

## Evaluation of OSCE Mediation Support

### ExB Project: Tailoring Approaches to Further Enhance the OSCE's Mediation Support and Dialogue Facilitation Capacity

#### Terms of Reference

##### 1. Background

Conflict prevention and resolution are integral parts of the OSCE's core mandate, and mediation and dialogue facilitation are important instruments to fulfil it. Mediation and dialogue are widely recognized as effective means to prevent, manage and resolve conflicts, both in terms of costs and results. It requires specialized knowledge, expertise and operational guidance as well as political, financial and administrative support. As a result, international and regional organizations, such as the United Nations (UN), the European Union (EU) and the OSCE, have identified a need to provide their mediators and dialogue facilitators with expert support and to co-operate, co-ordinate and establish partnerships with other actors involved in mediation.

In OSCE Ministerial Council Decision No. 3/11 (MC 3/11), the OSCE participating States (pS) agreed "to maximize the continuity, consistency and effectiveness of OSCE engagement in conflict mediation and to strengthen the role of OSCE mediators." Since the adoption of the decision, the OSCE's mediation support capacity has been successfully strengthened by systematically developing a mediation support framework and by implementing a wide array of activities targeting a range of beneficiaries, such as high-level OSCE mediators and OSCE staff supporting mediation and dialogue facilitation processes.

The OSCE Mediation Support Team (MST) within the Conflict Prevention Centre (CPC) has been consolidated as the main resource for mediation support within the OSCE. The MST serves as the in-house capacity, providing strategic support for OSCE mediation and dialogue processes based on methodological expertise and practical experience. As such, the MST works closely with OSCE field operations, OSCE Institutions as well as with different departments and sections within the OSCE Secretariat, in particular the CPC/Operational Services (OS), the Gender Issues Programme, and the Office of the Co-ordinator of Economic and Environmental Affairs.

The MST provides tailored, diverse and politically nuanced advice, along with consistent long-term peace process support for:

- **OSCE mediators and dialogue facilitators**, including those involved in OSCE-supported high-level dialogue and mediation processes, such as Special Representatives of the Chairperson-in-Office and their support teams, the OSCE Chair, the OSCE

Secretary General, the Director of the CPC, and relevant heads of OSCE field operations.

- **OSCE staff** in field operations, the CPC, and OSCE institutions who are directly involved or play critical roles in supporting dialogue facilitation and mediation efforts. Launched in 2025, the OSCE-wide Dialogue Practitioners Platform (DPP) brings together OSCE dialogue experts across the organization.

The work of the MST includes:

- **Capacity-building** by providing regular training on mediation and dialogue topics, such as conflict analysis, process design and dialogue facilitation skills. It also offers tailored training, coaching and mentoring programmes on request;
- **Knowledge management and operational guidance** by identifying lessons from mediation and dialogue engagements, organizing peer-to-peer exchanges and developing practical guidance in co-operation with relevant OSCE executive structures, departments and units;
- **Outreach, networking, co-operation and co-ordination** with relevant local/national actors as well as with international, regional and subregional organizations;
- **Operational support** for the OSCE Chairs, their Special Representatives, heads of field operations and other relevant OSCE mediators. With its roster of mediation experts, the MST also facilitates short-term deployments, thematic engagements and long-term capacity development.

From the beginning, the MST has been funded through multi-year extrabudgetary (ExB) projects:

- Implementing the OSCE Mediation Training and Capacity-Building Concept (2013, €175K)
- Building the OSCE Mediation-Support Capacity (2014-2016, €528K)
- Consolidating the OSCE Mediation-Support Capacity (2017-2019, €632K)
- Sustaining the OSCE Mediation-Support Capacity (2020-2022, €785K)
- Tailoring Approaches to Further Enhance the OSCE's Mediation Support and Dialogue Facilitation Capacity (2023-2025, active, €1,375,796)

All five projects have sought to further strengthen the consistency and effectiveness of OSCE mediation and dialogue-facilitation engagements through a sustained mediation-support capacity. The current project is organized around three strands of work, built around key beneficiary groups. The anticipated project results are:

- The consistency of OSCE engagement in high-level mediation and dialogue processes is increased.
- The capacity of OSCE field operations to support or engage in mediation and dialogue facilitation processes is increased.
- The capacity of OSCE executive structures to support OSCE in mediation and dialogue facilitation is increased.

Over time, the MST has significantly evolved and has undergone successive phases of installation (2013), consolidation (2014-2016), advancement (2017-2019, 2020-2022), and tailoring support (2023 – present). Starting with one Mediation Support Officer (MSO, S3) in 2013, the MST developed and amplified its portfolio under the leadership of the CPC from the initial provision of training and guidance, to a comprehensive and systematic mediation support capacity. The team was composed from 2014 onwards of three MSOs (S3) and one Mediation Support Assistant (MSA, G5) and from 2025 of one Senior Mediation Support Officer (SMSO, S4), two MSOs, one MSA and one Assistant Mediation Support Officer (AMSO, P1). MST is fully financed through ExB contributions. The SMSO and two MSOs are on the Unified Budget post table as seconded positions.

To further enhance the effectiveness of mediation support and strengthen its political relevance, the MST was integrated into the CPC's Policy Support Section (PSS) in 2025. This restructuring streamlined workflows between the MST and the geographic desks operating under the same CPC Deputy Director, thereby improving co-ordination and ensuring more coherent and timely policy support to OSCE mediators and dialogue facilitators.

## 2. Evaluation Objectives, Purpose and Use

In 2022, the first external evaluation of the MST project was conducted. It recommended, among other things, adopting a more beneficiary-centred management approach with tailored mediation and dialogue facilitation support, providing more sustained long-term support and co-operation with field operations, and expanding the network of external partners to enhance the OSCE's capacities in mediation and dialogue facilitation. These recommendations were instrumental in shaping the design of the current project phase.

A second external evaluation shall assess the extent to which they have been implemented and situate the lessons learned within a rapidly evolving mediation landscape. As OSCE mediation formats come under increasing pressure and geopolitical dynamics challenge established formats and approaches, the OSCE must continuously redefine and assert its role in mediation and dialogue facilitation. This evaluation should allow for testing and validating the assumptions underlying the MST's work, assessing the effectiveness of mediation support in the OSCE context, and identifying possible avenues for future MST programming. More broadly, the evaluation should provide evidence on results – what works, what does not – inform future MST support to OSCE mediation and dialogue facilitation and serve to communicate credibly with pS.

With the above-mentioned facets in mind, the evaluation would have the following objectives:

- **Assess the design and implementation of the current project phase (2023 – 2026):** Review how MST support was designed, responding to the findings of the 2022 evaluation, and implemented as planned to support (1) more consistent OSCE engagement in high-level mediation processes and (2) strengthened local mediation and dialogue facilitation capacities.
- **Evaluate the effectiveness of MST support:** Test and validate the assumptions underlying the MST's work, assess outputs and outcomes of its support to mediators and dialogue facilitators.

- **Identify areas of greatest added value for future MST programming:** Identify areas where MST support can further be improved to meet the needs of OSCE mediators and dialogue facilitators within current geopolitical and institutional dynamics, and provide recommendations on how MST can add further value to the OSCE's role as a mediator and dialogue facilitator.

The findings of the evaluation are expected to inform MST programming and provide feedback for any potential adjustments to intervention logics. In addition, the findings of the evaluation may be used to support visibility and discussion around mediation support with *inter alia* the OSCE Secretary General, CPC leadership, the Chairpersonship or the Group of Friends of Mediation of the OSCE. The MST will determine, in consultation with CPC leadership, how its findings will be further disseminated.

### 3. Evaluation Scope

The evaluation of peace mediation, mediation support and dialogue facilitation is not always straightforward due to the inherent sensitivities relating to stakeholders and substance, and the complexity of the overall mediation ecosystem.<sup>1</sup> Noting that there are overlaps between the overall role of mediation in the OSCE context, the role of the MST in providing support, and the MST's ExB project and their objectives, the scope of the evaluation is limited to the role of the MST in providing support within OSCE mediation and dialogue efforts.

This focus notwithstanding, the evaluation should consider the overall context within which MST's work takes place, and how changes in this context affect the effectiveness of past support but also prospects for future support. Given the ongoing nature of mediation processes and the sensitivities involved, it is important that there is awareness of do-no-harm principles by the evaluation team.

The 2022 evaluation report will serve as a basis for the evaluation. The evaluation shall focus on the current project phase (2023 – 2026). No specific geographic or process focus is envisioned for the evaluation, although the use of selected case studies can be considered.

### 4. Evaluation Questions

Taking in consideration the evaluation scope, the main evaluation criteria to be considered are **relevance** – given the request-based nature of mediation and dialogue facilitation support, how does the MST address beneficiary needs and are assumptions on the provision of this request-based support on target; **effectiveness** – to what extent the MST is achieving the results targets set, and how this can be improved; and **sustainability** – how can the benefits of support be supported over the long-term. These criteria best capture areas of prospective lessons learned, as areas of inquiry where there is more space for the MST to adapt its programming and support services.

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<sup>1</sup> See, for instance, HD Center, Mediation Practice Series 7, *Valuing peace: delivering and demonstrating mediation results – dilemmas and options for mediators*. November 2017, or Initiative for Peacebuilding, IFP Mediation Cluster, *Evaluating Peace Mediation*, November 2008.

The following evaluation criteria, questions and sub-questions are envisioned to guide the evaluation:

**Relevance:** To what extent has the Mediation Support Team addressed the mediation needs of beneficiaries and participating States in the context of an evolving geopolitical context?

- *To what extent has the MST successfully addressed the needs of beneficiaries (recipients of support)?*
- *What are the key assumptions underlying the MST's theory of change and support approach, and to what extent do these assumptions remain valid in the current context?*
- *To what extent has the MST applied a gender perspective in its mediation support activities?*
- *How relevant is MST support in the context of evolving geopolitical and institutional dynamics?*

**Effectiveness:** To what extent has the MST contributed to 1) more consistent OSCE engagement in high-level mediation processes and 2) strengthened local mediation and dialogue facilitation capacities.

- *What are the key results of MST support for OSCE mediation and dialogue efforts?*
- *How well has the MST supported consistent OSCE engagement in high-level mediation and dialogue processes?*
- *How effective has the MST been in strengthening the capacity of field-based mediation and dialogue engagements?*
- *To what extent has the MST adopted a beneficiary-centred management approach?*
- *How effective has co-operation with field operations been?*
- *How effective has the MST been in expanding partnerships to enhance OSCE mediation and dialogue capacities?*
- *What adjustments could strengthen the effectiveness of MST support?*
- *What improvements could be made to MST support services to increase their impact?*

**Sustainability:** What factors have supported and what factors have hindered the achievement of sustainable results in terms of more consistent OSCE engagement in high-level mediation processes, and 2) strengthened local mediation and dialogue facilitation capacities.

- *What are the major factors influencing the sustainability of MST support?*
- *Are there best practices or approaches to enhance sustainability?*
- *Is continued engagement warranted to maintain or build on results?*
- *How can lessons learned inform the OSCE's future role in mediation and dialogue facilitation?*

**Efficiency:** To what extent has MST used resources efficiently to support OSCE mediation practices, and co-ordinated its work with relevant external and internal actors to prevent duplication of efforts and ensure complementarity?

**Gender Perspective:** To what extent has MST integrated gender equality considerations in the design and implementation of its work?

The final evaluation questions shall be refined together with the MST and shall be included in the inception report.

## 5. Approach and Methodology

The choice of methodology for this evaluation remains with the consultant(s), who shall propose a suitable methodology. As a suggested option, the evaluation could apply a *critical friends* methodology – a participatory, learning-oriented, and forward-looking approach particularly well-suited for complex and politically sensitive environments such as peace mediation. This approach combines the perspective of a “trusted insider”, who understands the context and can offer constructive challenges, with that of an “independent outsider,” who brings impartial expertise and authority. Such a methodology is highly relevant for OSCE mediation support, where institutional and political factors limit the usefulness of purely impact-focused evaluations, and where adaptive, learning-focused approaches are essential. The evaluation is expected to combine standard deliverables (e.g., inception and final reports) with iterative feedback loops, enabling real-time reflection and adjustment of focus.

The evaluation will make use of a combination of desk analysis and targeted interviews for data collection. The MST will support the evaluator/evaluation team in collecting relevant OSCE project reporting material (plans, progress reports, etc.) and activity reports (drafts, IOMs, etc.) for desk study. The evaluation should also make use of academic studies and policy papers on mediation support more broadly, and mediation in the OSCE context.

Interviews with beneficiaries of MST support or other relevant stakeholders will constitute a major data source for the evaluation. It is envisioned that representatives of at least the following groups will be interviewed as part of the evaluation: direct beneficiaries of MST support (present or former OSCE staff who have carried out mediation and dialogue facilitation activities, including Special Representatives and their teams and DPP members); CPC leadership, CPC staff, including MST and PSS staff, as well as other relevant OSCE colleagues MST co-operates with (Secretariat, Institutions and field operations); Co-Chairs of the OSCE Group of Friends of Mediation, as well as selected representatives of OSCE pS; and other subject matter experts or peer organizations with familiarity and past co-operation with OSCE on the topic. The number and targeting of the interviews will be determined by the evaluator/evaluation team, in discussion with the MST. Gender balance will be considered in selecting key informants.

**The evaluation shall be conducted between November 2025 and March 2026.**

The following stages for the evaluation are anticipated:



- Inception: preparation of inception report, including evaluation plan and methodological approach
- Data collection: identification of documents, list of interviewees, interview guides and their conduct
- Data analysis: synthesis of collected information, production of intermediate summative products if agreed
- Briefings: regular briefings with MST on emerging findings and iterative discussions to focus evaluation
- Final evaluation report: drafting of the final report, summarizing key findings, conclusions and providing future-oriented recommendations

## 6. Deliverables

The evaluation will involve the following deliverables:

- **Inception report**, which will include a detailed evaluation methodology, guiding questions, data collection methods and plan, interview guides, list of key informants and implementation schedule
- **Draft and Final evaluation reports** (see Sections 9 and 10)

In addition to these fixed deliverables, other supplementary material, e.g., presentations and handouts may be agreed on as necessary. The evaluation team is also expected to be regularly available in an agreed-on fashion for liaising with the CPC/PSS/MST to share preliminary findings, and work to adjust the focus of the evaluation in an iterative fashion.

The remuneration per consultant is set at **550 EUR per day** and will be delivered in two instalments, the first after the delivery and approval of the inception report, and the second after the delivery and approval of the final evaluation report.

## 7. Qualifications of the Evaluators

The OSCE seeks to commission the evaluation from a team of two consultants with complementary expertise. One evaluator should bring **solid evaluation expertise and methodological rigour**, with proven experience in conducting evaluations in complex international settings. The second evaluator should contribute **thematic expertise in mediation and mediation support**, combined with a strong understanding of the OSCE's political context and sensitivities. Together, they will be jointly responsible for implementing the evaluation and delivering its outputs in a satisfactory manner, with internal arrangements on the division of roles and time allocation left to their discretion.

While the preferred option is a two-person team, applications from individual consultants who combine these sets of expertise will also be considered.

External evaluators engaged to conduct this evaluation must not have been involved in the design or implementation of the evaluated interventions, on which they shall sign a declaration as part of their contract for the given evaluation. Other than in their capacity as evaluators, they should also not enter into any other type of working relationship with the concerned executive structure or with the beneficiary of the project evaluated for at least a one-year time period

following submission of the final evaluation report. All the elements above shall be set out in the terms of reference for the assignment.

The generic qualifications required are as below:

**For the evaluator with evaluation expertise:**

- Minimum 10 years of professional experience in evaluation, preferably in the field of peacebuilding, mediation, or dialogue facilitation.
- Proven expertise in evaluation methodologies, including theory-based and participatory approaches (experience with “critical friend” methodology is a strong advantage).
- Demonstrated experience in planning, monitoring, and conducting evaluations of complex, politically sensitive initiatives.

**For the evaluator with thematic expertise:**

- Minimum 10 years of professional experience in the field of mediation and conflict resolution.
- Advanced knowledge of the OSCE’s political context and sensitivities, with experience of high-level mediation or dialogue processes.
- Strong knowledge of the OSCE’s role in peace mediation and dialogue facilitation.

**For both evaluators:**

- Advanced university degree in political science, international affairs, law, evaluation, or related field.
- Excellent knowledge of English, including outstanding communication and drafting skills.
- Computer literacy and experience in conducting remote interviews.
- Flexibility and proven ability to meet deadlines.

## **8. Liaison arrangements**

The consultant(s) is expected to carry out the evaluation in close and regular communication and agreement with the MST (contact point – Alexandra Pfefferle, Senior Mediation Support Officer). The MST will provide the consultant(s) with:

- OSCE data and sources as required and possible;
- Logistical support, including arranging meetings with OSCE officials and stakeholders;
- Feedback on the inception report (if any), draft evaluation report and final report;
- Other support as appropriate.



## 9. Timelines and budget

The work plan table below describes evaluation stages and deliverables in general stages. The evaluation is planned to take place over a longer period of time with bursts of activity relating to key milestones. It is aligned with section 6 above, and may be adjusted as appropriate throughout the evaluation process. The evaluation budget is calculated on the basis of the number of working days needed to conduct this evaluation.

Evaluation Phase/Task	Consultant Team	Nov	Dec - Jan					Feb – 15 March		
Inception phase		# Days								
Inception meeting. The purpose is to assess whether and to what extent the evaluation ToR need to be revised.	1									
Detailed measurement, design and planning discussion. Consultation with MST as required.	2									
Inception report and subsequent adjustments to the evaluation plan as appropriate.	2									
Desk and Interview phase										
Review of OSCE records and third-party sources.	5									
Interviews with key informants (staff, stakeholders); data collection	20									
Reporting phase										
Regular debriefings	4									
First evaluation report draft	3									
Internal OSCE draft review										
Final evaluation report	3									
Total number of estimated days	40									

## 10. Evaluation report structure

The final evaluation report shall not exceed 25 pages (excluding annexes, table of contents and executive summary). Section 4 of the report needs to be aligned with the evaluation questions.

### Suggested Structure for the Evaluation Report

1. **Executive Summary**
  - Key findings, conclusions, and recommendations (short, accessible).
2. **Introduction and Background**
  - Purpose, scope, and objectives of the evaluation.
  - Overview of the MST and its evolution (including reference to the 2022 evaluation and current project phase).
  - Context: OSCE mediation and dialogue facilitation engagements, evolving mediation landscape, and political sensitivities.
3. **Methodology**
  - Approach and methods used.
  - Limitations and considerations.
4. **Findings**
  - Implementation of the Current Project Phase (2023–2026)
  - Effectiveness and Added Value of Mediation Support in the OSCE Context
  - OSCE’s Future Role in a Changing Mediation Landscape
5. **Conclusions**
  - Summarize key insights across the three evaluation dimensions.
  - Highlight cross-cutting themes (e.g., institutional positioning, sustainability, partnerships).
6. **Recommendations**
  - Practical, actionable suggestions for MST and CPC.
  - Strategic directions for the OSCE’s mediation and dialogue facilitation role.
  - Options for future project design.
7. **Annexes**
  - Terms of reference.
  - Methodological details.
  - Evaluation questions / Interview guide.
  - List of stakeholders consulted.