



ITALIAN INITIATIVE ON
INTERNATIONAL MEDIATION

Founding Document

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1. Rationale: Italy's Role as a Mediator in International Conflicts

In the last few years, the international system has entered a phase of increasing conflicts worldwide, a new crisis of the post-Cold war security arrangement in Europe, and new political tensions both within and between States, including a growth of racist and extremist movements on the rise in many countries, including those with long established democratic and inclusive traditions. Meanwhile, climate crisis has become a clear and present danger in different parts of the world, and the indispensable, far-reaching transformation of the world economy has the potential to further exacerbate political tensions and rivalries.

In this new era of global uncertainty, it is of paramount importance to strengthen the repertoire of instruments for the prevention and management of international conflicts, and specifically peace mediation¹. Countries such as Switzerland, Norway, and Sweden, historically neutral actors with respect to international conflicts, have for decades invested in professionalizing their foreign policy actors in fields such as dialogue facilitation, mediation, and peacebuilding, interested in creating for themselves a defined and respected role and status in the international arena.

Even Germany, increasingly a key player of a Europe with a still confused foreign policy identity, has reinforced its role as an international mediator in recent years, incorporating into its governmental structures peacebuilding, conflict prevention and mediation support departments and units adequately trained by civil society experts who have been working on the subject in different contexts for years.

What about Italy? How does it stand with respect to this topic?

Despite the professionalism of Italy's diplomatic sector, and the constant presence in different conflict arenas of diplomats, NGO personnel and representatives of armed forces with a strong and credible peacekeeping experience, issues such as international peace mediation and peacebuilding do not fall into a concrete medium-to-long-term (inter)national policy development perspective, leaving the efforts to create occasions for international dialogue to the individual initiatives of good-willing ambassadors.

If we also take the example of the above-mentioned countries, which have based the creation of their international status as mediators on the collaboration between civilian expertise and institutional capacity, the lack of a sectoral center of gravity in Italy is apparent. As a result, Italians with expertise in peacebuilding and international mediation end up following disjointed individual paths that lead them to hold sometimes prominent roles in international organizations such as UN, EU, OSCE, or in non-governmental organizations involved in the facilitation of dialogue in conflict areas around the world,

¹ International peace mediation refers here to “a process whereby a third party assists two or more parties, with their consent, to prevent, manage or resolve a conflict by helping them to develop mutually acceptable agreements ” (UN Guidance on effective mediation, 2012, p. 4), in all violent or potentially violent conflicts, whether inter-state, or intra-state.

without ever meeting, coordinating or acting collectively. This is a **gap** that needs to be filled if we want to harness the potential comparative advantages our country has in the areas of international mediation and peacebuilding.

In fact, a **quick analysis** shows that:

- a) Italy's specific geographical position makes it a natural bridge between North and South and, to a certain degree to East and West.
- b) Italy possesses historical and cultural capacity to communicate with different actors in international conflicts.
- c) There is a vast network of Italian highly skilled professionals in the peacebuilding and international mediation sector, ready to support the institutions in developing specific competencies on the topic.
- d) Mediation and dialogue facilitation are technical topics that require specific skills and competences; to be successful, these cannot be left to improvisation, while at the same time, those skills and competences are particularly close to Italian culture and communication style.

These are ideal conditions for Italy to play a more prominent role in mediating internationally relevant conflicts, and consequently increase its relevance in the international arena.

We therefore launch an **Italian Initiative on International Mediation - 3IM**, a joint initiative linking research, training, projects and media outreach, with the aim of:

- a) **encouraging, supporting and assisting Italian institutions** to develop professionalism and international credibility in the field of international conflict mediation and peacebuilding;
- b) creating a network or Community of Practice of international mediation professionals in Italy that can act as an incubator of projects, ideas of development, and as a **source of expertise** that Italian institutions can draw on easily and effectively. We believe that linking these actors to promote collaboration and unite efforts can provide a solid foundation for developing a stronger role for Italy as a leading Peace actor.

Our initiative recognizes and builds upon current efforts to strengthen the Italian peacebuilding sector, harnessing present capabilities and systematizing lessons learned. International mediation and peacebuilding should be seen as different but highly complementary activities in the broader field of constructive management of international conflicts.

2. Research

Partners in the Initiative will contribute in the exploration of different research topics, involving the wider Italian research community working on the contemporary international system and in Peace and conflict studies (ERC sectors SH2_3, SH2_, SH2_5),

such as :

- History and current models of international peace mediation;
- Successful cases of mediation cases led by international actors and Italian ones (e.g. Vatican mediation on the Beagle Channel and others);
- International mediation and human rights regimes at global, regional and local level;
- The economic dimension of international mediation;
- Designing a specific model for international mediation suitable for Italy;
- Experiences of training and capacity building in international mediation, and their impact assessment;
- Integration between international mediation processes and violence prevention /peacebuilding strategies (integrated framework for peace);
- Multilateral mediation efforts – international organizations and mediation;
- Strengths and weaknesses of international mediation compared to strengths and weaknesses of other peaceful means to settle international disputes (negotiation, conciliation, arbitration etc.);
- International Mediation and the “triple nexus” of humanitarian assistance, development cooperation and peace promotion;
- *Women Peace and Security* and international mediation: good practices (Nordic Women Network, Mediterranean Women Mediation Network and others) and lessons for Italy;
- International mediation and global systemic challenges - climate crisis, resource crisis, economic crisis (“polycrisis”).

Research priorities and / or additional topics will be identified and pursued over time. For each of the research topics a principal investigator and lead organization will be identified. We aim at creating a scientific consultative committee of international experts, senior statespersons and diplomats.

Organizations and individuals part of the 3IM initiative will share fundraising opportunities, collaborate in the acquisition of funds for research: a) by participating jointly to calls (e.g. PRIN, Horizon, Erasmus+), b) by sharing fundraising capacity in the retrieving, project drafting, project management, identification of *ad hoc* donors.

Yearly conferences, research-practice dialogue seminars, support to early career researchers and diplomats etc. are envisaged. The Initiative will work closer with existing academic networks: the Rete Italiana delle Università per la Pace, as well as international networks such as EUPRA, IPRA, EPLO, and others.

3. Training and capacity building

Partners in the initiative will work on systematically strengthening capacities. So far, in Italian diplomacy the development of mediative capacity has been left to experience and initiative by single individuals. The Initiative aims to institutionalize the training of high-level experts by presenting MAECI with pilot training for Italian diplomats, based on existing good practices in other countries.

Quality training will be provided also to civil society activists, NGO personnel and municipalities' staff involved in "second track", "people's" or "cities' diplomacy", with the aim to integrate *peacebuilding* and *conflict prevention's* vision in the cooperation and development as well as in emergency relief actions. Specific courses and training opportunities will be organized at university level, based on the rich experience of training providers such as the Alexander Langer Foundation, ISPI, CISP - University of Pisa, the Scuola Superiore Sant'Anna and others.

4. Practice, policy, evaluation

When opportunities arise, 3IM will propose itself as a resource pool to support mediation activities performed by Italian governmental and non-governmental actors:

- by actively conducting and supporting mediation processes;
- by offering expertise to devise policy proposals;
- by conducting evaluations of mediation initiatives, encouraging "knowledge in action", collecting lessons learned and building a knowledge base with interested State and non-State actors;
- by accompanying and supporting diplomats, NGOs and other involved personnel in all phases of mediation processes, with a specific focus on planning and pre-mediation activities.

5. Raising public opinion & media awareness

International peace mediation, and in general the world of diplomacy, does not find appropriate description in the current Italian media landscape. The main narrative to understand international relations and conflicts is through the lens of geopolitics. However, this perspective makes it difficult to appreciate the degree of cooperation in the international system, which is always present and mixed with competition and outright conflict.

Above all, the geopolitical approach alone runs the risk of failing to capture the transformative nature of mediation processes and the potential for conflict management in the international system, thereby fueling widespread pessimism with respect to global fortunes without adequately reporting the enormous investment of international actors, including Italy, in the political stability of the planet.

Aim of this part of the project will be to raise public attention and interest in concrete examples of international mediation and related policy choices by Italian institutions. This will include actions such as organizing public events on key policy issues, training journalists on topics related to peace mediation and the publication of articles by members of the 3IM.

6. A contribution towards Peace Mediation in Italy

3IM aims to provide sound research, reliable training, and effective policy support to bridge the gap in Italy's culture to conflict mediation and the specific capacities related to it. Our initiative aims to help strengthen the capacity of Italian governmental and nongovernmental actors to design, promote and implement comprehensive peace policies through specific steps:

1. **Promoting international mediation as a key part of Italian foreign policy;**
2. Ensuring international mediation becomes an **integral part of the professional profile** of Italian diplomats, key military personnel involved in international missions, local governments and NGOs involved in people's diplomacy as well as professionals in humanitarian aid and development;
3. Establishing an Italian **Community of Practice** dealing with international mediation and peacebuilding;
4. Bridging expert actors in peacebuilding and international mediation with actors involved in neighbouring areas, by culture or interest (e.g., public mediation, participatory processes, development cooperation, human rights, emergency, civil rights), with the aim of creating a process of virtuous collective growth and exponential increase of Italian expertise in new generation areas.

We therefore call on interested colleagues and organizations active in Italy to join the initiative and sign the present founding document.

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