evident that a structure was needed to address the conflict at different levels. As a result, many dialogue initiatives were introduced, and, in addition to professional mediators, others such as NGO leaders, journalists, politicians, representatives of faith-based organizations, business people, and state officials began to show heightened interest.

Since 2014, the OSCE Project Co-ordinator in Ukraine has been assisting the Ukrainian government in facilitating the “Reconstruction Through Dialogue” initiative – an exchange between decision makers in Kyiv and representatives of communities affected by the crisis in eastern Ukraine. While this initiative has included internally displaced persons, no attempts have been made to establish dialogue across the line of contact.

The initiative consisted of forums that aimed at consolidating the community of mediators and facilitators and established conditions for exchanging experiences. The forums brought together more than 200 participants, including central government representatives, officials from the regions, Members of Parliament and local council deputies, representatives of diplomatic missions, NGOs, and leading experts on dialogue, mediation, and facilitation. The forums proved to be a crucial instrument for renewing and strengthening dialogue in eastern Ukraine. On the flip side, the beneficiaries of the project mentioned a lack of training initiatives and a short-term project mind-set.<sup>15</sup>

#### *Kosovo: Creating Safe Space for Engagement*

In the aftermath of the 1998-1999 Kosovo conflict, many efforts were made to normalize relationships between Kosovo Albanians and Kosovo Serbs. Despite these efforts, inter-ethnic and inter-faith relations remained weak. Against this background, in 2013, The OSCE Mission in Kosovo initiated and supported an Inter-faith Dialogue project with the objective of mitigating existing tensions drawn along ethno-political and religious lines. It encouraged dialogue between different religious communities and promoted tolerance and reconciliation among the Albanian and Serb population. The project involved religious leaders from the Islamic community, Serbian Orthodox Church,

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15 See Note 13.

Catholic Church, Jewish community, Protestant Church and smaller communities, such as the Tarikate/Tariqats community in Kosovo. These leaders from different parts of Kosovo met regularly, sometimes with institutional officials, to discuss joint concerns of the different religious communities. For example, in Peja, religious leaders met with the local authorities to discuss illegal construction and its consequences. In the aftermath of the meeting, religious leaders explained the problem to their congregation, which in turn helped reduce tensions and resistance in addressing this particular issue, which is widespread in Kosovo. Another project called the “Follow Us” Initiative addressed the ethno-political conflict with a cross-border approach. Facilitated and supported jointly by the OSCE Mission to Serbia and the OSCE Mission in Kosovo, the project was launched in 2012. It involved prominent women from Kosovo and Serbia in dialogue forums, aiming to promote confidence building and reconciliation. The women had diverse socio-political and professional backgrounds, including parliamentarians, civil society representatives, academics, and journalists. The forums were also used to discuss the role of women in politics and the issues of economic empowerment.

The OSCE contribution to both of these projects has been considerable. The projects brought together groups from different backgrounds to discuss issues of joint concerns and to build bridges in the process. The OSCE facilitated communication and networking among community leaders, authorities, and other community actors. This helped in nurturing the groups of influential women and religious leaders by motivating them to communicate and work on different levels and to build capacities in the field of conflict prevention and resolution. The OSCE provided safe and neutral space, without which these projects could not have been realized. In terms of room for improvement, more thought should have been put into developing strategies to sustain the impact of the projects. In terms of reach, there were not enough youth-oriented initiatives (Inter-faith Dialogue), and only a small group of people were targeted (Follow Us).

#### *Bosnia and Herzegovina: “Being” an Insider*

The current security situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina is considered “stable”, but unaddressed root causes of the conflict, fragile interethnic relations between Serbs and Bosniaks, structural violence, and a pervasive, deep-rooted lack of trust are a recipe for future outbreaks of violent conflict. The OSCE Mission to Bosnia and Herzegovina has conflict prevention and resolution, especially reconciliation, at the centre of its work. The Mission engages with government institutions and civil society to reduce potential drivers and sources of conflict, for example hate crimes and bias-motivated incidents. It also mediates between various political and civic actors to increase communication to support greater community cohesion, especially in returnee areas and divided communities.

This is therefore an interesting case where OSCE field operation staff (local and international) have in some cases assumed a mediative role, as the representatives of all three constituencies in Bosnia and Herzegovina, the majority of NGOs, and local authorities recognize the Mission (and its field offices) as an impartial and trustworthy partner. Some of the Mission staff, local staff in particular, think of themselves as contributing to insider mediation as part of their OSCE work, as well as through their personal efforts in their own communities.

For example, hate crime has diminished in Banja Luka over the last few years due to the OSCE's work. The OSCE has helped de-escalate – and curb spillover of – conflict. In sustaining a strong collaborative network of civil society actors, political parties, and institutions, the OSCE has raised the critical mass that is adept at early warning and prevention. It has also improved dialogue between marginalized groups and city authorities, reconciliation between ethnicities, and strengthened social cohesion.

### *Analysis*

The different roles of insiders in the above cases had not been specifically cast as mediation roles, as is usually the case in insider mediation; likewise, the OSCE's role as insider mediation support or engagement. It is, however, interesting to see how the characteristics of insiders and the roles played by insiders and the OSCE contribute to mediation. In terms of access, influence, and legitimacy, insiders in all four cases are locally rooted, which gains them trust and legitimacy across ethnic and religious lines and across different sectors. In some cases, they can influence state actors and facilitate dialogue on issues of social concern, and even have the power and courage to challenge authorities regarding the status quo. In other cases, civil society actors tend to earn respect through their commitment to social engagement. They are active, passionate, and committed to building bridges across divides. An interesting *mélange* is also observed in some cases, with the diverse capacities of teachers, the elderly, young people, women, religious organizations, and journalists. The OSCE nurtured a group of influential figures by motivating them to communicate. It brought together prominent insiders to further develop their capacity and helped turn informal initiatives into structured formats, in most cases building on existing and informal local structures. The OSCE provided safe and neutral space for dialogue to take place, especially in some cases where the OSCE has the legitimacy and power to convene groups for dialogue. Last but not least, OSCE field operation staff themselves took on the role of insiders.

These insights, together with the considerations for engagement discussed earlier, are useful starting points for deliberating the ways in which the OSCE can broaden its mediation scope by engaging in insider mediation. This may mean looking at current projects with an insider mediation lens and seeing how the projects could be improved or extended so that they could connect to

existing insider mediation processes and involved actors. It may also mean finding options for engagement, particularly in contexts where it is difficult for the OSCE to intervene. It also begs the consideration of actors the OSCE is not yet engaging with, i.e. those who are already playing a role in insider mediation and those who have the potential but not the leverage to do so. At least in the cases mentioned above, there are examples of both kinds of actors the OSCE has not engaged with, e.g. in Ukraine, there are professional mediators whose efforts were crucial in the aftermath of the 2014 crisis.<sup>16</sup> There is also a large body of civil society actors with various functions, especially young people, whose efforts are worth engaging with. It should be kept in mind that the usual “project” modality of the OSCE may not be suitable for engaging in insider mediation. Projects demand concrete results within a certain timeframe, which may not allow much flexibility and resources for sustained engagement with insider mediation. Engaging with insider mediation would require a long-term and phased approach to building relationships and trust with the insiders. The following section makes some deliberations in this regard.

### *Ensuring Sustained Engagement in Insider Mediation*

As indicated earlier, the difference between “support” and “engagement” is not merely a linguistic one. Mediation support provided by international actors predominantly revolves around developing the capacity of insiders through training and facilitating peer exchange. Engagement, on the other hand, additionally implies *sustained collaboration between insiders and outsiders*. It is ideally a *dialogic and interactive mutual learning process*. Different creative formats could be envisaged in this regard, such as peer-support or peer-advice between insiders and OSCE mediators. Insiders could also be involved from early on in OSCE processes by inviting them for joint conflict analysis and briefing. It should essentially be a long-term endeavour, with particular emphasis on facilitating networking. In this regard, the following considerations are deemed useful for the OSCE.

*Attuning to insider knowledge.* To be able to engage in insider mediation, the OSCE should acknowledge and learn about existing insider mediation structures and processes, and build trust with the actors involved. In cases where the acknowledgement is already there, such as in Bosnia and Herzegovina, the OSCE should find ways to refer more strongly to insider knowledge. In this way, the OSCE and insiders can jointly work out the options for and modalities of complementary efforts towards addressing obstacles in the conflict context. It is also important to be aware of informal power structures, which play a critical role in influencing policies and decision making in traditional communities.

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16 In Ukraine, the OSCE’s “Reconstruction Through Dialogue” forum had some engagement with local mediators.

*Respecting and leveraging informal processes.* Insider mediation processes are often most effective when they operate informally, under the radar of official institutions. While insiders sometimes seek legal recognition of their mediation efforts to gain physical and legal protection, particularly when dealing with proscribed non-state armed actors, they often choose to remain in informal networks and loose associations. If the OSCE's engagement might require formalizing these processes, it should be carefully assessed and strategized in order to avoid negative effects. Formalization may increase actors' visibility, limit their space for manoeuvring and make them vulnerable to becoming instrumentalized and politicized.

*Thinking beyond projects.* Projects are usually limited in scope, mandate, duration, and resources. While log frames and indicators of success often portray a romanticized picture of projects, and a lot of good does indeed come out of such projects, it is difficult to ensure their long-term impact and continuity. Insider mediation, in contrast with outsider mediation, can be a slow process whose impact over a shorter period may not be observable. It therefore requires patience and openness to organic evolution. Taking into account the limits to the political and financial sustainability of OSCE field operation projects, engagement could be as simple as a loose advisory and collaboration mechanism or a stand-by mediation support structure, which could be part of a larger support network, even with a regional scope. Creating a sustainable structure beyond projects would additionally require a change of mind-set in the donor participating States as to how they could potentially invest with a long-term vision.

*Providing safe space for peer-exchange and networking.* The OSCE could create co-learning, mentoring and coaching opportunities by bringing together insiders from various regions. Learning from the lived experiences of peers from similar or different socio-political contexts is often more valuable than knowledge or capacity development provided by international/external experts.

*Evolving inside out.* Even if it is time-consuming, it is important not to underestimate the need to work intensively on intra-group mediation in order to sensitize groups for inter-group mediation (e.g. intra-faith mediation as a basis for inter-faith mediation). To avoid appearing biased, the OSCE would need to engage with different groups and their insiders in parallel.

*Being strategic.* The OSCE needs to maintain full compliance with its own norms and principles as well as transparency in all its activities, especially with participating State actors. Engaging with insider mediation may be seen by state actors as a threat to their status quo (as was the case in Kyrgyzstan). In such cases, the OSCE would need to use its expertise and creativity to find effective strategic approaches to frame and translate insider mediation engagement into acceptable programmes.

*Being flexible.* Insiders' roles, scope, and legitimacy depend on the conflict dynamics. To the outsider's eye, insiders may appear to be doing contradictory things. It is, however, important to be patient and flexible about such dynamics when engaging in insider mediation. Here too, a networked style of engagement would prove more workable than project-based intervention.

### *Concluding Reflections*

Despite the rigidity and limitations that may characterize the OSCE structure, it has time and again proved its creativity in intervening in crisis and conflict. By engaging in insider mediation, there is certainly much potential for the OSCE to further nurture its creativity. While it cannot afford to be as flexible and have as much access to conflict contexts as certain international NGOs, there are some successful models with which it can experiment.

With regard to the sustained engagement in insider mediation elaborated above, there is one simple example of good practice that could prove useful to international actors such as the OSCE: the Berghof Foundation's dialogue work in the Caucasus. Since 2009, the Foundation has nurtured a space where a group of young people have empowered themselves to exercise their agency in addressing the conflicts in the region with a dialogic, transgenerational, and transregional approach. It was a slow but steady process – not without obstacles – evolving organically and therefore effectively. This model is currently being employed in other parts of the Caucasus and in the Balkans. The OSCE certainly has the means to attune to such an approach. Given the right conditions and political will, OSCE engagement in insider mediation could create dividends in reducing tensions and fostering peace, stability and security across the OSCE area.<sup>17</sup>

As a final note, insider mediation is not to be seen as a panacea, but as an integral part of a larger peacemaking and peacebuilding architecture, in which insiders and outsiders play complementary and co-ordinated roles to create synergies for the holistic transformation of conflict.

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17 Understandably, in the particular case of the Caucasus, the OSCE is represented by little to no mission, and as such, its leverage on the ground is very limited. Its efforts on track I, however, have been crucial.