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Assembling Practices of EU Mediation in Myanmar and Georgia

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i. Abstract

The objective of this dissertation is to study the practices of mediation of the European Union (EU) in order to explore how the understanding of violent conflicts by EU officials is reflected in their ways of responding to them through practices of mediation. In late 2011 the in-house Mediation Support Team of the Union took office as part of implementing the *Concept on Strengthening EU Mediation and Dialogue Capacities*, adopted by the Council of the European Union in 2009. The group began to develop new practices of in-house mediation support, thereby engaging with the already existing efforts of the Union. This study sets out to trace the emergence of this loosely knitted web of practices – the assemblage of EU mediation – by drawing on the sociology of translation or Actor-Network-Theory and on concepts of governmentality studies. It builds on the four moments of translation as developed by Michel Callon and refines them with the notion of political rationality and *techne* to assess what it is that makes the assemblage relatively durable. This dissertation argues that the seemingly incoherent and to an extent diverging practices of mediation are in fact organized around a reasoning on violent conflict which securitizes conflict. It is challenged by a transformative rationale which is advocated by the Mediation Support Team. However, the common denominator of both concepts is an understanding of how to build peace with sustainable economic development, the eradication of poverty, strong and democratic state institutions and an effective system of multilateralism as its main components. Taken together, this reasoning or political rationality gives rise to a state-centred approach to violent conflict which often plays out at the expense of a detailed conflict assessment as it simplifies the multiple realities and narratives of violent conflict. Two case studies of EU mediation practices in Myanmar and Georgia substantiate this argument. They are assessed through analysing the transcripts of 63 semi-structured interviews and textual artefacts. Moreover, the dissertation discovers an intriguing puzzle pertaining to how the political rationality of the assemblage of mediation is resisting any form of scrutinizing the underlying assumptions of the state-centred understanding of violent conflict. On the one hand, the Mediation Support Team fulfils a supportive role and did not manage to establish itself as an obligatory passage point of the assemblage which would define how to engage in mediation and require all other actors to pass through it. In fact, the codified practices of the Common Foreign and Security Policy authorize the Council of the European Union to determine the Union's foreign policy objectives, including mandating an actor to mediate on behalf of the EU, and calling for all efforts of resolving violent conflicts to be in line with Council policies. Accordingly, European Union Special Representatives or Heads of Delegations engage in those practices that engender a peace process. On the other hand, the study found that the practices of mediation support structure the way of thinking of EU officials on peace and conflict in that they introduce specific concepts such as the transformative approach to violent conflict and blur the boundaries between EU actors and external experts, thereby raising the question whether or not this will challenge the Union's concept of violent conflict in the future.

ii.   Acknowledgments

This dissertation is the material trace of a journey which took form in January 2013 but began with my studies in 2007. It was during my time of working for the mediator, Dr Juan Diaz, that I learned about the Mediation Support Team of the European Union and the various mechanisms in place to strengthen the capacities of EU actors in this field. As a newly certified mediator, these developments caught my attention. I was particularly interested in the processes of how mediation expertise is acquired within the quickly changing environment of the EU institutions. Initially, I conceptualized my PhD project along the lines of a tension between mediation as a craft and as a foreign policy instrument of the Union. However, a pilot study on EU mediation in Yemen made me realize that this tension between foreign policy and mediation was something I had constructed based on traditional concepts of the mediation literature. What is more, I had to admit that these conceptual tools were failing to grasp what I was learning from EU officials about the practices to which they referred to as mediation. As a result, I changed the approach of my research and began to trace the assemblage of EU mediation by letting the actors specify what mediation is and by building on ethnographic research methods. During all these conceptual struggles, I could always rely on the full support and valuable advice of both of my supervisors, *Dr Tom Casier* and *Prof Richard Whitman*. They were not only helping me to develop the conceptual approach to address the research question of how the understanding of conflicts by EU officials is reflected in their ways of dealing with them through practices of mediation but also helped me navigate in academia. To both of them I would like to express my immense gratitude. In this regard, I also thank *Prof David Chandler* whose work on statebuilding and on critiquing the critics of the liberal peace has been instrumental in deepening my understanding to the extent that I reached out to him and have benefited from his thoughts, comments and ideas since. I would also like to thank two of my teachers of social and cultural anthropology at the Free University of Berlin, *Prof Mareile Flitsch* and *Dr Jeanne Berrenberg*, who encouraged and fostered my interest in the micro-practices and mechanisms of the 'social' and the production of knowledge but also taught me how to collect data and gain access to a world which is unfamiliar to me. In doing so, they lay the foundations for my PhD research.

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Nevertheless, I would not have been able to engage in this research project had it not been for *Tomas Henning*, the Head of the Mediation Support Team of the European External Action Service. I am very much indebted to him for his tireless efforts to help me understand how the Mediation Support Team collaborates with a large number of EU officials and various mediation experts and conflict resolution professionals from think tanks and non-

iii.   List of abbreviations

AFPFL	Anti-Fascist People's Freedom League
ANT	Actor-Network-Theory
BIA	Burma Independence Army
COBERM	Confidence Building Early Response Mechanism
DCFTA	Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area
DDR	Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration
DEVCO	Directorate-General for International Cooperation and Development
DFID	Department for International Development
EEAS	European External Action Service
EU	European Union
EUMM	European Monitoring Mission
EUSR	European Union Special Representative
GID	Geneva International Discussions
GSP	General System of Preferences
HR/VP	High Representative/Vice President of the European Commission
ICC	International Criminal Court
ICG	International Crisis Group
ICRC	International Committee of the Red Cross
IcSP	Instrument contributing to Stability and Peace
IFFMCG	International Fact-finding Mission on the Conflict in Georgia
IO	International Organization
IPRM	Incident Prevention and Response Mechanism
MPC	Myanmar Peace Centre
MST	Mediation Support Team
NCCT	Nationwide Ceasefire Coordination Team
NGO	Non-governmental Organization
NLD	National League of Democracy
OSCE	Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe
SLORC	State Law and Order Restoration Council
SPDC	State Peace and Development Council
SSR	Security Sector Reform
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNFC	United Nationalities Federal Conference
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNOMIG	UN Observation Mission in Georgia
UPCC	Union Peace-making Central Committee
UPWC	Union Peace-making Working Committee
WG	Working Group

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1. Introduction

In 2009 the Council of the European Union adopted the *Concept on Strengthening EU Mediation and Dialogue Capacities* (Concept hereafter) and thereby mandated a group of actors to promote a more systematic approach to mediation (Council of the European Union, 2009a). Eventually the Mediation Support Team took office in late 2011 as part of the *Conflict Prevention, Peacebuilding and Mediation Instruments Division* or K2 of the European External Action Service (EEAS) and has been engaging in establishing new practices of in-house support since. At the same time, scholars have begun to take note of these developments and are exploring the Union's efforts as a mediator. The growing body of work reflects a particular tradition of studying mediation. It focuses on aspects such as the characteristics of the mediator and the disputants, various sources, drivers and dynamics of violent conflict as well as the process format. Addressing all these factors is seen as decisive for grasping how mediation efforts develop and, not least, for explaining success and failure (e.g. Bercovitch, Anagnoson, & Wille, 1991). Accordingly, scholars have developed concepts to make this complexity amenable to qualitative and quantitative formats of analysis (e.g. Greig & Diehl, 2012). By way of example, the third party is usually assessed with regard to impartiality or bias, capacities and resources, the record of previous mediation engagements and the employed strategies. In doing so, the concepts structure the thinking about the mediator as the boundaries and distinctions they draw are derived from assumptions pertaining to what is considered as key elements of processes of resolving conflicts. In this respect, recent analyses on EU mediation are trying to uncover the Union's approach and effectiveness as well as examining an alleged gap between policies and practice (e.g. Bergmann & Niemann, 2015; Davis, 2014).

Little research has been undertaken to challenge these concepts of mediation and to take a step back from presupposing how EU actors go about this task. This constitutes a shortcoming which is particularly momentous regarding the mediation efforts of the EU since it is an approach which is, as this dissertation contends, ill-suited to embrace the changes under way in how officials of the Union engage in external crisis and conflict as a third party. In fact, these concepts do not speak to the multiple realities these actors face. This thesis suggests studying EU mediation as an assemblage instead and conceptualizes it by building on the sociology of translation or Actor-Network-Theory (ANT) and governmentality studies. In doing so, it addresses the central concern of this dissertation namely to examine the practices

of EU mediation in order to explore how the understanding of violent conflicts by EU officials is reflected in their ways of responding to them through practices of mediation.

What does a practice-based approach offer to the study of EU mediation in light of the research question? What does it entail to study how the understanding of conflict by EU actors is reflected in the respective policy response by employing practice theories? First, it allows for transcending agent-driven and structure-focused approaches towards understanding the Union in that it conceptualizes both as inherent to practices (Nicolini, 2013, pp. 7-8). Hence, it can be studied how the assemblage or loosely knitted web of mediation practices is brought into existence and account for how actors develop a policy response to an event in a conflict-affected country and how their actions are constrained by codified practices. As such, this approach offers an alternative to the institutional perspective on the EU. Second, it acknowledges that discourse and language as well as materiality matter equally to comprehend the 'social'. In doing so, it is possible to account for how objects can turn into resources that establish asymmetric relations and how they 'structure the field of possible action' of EU and non-EU actors enrolled in the assemblage (Foucault, 1998, p. 221). Third, practice theories focus on performativity which engenders a dynamic conceptual approach to the EU and examines how practices enact and re-enact it as an organization, thereby enabling the researcher to study how projections of orders are created and reproduced but also how they change (Nicolini, 2013, p. 7). Fourth, a practice-based approach is rooted in a relational ontology which grasps the social 'as being composed by, and transpiring through, a bundle or network of practices' (Nicolini, 2013, p. 8). Embracing the assemblage of mediation as relational overcomes the boundaries between EU and non-EU actors, levels of analysis, and the micro and macro.

The conceptual and methodological approach of this study is inspired by the sociology of translation or ANT and concepts of Foucauldian governmentality studies. In this regard, it is different from other practice-oriented work on diplomatic practices of the EU which primarily draws on the sociology of Pierre Bourdieu (e.g. Adler-Nissen, 2014; Villumsen Berlin, 2012). Whereas this body of research offers valuable contributions to scholarship of the Union, it struggles with the strong focus on domination and a degree of structural determinism of habitus, field, capital and doxa which hampers its ability to address change, materiality and reflexivity (Nicolini, 2013, pp. 68-69; Bueger & Gadinger, 2014, p. 28). Since this study is interested in how the assemblage of mediation emerged and how it engages with other already

existing networked relations, it intends to explore the potential of ANT and its emphasis on assembling and dissolving through enactment and re-enactment and in particular Michel Callon's conceptualization of the four moments of the process of translation (Latour, 2005; Callon, 1986). This study complements these four elements with the concepts of political rationality and *techne* of governmentality studies as it deepens the understanding of practices in that it allows for assessing both how thought operates in maintaining but also altering the assemblage of mediation as well as the actant-like role of objects and materiality in the processes of translation (Miller & Rose, 1992). The refined moments of translation assist in examining textual artefacts and the 63 oral accounts which were collected through semi-structured interviews with EU officials, member state diplomats, conflict resolution experts and researchers, representatives of civil society and the conflict parties, as well as non-EU mediators and facilitators. The approach to the study of EU mediation and how it informs the choice of methods is developed in greater detail in chapter two.

As this practice-based approach necessitates in-depth analysis, it is important to clearly define the scope of this study. This dissertation builds on two cases, namely the practices of EU mediation efforts in Myanmar/Burma (Myanmar hereafter) and Georgia. They have been chosen on the basis of three criteria. At first, all five types of EU mediation involvement as outlined in the Concept that is promoting, supporting, leveraging and funding of mediation efforts of others as well as the EU as the mediating actor, should be accounted for, thereby allowing the EU's own concept of mediation to guide the research (Council of the European Union, 2009a). Second, the Mediation Support Team of the EEAS with its goal of promoting a more coherent and professional approach to mediation primarily works with EU delegations and European Union Special Representative (EUSR) teams which are actor-networks that differ as to their level of conflict expertise and the nature of their mandate. The case of Myanmar is an example of an EU delegation being in charge of the practices of supporting the peace process of the country and Georgia presents a case in which the EU delegation administers the funding instruments for conflict resolution activities of the European Commission, whereas the EUSR team is responsible for the EU's role in the Geneva International Discussions (henceforth, Geneva talks). Third, since mediation is part of foreign policy, all major decisions are taken by member state representatives in the Council and monitored during implementation. All of this has ramifications for mediation practices and is acknowledged by taking the policy context and in this sense also geographical proximity into consideration: Georgia is part of the European Neighbourhood Policy and recently signed an

Association Agreement with the EU while policies towards Myanmar are guided by the Comprehensive Framework adopted by the Foreign Affairs Council in 2013. However, narrowing it down to two case studies is still a broad topic as a considerable number of actors can enrol in the assemblage of EU mediation. Consequently, this dissertation will focus on EU actors and their implementing partners but will not follow the actors all the way to the actor-networks of national governments of member states nor will it provide a detailed assessment of other external actors. Even though they will not be studied systematically, they will be included in the analysis whenever relevant to the practices of EU mediation.

This dissertation puts forward the argument that the seemingly incoherent and to an extent diverging practices of mediation are in fact organized around a reasoning on violent conflict which problematizes conflict as a security threat. It is challenged by a transformative rationale which is advocated by the Mediation Support Team. However, their common denominator is a concept of peace which identifies sustainable economic development, the eradication of poverty, strong and democratic state institutions and an effective system of multilateralism as building blocks towards security and stability. Taken together, this reasoning gives rise to a state-centred approach to violent conflict which often plays out at the expense of a detailed conflict assessment as it simplifies the multiple realities and narratives of violent conflict. Chapter three to six substantiate this argument as follows. Chapter three addresses two central concerns: it traces the state-centred concept of violent conflict by examining the key documents which are relevant to practices of EU mediation and uncovers how it shaped these emerging practices. First, this chapter examines the two philosophies or rationales of violent conflict and shows how the securitized approach to conflict builds on an understanding which perceives the violent escalation of conflict as a shock that hits the affected country and leads it astray, whereas the transformative philosophy views conflict as part of social change and contextualizes its violent escalation as needing a transformative response. It also demonstrates how both philosophies are integrated into the EU approach to violent conflict through a concept of peace which points to a particular narrative. This narrative builds on the history of the Union and presents the concept of peace as a lesson learned by the EU. Second, chapter three also sheds light on how the state-centred approach shaped the emerging mediation instruments by assembling how the EU approach to conflict developed, how mediation was conceptualized as a policy tool and by situating it in the so-called Comprehensive Approach to External Conflict and Crisis. At the same time, it assesses how the Mediation Support Team challenges the securitized understanding of violent conflict and collaborates with

external experts to reinforce its standpoint, thereby blurring the boundaries between EU and non-EU actors.

The subsequent chapters explore the processes of translation which gave rise to the assemblage of mediation in Myanmar and Georgia respectively. The case studies shed light on the mediation practices of two different actor-networks: the EU Delegation to Myanmar and the EUSR for the South Caucasus and the Crisis in Georgia. Chapter four focuses on the delegation's practices of supporting the Myanmar Peace Centre (MPC), a semi-governmental institution which combines the government secretariat and the platform for negotiating the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement as well as holding the Political Dialogue. It shows how the actors of the Union failed to lock the conflict parties into the roles as envisioned by their problematization but were themselves enrolled as the funder of the MPC instead. Indeed the MPC became the obligatory passage point of the peace infrastructure in Myanmar, the 'central node' through which all other actors have to pass, meaning it took control of the peace process (Law & Hetherington, 2002, p. 398). To trace these processes the chapter develops at first how EU-Myanmar relations emerged as a response to the change to a semi-civilian government in 2011 and uncovers a shift in the problematization as well as how mediation support came to be seen as the right policy tool. Second, it assembles the *techne* of these practices and examines the accounts of EU actors pertaining to the four moments of translation. Third, the analysis is complemented by assessing the perspectives and views of implementing partners of the EU which allows for an understanding of how they perceive EU actions and in what ways they engage in these practices. In doing so, a small group of Union officials becomes visible who shaped the practices of EU mediation support and suggested the MPC as a contribution of the Union to Myanmar's peace process as a capacity building measure for the government or a ministry for peace. Over the years, this idea has been forgotten and the current delegation staff responsible for the MPC perceives their work as political support but why and with what consequences? Moreover, how did the group of actors in the early days of EU-Myanmar relations came to perceive the peace centre as the right instrument for promoting a peaceful future in Myanmar? How did they understand the developments in the country and do the EU actors working on and in Myanmar in 2015 problematize the events unfolding differently? And if so, how does it change the assemblage of mediation?

Chapter five turns to the case study of Georgia and traces the practices of mediation following the war in 2008 and the involvement of different actor-networks of the EU in a conflict, in which the notion of statehood is contested, and the Union's position partial towards the narrative of statehood of the government of Georgia. To begin with, examining the textual artefacts points to a problematization of Georgia's conflicts before the war in 2008, which emphasizes weak state institutions, high levels of corruption, poverty, and enemy images in the country, mainly at the expense of an extensive examination of the grievances and war crimes committed during the wars in the 1990s. Accordingly, the EU's approach was based on the rationale of transforming Georgia into a country of which South Ossetia and Abkhazia would want to be part of. Moving on to the five-day-war in 2008, the chapter uncovers how these events created a different reality on the ground and challenged the Union's previous practices of resolving the conflicts of the country by questioning its political rationality. These changes are explored in order to trace how the assemblage of mediation as it exists today emerged by following the actors of three actor-networks: the EUSR and his team, the EU delegation, and the European Union Monitoring Mission (EUMM). Juxtaposing their respective mandates and contributions to produce the practices of EU mediation, which gave rise to the Geneva International Discussions (Geneva talks hereafter), helps to understand how the problematization of the Council of the European Union, which subscribes to the notion of statehood advocated by the Georgian government, forces the EUSR into engaging in practices that manage the post-war realities. In doing so, the chapter aims at mapping the attempts of the EUSR at developing a problematization and interessement devices that is the instruments and mechanisms which are envisioned by the knowledge claims of the problematization and aim at achieving agreement and support of the targeted actors. It focuses on how the EUSR tries to enrol the conflict parties into the assemblage of mediation despite the partiality of the Union. Moreover, it addresses how the processes of translation are partially failing in that the EUSR cannot lock the participants of the Geneva talks in their roles as envisioned by the problematization of the EU but allows for a 'constructive ambiguity' instead. Hence, he managed to bring the parties to the table but cannot overcome the diverging problematizations regarding the conflict of the participants. As such, the practices of mediation seem to contribute to Georgia, South Ossetia and Abkhazia going separate ways rather than protecting the territorial integrity of the country.

Building on the insights and findings of the empirical chapters of this study, the sixth chapter is a stock-taking exercise and serves the purpose of exploring the relationship between the

political rationality and *techne* within the assemblage of EU mediation. It illustrates how the technologies of mediation can serve as interessement devices and structure the thinking on conflict. Their actant-like role creates a form of path dependency through practices which can shed light on similarities between different cases of the Union's mediation efforts. Furthermore, this chapter deepens our understanding of the political rationality of the assemblage in that it draws our attention to the state-centred concept of violent conflict and how neither the Mediation Support Team nor the dissident voices of the assemblage in Georgia and Myanmar managed to scrutinize its underlying knowledge claims.

Last but not least, the seventh chapter summarizes the entire study and highlights its findings and contributions to research on mediation, EU external action and practice-based approaches. Against this background, it concludes by addressing the strengths and limitations of the conceptual framework which builds on the sociology of translation and governmentality studies, and identifies avenues for further research. It highlights how the sociology of translation can significantly contribute to the study of the diplomatic practice of the Union and, in particular, mediation and conflict resolution in that it complements Bourdieu-inspired research.

2. Developing the research approach

The starting point of this study is the Mediation Support Team (MST) which was created in the process of establishing the EEAS in late 2011. Tasked with promoting a more coherent and professional approach to mediation, the team of five has been providing in-house support to relevant EU actors such as delegation personnel and EUSRs and their advisors, thereby establishing new routines of collaboration, training and coaching. Research on EU mediation has to account for these changes and critically inquire how they form a part of the Union's practices as a third party in resolving violent conflicts. However, the growing literature on this subject has not embraced these developments thus far. Instead scholars are concerned with primarily three research puzzles: at first, there are studies which assess the nature of EU mediation (Cupac & Ruzic, 2013); second, others examine the foreign policy context of mediation as to how the EU translates its principles of external action into policies (Davis, 2014); and, finally, there are the first attempts of assessing the effectiveness of the Union's engagement in mediation (Bergmann & Niemann, 2015). Although all three research perspectives offer valuable insights into the post-Lisbon environment and its implications for mediation, they have a specific shortcoming in common which prevents them from grasping the distinctive characteristics of EU mediation. In conceptualizing mediation based on concepts of the positivist tradition of the mediation literature, they are overlooking both the EU's own approach, which differentiates between three tools and five types of mediation involvement, as well as the internal controversies regarding the meaning of mediation. Moreover, the efforts of the Union in this field are much more dynamic and interwoven with other practices than the traditional concepts permit. Yet it is difficult to understand mediation without assessing the diverging ideas on employing mediation instruments as well as the processes, forms of collaboration between a diverse group of actors, and the tools and techniques they use.

To address the gap in the literature, this study engages in gradually assembling the practices of mediation of this diverse group of actors pertaining to the question of how the understanding of conflict by EU officials is reflected in the ways of developing an EU response through mediation practices. It is interested in tracing how these practices produce various knowledge claims and how the actors make sense of the dynamics in a conflict-affected country, and how their ideas do or do not feed into the processes of developing the respective policies towards this country. However, focusing exclusively on ideas, values, and

assessments of EU officials would mean neglecting the tools, instruments, and other forms of codified practices which are part and parcel of the processes through which a crisis in a conflict-affected country becomes known to officials of the Union and is rendered manageable, thereby engendering the opportunity for action. Hence, this study assembles not only the ideas and considerations of the actors but also the numerous devices of the infrastructure of this heterogeneous network and addresses the question of what it is that makes this loosely knitted web of practices relatively stable and durable. Accordingly, this necessitates an approach which transcends familiar dichotomies such as stability and change, ideas and matter, or agency and structure, and allows for studying mediation efforts 'in action' by acknowledging that they are neither objects, nor 'in the heads of people, and they are not stored in routines or programmes. Practices only exist to the extent that they are enacted and re-enacted' (Nicolini, 2013, pp. 219-220; Adler & Pouliot, 2011; Bueger, 2015). Hence, this study conceptualizes mediation as an assemblage and understands the various ideas of EU and relevant non-EU actors on conflicts as well as the tools and devices to develop and implement a policy response within and constituted by practices. Drawing on the Latourian approach to assemblage, it traces the four moments of translation and complements this notion with the concepts of political rationality and *techne* as put forward by Nikolas Rose and Peter Miller (Latour, 2005; Callon, 1986; Rose & Miller, 1992). Before developing this conceptual framework and its methodological implications in greater detail, it is important to justify why this study distances itself from established theoretical approaches to EU peacebuilding and external action. To this end, the next section sketches the journey of going back and forth between developing a conceptual framework and conducting fieldwork, during which the debate on the 'liberal peace' was considered to theorize EU mediation, and then demonstrates why this perspective was abandoned. Moreover, this dissertation is not the first attempt to study the EU through a practice lens. However, building primarily on the sociology of translation is less common as most of the work on European security and diplomatic practice is inspired by Bourdieusian sociology (e.g. Adler-Nissen, 2014; Berling, 2012). Hence, the next part of the chapter also sheds light on why the sociology of translation was chosen over Bourdieusian approaches.

2.1. The ontology of the 'liberal peace'

Many scholars depict the rationale of peacebuilding interventions of 'Western' and international actors in conflict regions as aspiring to construct a 'liberal peace'. The efforts of the EU have also been studied in this way and the framework of the 'liberal peace' has been

viewed as particularly useful for grasping the Union's Comprehensive Approach to External Conflict and Crisis of which mediation instruments form a part of (e.g. Pogodda et al., 2014). So what does 'liberal peace' entail? Its interventionist agenda

embodies a new or political humanitarianism that lays emphasis on such things as conflict resolution and prevention, reconstructing social networks, strengthening civil and representative institutions, promoting the rule of law, and security sector reform in the context of a functioning market economy. (Duffield, 2001, p. 11)

At first glance, the 'liberal peace' reads more like the outline of a governmental project of constructing a state rather than an analytical concept. It is only with liberalism as its common thread that it became the point of reference of the peacebuilding debate. Yet it appears to be a catch-all term and far from consistent with liberal thought. Although critiques of 'liberal peacebuilding' are 'highly effective in challenging the assumptions of easy fixes to post-conflict situations' (Chandler, 2010b, p. 138), they do not question the concept. As to the subject matter, the 'liberal peace' is problematized from all sides. While its proponents advocate the liberal tradition albeit acknowledging the need to improve the practice of peacebuilding, its critics pinpoint liberalism as the source of domination and hegemony of the intervening actors over the 'recipient country' (e.g. Paris, 2002; Richmond, 2005; Mac Ginty, 2008). According to David Chandler, the critics can be grouped as to whether they perceive the 'liberal peace' as resulting from structural inequalities and not being amenable to policy change or as an agenda which can and should be improved (Chandler, 2010b, pp. 144-145). In the first group, Michael Pugh's neo-Marxist analysis identifies economic factors as the main driving force of the peacebuilding agenda, whereas Mark Duffield applies a Foucauldian approach to interrogate what he calls the 'radical developmental agenda of social transformation' (Duffield, 2001, p. 11). More policy-oriented scholars such as Oliver Richmond and Roland Paris, in contrast, develop ways of remedying flaws of the 'liberal peace', mainly through changing the techniques of peacebuilding. Richmond, for instance, considers the 'liberal peace' to be a hybrid version of four different peace discourses of the history of 'Western' political thought. Its building blocks are the victor's peace and a constitutional, institutional and civil notion of peace. The victor's peace is achieved through a defeat of one warring party over the other and stems from a Hobbesian-inspired perspective according to which a balance of war is required to contain human behaviour. Akin to the ideas of early Enlightenment and Kant's *Perpetual Peace*, the constitutional peace embraces democracy, free trade, and cosmopolitan values. The institutional peace is embodied in the liberal-institutionalist approaches to multilateral governance as promoted by the UN, UN

agencies, and international financial institutions. Last but not least, the civil peace discourse emphasizes individual agency, basic human rights, and social justice. This hybrid peace can be built in different ways which is depicted through a conservative, orthodox and emancipatory graduation moving from top-down to bottom-up approaches (Richmond, 2005, p. 217). Hence, Richmond recommends the emancipatory end of the spectrum to overcome the shortcomings of 'liberal peacebuilding'.

What both groups of critics have in common is the underlying assumption of peacebuilding as being too liberal for their target groups. As the non-liberal Other, these peoples are depicted as unable or not ready to cope with liberal ideals. For example, Paris does not fundamentally object to the 'globalisation of a particular model of domestic governance' but advises to keep the principles and 'change the *methods* that peacebuilders currently use in promoting liberalisation' (Paris, 2002, p. 638; 1997). He considers the current practice as a new version of *mission civilisatrice* which is pursued through shaping the content of peace agreements, expert advice, conditionality and 'proxy governance'. According to Paris, liberalism involves the 'transmission of norms of appropriate or "civilised" conduct from the core of the international system to the periphery' (Paris, 2002, p. 656). This is problematic in at least two different ways. First of all, resonating civilizational thinking, scholars of the 'liberal peace' build on the belief of liberalism being a pacifying force and assume a consensus among the 'international community' that a particular form of the state can resolve conflicts. And secondly, by portraying liberalism as the reason of policy failure and violent conflict, it constrains the debate to go round in circles within the framework of the 'liberal peace'. This introduces a certain linearity of whether or not peacebuilding interventions were too liberal and too interventionist and confines empirically valuable analysis to what David Chandler calls 'a fictional policy narrative' (Chandler, 2010a, p. 23). Why he uses the term fictional becomes apparent when examining the question of what is liberal about the 'liberal peace'.

In the work of Michael W. Doyle, human beings are presented as free, rational, and moral individuals and holders of rights. The ethical stake of this understanding grants freedom from arbitrary authority, social and economic rights as well as a right to political participation and democratic representation to individuals in order to safeguard their autonomy (Doyle, 1983, pp. 206-207). Although the terminology of the 'liberal peace' – democracy, the rule of law, human rights, civil society and a market economy based on free trade – is evocative of the liberal ideals, they have acquired a new meaning in the context of interventions. The

consensus on the necessity to intervene and stabilize conflict regions among scholars and policy officials rests on the notion that people in conflict fail to build or maintain a strong state as, for instance, the concept of failed or failing states suggests. They are endangering the 'liberal world' through these shortcomings. Hence, in this paradigm, as David Chandler argues, the autonomy of fragile states 'appears to be the problem which requires management' (Chandler, 2010a, p. 3). Consequently the logic inherent to practices of 'liberal peacebuilding' is the exact opposite of the liberal understanding of the individual as an autonomous subject. The aim is no longer 'to erect a political structure that will moderate in a fair and transparent manner between the diverging ideals and interests of these communities [in conflict]' (Begby & Burgess, 2009, p. 93). Rather, the objective is to build a stronger state through a process of institutionalization and bureaucratization. Chandler illustrates this inversion of the liberal agenda amongst others by referring to the literature which problematizes democratic elections in conflict countries as supporting radical representatives of conflict groups and often leading to electoral violence. According to this example, institutionalization and good governance measures are suggested to substitute democratic elections to avoid an outbreak of violence and, as the proponents of this approach claim, further a peaceful solution (Chandler, 2010a, p. 4). Moreover, the critique of the concept of the 'liberal peace' reveals a central assumption about what causes violent conflict. Weak states are at the top of the list of security threats in the security strategies of the EU and the US and the linkage of weak or failed states with organized crime, terrorism and extremism is put forward to engage in these countries through development aid coupled with peace- or statebuilding programmes. It is through this development-security nexus that the dividing line between peacebuilding and statebuilding has become extremely blurred over the last two decades. It seems, as if the two are predicated on the same understanding of the problem, namely weak state structures and fragile institutions, or in other words, a weak social contract, which leads scholars and practitioners alike to recommend statebuilding measures as a means of building peace (e.g. Murshed & Tadjoeddin, 2009). Seen from this angle, the multiplicity of conflicts in the region of intervention poses a potential threat to stability; hence, it is considered to be in need of management. This again is part of the narrative that justifies a statebuilding agenda that may require compromising between the autonomy of the targeted peoples and establishing bureaucratic structures.

Turning to the question of how this framework could inform the study of EU mediation, it could be argued that the concept of the 'liberal peace' and its critiques would be one way of

capturing the political rationality of mediation practices, that is to say, one would assume that the 'liberal peace'-thinking is driving these efforts. This, however, would mean to work from within the questionable implications of the 'liberal peace' which presupposes a dichotomy between the so-called liberal and non-liberal world, and identifies a number of elements that are interpreted as leading to violent conflict as well as what constitutes peace, and legitimizes and even encourages interventions although in the 'right way'. What is more, the concept is theoretically incoherent and contributes to an appreciation of a single underlying homogenizing logic of peacebuilding efforts. Methodologically, the 'liberal peace framework' resembles an attempt at trying to examine a research question with its answer already given, as it already presupposes what it is going to find in empirical studies. In contrast to this approach, what this thesis is looking for is a conceptual framework which does not introduce a grand narrative to explain the EU's approach to mediation but instead provides the tools to identify and trace both the relations between actors, the knowledge claims and rationales, and the techniques, instruments, and programmes or routines which inform and produce EU action in this field. Only then the question of how the understanding of violent conflicts by EU officials is reflected in their ways of dealing with them through practices of mediation can be explored.

Practice theory, unlike other theoretical traditions, allows for studying EU mediation without presupposing a traditional understanding of mediation or limiting the research perspective to debates on EU foreign policy. What is more, it helps to avoid the pitfalls of the prism of the 'liberal peace' debate which has been utilized as a blueprint-like theoretical framework for the Union's engagement in peacebuilding but facilitates tracing the concepts of conflict, values, and ideas of resolving them in policy documents, statements, and strategies of EU mediation. Accordingly, liberal legacies in the EU language of peacebuilding and conflict resolution can also be accounted for but, more importantly, uncovering contradicting views and diverging rationales of EU action will be a finding and not a problem of theoretical coherence. Practice theory is not a grand theory but rather a family of theories (Bueger & Gadinger, 2015, p. 450). Despite its broad focus, it comes with particular ontological and epistemological commitments which illustrate its distinct view of the world and situate it vis-á-vis other theoretical traditions. Following Christian Bueger and Frank Gadinger's minimal definition of practice theory, these are, at first, a relational ontology which focuses on processes instead of fixed orders (Bueger & Gadinger, 2015, p. 453). Second, knowledge and knowing is understood as within practice, thereby building on a concept of knowledge which embraces

ideas and beliefs as well as action, resources and objects. Third, knowledge production is a collective process. As 'repeated *interactional* patterns', practices are mostly learnt collectively (Swidler, 2001, p. 85 as cited in Bueger & Gadinger, 2015). Fourth, practices are also material not only because material artefacts are part of this world but also because material things can have an actor-like role. Fifth, social order is approached as a multiplicity in that practice theory presupposes several existing orders. Finally, practices are performative and exist through enactment and re-enactment. In doing so, entities and orders, which appear to be stable and complete, are understood as an effect created by multiple processes of ordering that project the idea of stability and durability. In fact these entities are constantly being maintained through practices and consequently open to change. Despite these shared ontological and epistemological commitments, practice theories also differ from each other.

European security and diplomacy has been the central object of research of practice theory. For instance, Trine Villumsen Berling examined the changes in European security in the 1990s through a framework which draws on Bourdieu's field, capital, doxa and agency. In sum, she explores how different kinds of capital, a concept which can be understood as assets or resources that give an actor power and influence and situate him or her in the hierarchical structures within a field, became important in producing and reproducing these structures of the field of European security. More specifically, she analyses how agents mobilized these forms of capital (Berling, 2012, pp. 454-455). Even more to the point is Rebecca Adler-Nissen's work on the diplomatic practice of the EU (Adler-Nissen, 2014). She grasps diplomacy as a social field and assesses how established agents and newcomers including 'different state- and non-state actors struggle for dominant positions' in response to the creation of the EEAS. According to her, this new diplomatic body questioned the monopoly of the state on symbolic power (Adler-Nissen, 2014, p. 659). So why does this thesis rely on the sociology of translation and not another practice-based approach such as the Bourdieusian concepts? The conceptual apparatus of Bourdieu is problematic for the study of EU mediation practices since it goes hand in hand with a set of assumptions which would change the nature of this research and address different questions as it struggles with change, material mediators and reflexivity (Nicolini, 2013, pp. 68-69; Bueger & Gadinger, 2014, p. 28). This research project is about tracing how the assemblage of mediation emerged, continues to exist and changes, how knowledge is produced on peace and conflict and how it is interwoven with and, at the same time, engendered through policy responses, thereby enrolling actors and objects. At first, Bourdieu's key concepts in this regard – field, habitus, doxa and capital – are

what Latour would call a metalanguage in that they analyse the social world to understand what is going on (Schinkel, 2007). Put differently, Bourdieusian sociology tries to understand power struggles and the reproduction of hierarchies of domination of which actors are not aware albeit constantly contributing to their continued existence. In this sense, Bourdieu or classical sociology, '[…] knows more than the "actors"; it sees right through them to the social structure or the destiny of which they are the patients'. (Latour, 1996, p. 199). Latour and more generally the sociology of translation object to this set of assumptions about the social in that they leave it behind and argue that the networked relations or associations between human and non-human actors are what other scholars refer to when they speak of the social. Hence, tracing these associations can render visible how different 'orders' come into being, are maintained and potentially changed. It focuses more on the 'nature' of practices or what they are about, rejects the actions of actors as being predetermined and does not work with concepts of the actors' dispositions and structural positions including the notion of social class (Buzelin, 2005, pp. 199-202). Second, Bourdieu's concepts do not speak to materiality or objects, while the sociology of translation facilitates this by taking into account how instruments, tools and other forms of material resources are an integral part of practices and, more importantly, power relations. Third, trying to comprehend how the understanding of conflict by EU officials is reflected in their ways of responding to them through practices of mediation requires our conceptual approach to be capable of detecting also the level of reflexivity of actors. That is how they monitor the events unfolding in the conflict-affected country, how they align or explain them with other knowledge claims or even revise them. The sociology of translation values what actors say by using an infra-language, as scholars primarily try to embrace the concepts of the actors. As such, it allows for developing a dynamic conceptual approach which follows the actors and objects and tries to understand their heterogeneous networked relations, how they produce facts and knowledge claims, and how projections of stability are created. In this regard, the sociology of translation is particularly suitable for studying webs of practices which are very much in flux, loosely knitted and enrol a number of actors, who are also part of other assemblages, and allows for assessing the research question by accounting for the reflexivity of actors and acknowledging the crucial role of objects or material artefacts in the networked relations which form the assemblage.

2.2. EU mediation as an assemblage

This dissertation is inspired by the sociology of translation and conceptualizes the concept of an assemblage as a loosely knitted web of practices by drawing primarily on Bruno Latour's approach which he developed in his book *Reassembling the Social* (2005). However, the notion of assemblage has been defined in different ways giving rise to various approaches with different focal points which require clarification. Their common denominator is the general meaning of assemblage as 'A bringing or coming together; a meeting or gathering; the state of being gathered or collected' (OED Online, 2016). Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari develop their understanding of *agencement* or assemblage in *A Thousand Plateaus* in which they grasp it as

a multiplicity which is made up of many heterogeneous terms and which establishes liaisons, relations between them across ages, sexes and reigns – different natures. Thus, the assemblage's only unity is that of co-functioning: it is a symbiosis, a 'sympathy'. It is never filiations which are important but alliances, alloys; these are not successions, lines of descent, but contagions, epidemics, the wind. (Deleuze &Parnet 1987, p. 69 [1977] as cited in Müller, 2015, p. 28)

In trying to embrace the constituting elements of an assemblage, Martin Müller carves out five dimensions which depict assemblages as relational, productive, heterogeneous, deterritorializing and reterritorializing through their rhythm of coming into being, changing and dissolving, and, finally, a corporeal element in that they are desired (Müller, 2015, pp. 28-29). Swati Srivastava introduces a concept of assemblage in her study of international organizations as '1) the product of myriad social interactions within and across levels of analysis that 2) through projection of sustained coherence and stability 3) authorizes particular practices and discourses 4) while necessitating multiple play and reconstruction' (Srivastava, 2013, p. 74).

Finally Latour's conceptualization of an assemblage can be best described as a loosely knitted web of practices or as networked interactions which constitute the social (2005). In this regard, he re-defines the social in *Reassembling the Social* as

[…] much wider than what is usually called by that name, yet strictly limited to the tracing of new associations and to the designing of their assemblages. This is the reason why I am going to define the social not as a special domain, a specific realm, or a particular sort of thing, but only as a very peculiar movement of re-association and reassembling. (Latour, 2005, p. 7)

In doing so, Latour conceptualizes an approach to assemblage which is, to borrow Srivastava's words, both theorizing an assembled assemblage and a method for assembling assemblages. That is he gradually develops the notion of an actor-network through which one can study assemblages. By unsettling the idea of social order and stability, he shifts the attention to the multiple attempts at 'ordering' or group formation, which give rise to what is often perceived as stable and static. This opens up an entirely different perspective on 'the social', thereby rendering society visible as a heterogeneous network which is made out of manifold associations between various people, as well as things and people, and things with things. If the society is a heterogeneous network, so is knowledge. It is the 'product or an effect of a *network of heterogeneous materials*' (Law, 1992, p. 381). Similarly, also identity formation can be grasped as an effect of a network, thereby acknowledging that 'an actor is also, always, a network' (Law, 1992, pp. 383-384).

These considerations already implicitly refer to what Callon describes as the three methodological principles of the sociology of translation: *agnosticism*, *generalized symmetry*, and *free associations* (Callon, 1986). The *agnosticism* of the researcher is understood as refraining from 'censoring the actors when they speak about themselves or the social environment' (Callon, 1986, p. 3). The *generalized symmetry* acknowledges that objects have as much agency as human beings because both can enter into associations and this process is what defines the nature of a human or nonhuman. This hints at a particular understanding of agency as within and constituted by practices in that actors acquire it through forming associations (see also Bueger, 2011, p. 174). The principle of *free association* requires the researcher to abandon all assumptions which establish a distinction between natural and social and, more generally, to take into consideration

that the repertoire of categories which he uses, the entities which are mobilized, and the relationships between these are all topics for actors' discussions. Instead of imposing a pre-established grid of analysis upon these, the observer follows the actors in order to identify the manner in which these define and associate the different elements by which they build and explain their world, whether it be social or natural. (Callon, 1986, p. 4)

Whereas these principles inform the approach of the researcher who studies assemblages, they do not answer the question of how to follow the actors and how to differentiate between their roles in the assemblage. The concept of translation can shed light on this matter. It depicts the processes and mechanisms through which actors or actants, a term Latour employs to

emphasize the agency of humans and nonhumans, form associations.[1] As such, it is about how actors 'whose primary interests are not necessarily the same […] interpret their own objectives into each other's language so as to ensure everyone's proper participation (or the dismissal of some actors if necessary), and the continuation of the project until fulfilment' (Buzelin, 2005, p. 197). Moreover, actors or actants can act as an intermediary or mediator. Whereas the former 'is what transports meaning or force without transformation: defining its inputs is enough to define its outputs', mediators have to be looked at on a case-by-case basis as there is no certainty as to what they might do and how they change or translate the meaning of what they are supposed to convey (Latour, 2005, p. 39). To borrow Latour's words, an association or relation which 'induces two mediators into coexisting' is what is depicted by the process of translation (Latour, 2005, p. 108). Michel Callon conceptualized this process in a more systematic way.

In his study of the *Domestication of the Scallops and the Fishermen of St Brieuc Bay*, he addresses the process of translation based on a case study in which he explores the project of a group of researchers, who are trying to solve the problem of the dwindling stock of scallops at Brest by attempting to cultivate them (Callon 1986). Callon develops four elements or moments of translation: problematization, interessement, enrolment, and mobilization. First, the process of problematization takes place when the researchers introduce a potential solution to the scallop problem and detail a method for cultivating them. In doing so, they also identify the actors and develop their roles in the network that they are trying to create. In other words, the phase of problematization captures a 'double movement' of the researchers developing a solution to a problem on the one hand and forming 'a system of alliances, or associations, between entities, thereby defining the identity and what they "want"' whilst establishing themselves as experts who are capable of solving the problem on the other (Callon, 1886, p. 6-8). Thus, in the first movement, one or more actors define a problem, develop the central questions that need to be answered to solve it and hypothesize a potential solution. In the second movement, they identify the actors, who are affected by the problem and/or essential to realizing the solution, and conceptualize the roles, which the target groups need to accept for resolving the problem. The initiating actor or group of actors also define their own roles so as to establish themselves as an obligatory passage point in the network. The notion of the obligatory passage point describes the processes through which the

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[1] Throughout this dissertation, I follow Callon's example and use the term actor 'in the way that semioticians use the notion of the actant' (Callon, 1986, p. 25). Only in cases, in which I want to particularly point the reader to an actor being a thing or an object, I employ the term actant.

researchers manage to address the interests of the target groups in a way so as to align them with their own and establish themselves as the 'central node' in the network with a degree of control over how the actors form associations (Law & Hetherington, 2002, p. 398). The second moment of translation is interessement and depicts the 'actions by which an entity (here the three researchers) attempts to impose and stabilize the identity of the other actors it defines through its problematization. Different devices are used to implement these actions'. In other words, interessement devices serve the purpose of locking the actors in their roles as envisioned by the problematization. The hypothesis of solving the problem is inscribed in these devices as they are developed based on the definition of the problem and the solution. As such, interessement devices help to materialize the ideas and processes that took shape during the problematization (Callon, 1986, p. 9). The processes of interessement can fail to achieve their goal. However, if they are successful, they lead to enrolment in that the actors accept the roles as defined by the problematization. 'To describe enrolment is thus to describe the group of multilateral negotiations, trials of strength and tricks that accompany the interessements and enable them to succeed' (Callon, 1986, p. 10). Thus, enrolment is inevitable for the network as it brings the assemblage into existence. Finally, the last moment of translation is about mobilizing the newly established 'system of alliances' by designating spokespersons (Callon, 1986, p. 10). It is impossible to involve all actors concerned; hence, the different groups need to be represented by spokespersons. In order not to endanger the processes of translation, the spokespersons need to be able to represent the respective groups of actors since their mobilization through spokespersons eventually confirms the propositions of the problematization and makes them credible.

To mobilize, as the word indicates, is to render entities mobile which were not so beforehand. […] Through the designation of the successive spokesmen and the settlement of a series of equivalencies, all these actors are first displaced and then reassembled at a certain place at a particular time. This mobilization or concentration has a definite physical reality which is materialized through a series of displacements. (Callon, 1986, p. 14; Law, 1985)

These four moments of translation overlap and do not proceed neatly in this order. They can also fail and not complete the translation but if they succeed, it has become apparent why, in the words of John Law, 'translation is both about making equivalent, and about shifting. It is about moving terms around, about linking and changing them' (Law, 2009, p. 144). In fact, processes of translation are inherently linked to change in that they modify both the environment and the actors engaged in it through new associations which come into being. By

not treating actor identities as stable, the sociology of translation distances itself from traditional network analysis. In short, neither assemblages nor actors are stable arrangements (Bueger & Bethke, 2014, p. 39). At the same time, the process of translation also provides the mechanism for more durable assemblages to develop and thus, generates ordering effects (Law, 1992, p. 386). Through ritualized, codified, or simplified practices, an actor-network can become blackboxed or punctualized. Latour explains the notion of blackboxing in *Pandora's Hope* as

An expression from the sociology of science that refers to the way scientific and technical work is made invisible by its own success. When a machine runs efficiently, when a matter of fact is settled, one need focus only on its inputs and outputs and not on its internal complexity. Thus, paradoxically, the more science and technology succeed, the more opaque and obscure they become. (Latour, 1999, p. 304)

Blackboxing also serves the purpose of simplifying complexity, thereby assisting actors in going about their work without having to address all the details time and again. For instance, a blackboxed knowledge claim such as the conviction that mediation instruments can resolve violent conflicts enables member state representatives in the Council of the European Union to mandate an actor to mediate on behalf of the EU without engaging in a lengthy study on impact of mediation processes. From this it is possible to derive that a blackboxed knowledge claim is also either no longer contested or not challenged strongly enough. However, this can change as actor-networks are never entirely durable due to the performative nature of processes of translation. This also elucidates why this approach rejects the dichotomy between agency and structure. An actor-network constitutes agency as well as it gives rise to structures the moment it grows into a relatively stable and undisputed arrangement. Against this background, it becomes evident why research informed by this approach is interested in everything which is in the making and in what allows it to persist just as well as it is about understanding power and authority or, as Law puts it, it 'is concerned with the mechanics of power' (Law, 1992, p. 380). It sees power not as an explanation but rather as something to be explained since it is a result of a process which has brought about asymmetries. Hence, the question must be how these asymmetries develop and what constitutes them (Latour, 2005, p. 64). These are the research puzzles which this study has to address if it wants to grasp how EU actors mediate by tracing the processes of how the understanding of violent conflicts by EU officials is reflected in their ways of dealing with them. Examining mediation as an assemblage speaks to this concern if the notion of network is understood as a method or as an adjective rather than a noun. 'In other words, network describes instead of being described. If

the flows of interactions from one actor to another create networked relations, then it is through tracing these linkages that the origins of "social construction" emerge' (Srivastava, 2013, p. 77).

What are the implications of this approach for the study of EU mediation? First, thinking of the EU as multiple actor-networks disaggregates its institutions into numerous processes and webs of relations between actors. In practical terms, this means following the actors involved in EU mediation as a response to external conflict and to gather the processes, routines, ideas and tools they employ, thereby tracing the associations between them which might render new actors visible and allows to gradually uncover the assemblage. Second, the heterogeneous and dynamic nature of an assemblage embraces the possibility that actors are part of multiple assemblages which accommodates overlaps and exchanges owing to the actors' links to various arrangements. In other words, taking into account the diverse backgrounds and areas of responsibility of the actors involved helps to comprehend the complexity of an assemblage as emerging and existing in a context of multiple arrangements. Moreover, it does not confine this study into taking account of EU actors but rather necessitates the inclusion of non-EU actors as full-blown mediators in the Latourian sense if they form a part in processes of translation of EU mediation. Finally, since this approach is a vehicle for tracing the processes of translation that bring into being the assemblage of EU mediation, it offers a perspective on power and authority which is relational and dispersed and can provide insights into why a specific response to a conflict was chosen and not another.

In sum, tracing an assemblage as a heterogeneous network provides the basis for capturing the mechanics of change and attempts at ordering which shape the assemblage. However, the instruments need to be refined in order to understand what it is that holds the assemblage together and makes it distinct from other arrangements as well as how it conducts the conduct of the enrolled actors and constitutes a governing device of the Union. At first glance, it is possible to take notice of the assemblage because of a set of practices being referred to as EU mediation. Zooming in, this aggregate of practices is neither stable nor a given entity but results from numerous processes of translation which depict the struggle of actors to engage with one another to negotiate and agree on a shared understanding of a problem and the best way of responding to it. Assessing these processes in detail can reveal how the practices of mediation build on a rationale or problematization of conflict but not without challenging some of its elements, thus, giving rise to controversies and exerting a constraining effect on subsequent processes of translation. In order to grasp these dimensions of the assemblage of

EU mediation, this study suggests adapting the concept of translation by complementing Callon's four moments of translation with the notions of political rationality and *techne* of governmentality studies.

2.3. Governmentality: political rationality and technologies of governing

First of all, political rationality and *techne* have to be understood in connection with Michel Foucault's notion of governmentality (2008). In his lectures of 1977 and 1978 at the Collège de France, Foucault begins to develop a history of governmentality which tries 'to grasp the level of reflection in the practice of government and on the practice of government' (Foucault, 2008, p. 2). He is wondering if it is

[…] possible to place the modern state in a general technology of power that would have assured its mutations, its development, and its functioning? Can we talk of something like a "governmentality" that would be to the state what techniques of segregation were to psychiatry, what techniques of discipline were to the penal system, and what biopolitics was to medical institutions? (Foucault, 2008, p. 120)

Hence, governmentality is concerned with uncovering particular knowledge claims or a rationality which underlies, guides, but also attempts to transform a specific set of practices or, in other words, 'how thought operates within our organized ways of doing things, our *regimes of practices*, and with its ambitions and effects' (Dean, 2010, p. 27). Key to understanding governmentality is Foucault's concept of government and governing which is not confined to the realm of the state but also embraces 'problems of self-control, guidance for the family and for children, management of the household, directing the soul, and other questions' (Lemke, 2007, p. 45; Lemke, 2001). This approach to government captures governmentality or the 'art of governing' as the 'way in which one conducts the conduct of men' (Foucault, 2008, p. 186). Conducting the conduct of men is not an exclusive government activity but also refers to the conduct of the self. Consequently, government as the conduct of conduct alludes to the mechanisms underlying all attempts in which an individual, group or organization engages in an activity which tries to guide or direct the behaviour of itself or other human beings. In fact, 'all organized social existence […], presupposes forms of the "conduct of conduct"' (Dean, 2010, p. 46). Accordingly, governing can be defined as structuring the field of possible action of human beings (Dean, 2010, p. 22).

This account of government is based on several assumptions. To begin with, it presumes that human conduct can be regulated and directed which, at the same time, presupposes free subjects in that they are capable of thinking and acting, or, seen from the perspective of the

sociology of translation, they are capable of forming associations. Moreover, the very idea of directing and guiding the behaviour of subjects adheres to the rational attempt of directing the behaviour of human beings. Conducting the conduct of the self or others is rational insofar as it assumes a more or less organized effort of identifying goals and developing a plan or policies which will achieve the envisaged goals through implementing policies and executing the plan. In doing so, it touches on questions of morality. It is as much moral as it is rational because thinking on how to conduct the conduct of men and to what ends cannot be done without touching on the question of what is good or bad for oneself or others and what is worth pursuing (Dean, 2010, p. 18). As such, this approach allows for 'thinking about the linkages between questions of government, authority and politics, and questions of identity, self and person' (Dean, 2010, p. 20). More specifically, it is this focus on 'the reciprocal constitution of power techniques and forms of knowledge and of regimes of representation and modes of intervention' (Lemke, 2007, p. 44), which is of concern to this study.

Turning to political rationalities and technologies of governance, there are three leading scholars in this field who have worked with both concepts: Mitchell Dean, Nikolas Rose, and Peter Miller. Mitchell Dean's approach to analysing a regime of practices introduces the dimensions or axes of visibility, *techne*, *episteme*, and identities.[2] The first dimension refers to all forms of visibility which facilitate the functioning of a regime of governmental practices. It examines all relevant ways of visualization of the field which needs to be governed (Dean, 2010, p. 41). The second dimension takes all technical aspects of government or the *techne* of a regime of practices into consideration, thereby trying to trace how 'authority is constituted and rule accomplished' (Dean, 2010, p. 42). The political rationality or *episteme* of a regime of practices is the third dimension. It examines how a problem is defined as a target of practices of government, how solutions are identified and how it attempts to transform practices; thus, contributing to the production of 'truth' (Dean, 2010, p. 42). Finally, the last dimension concerns identities, that is to say, the diverse accounts of human beings and identities which are underlying regimes of practices. As such, Dean's approach focuses more on how a regime of practices engenders authority and influence than on how practices give rise to a particular policy response to an event in a conflict-affected country. In this regard, Rose and Miller's work is more suitable for the purposes of this study. They conceptualize political rationalities as regularities within the political discourse as the 'domain for the

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[2] Mitchell Dean builds primarily on Foucault but also on other social theorists of the 20th century, for instance, Gilles Deleuze (1991).

formulation and justification of idealized schemata for representing reality, analysing it and rectifying it' (Rose & Miller, 1992, p. 178). These regularities revolve around a moral form, an epistemological character and a distinctive idiom (Rose & Miller, 1992, pp. 178-179). The moral form of such rationality depicts questions of the right division of responsibilities between authorities and what principles should guide the work of authorities or governing bodies. The epistemological character alludes to an understanding of the people or the population which has to be governed. Finally, the idiom or the political language is perceived 'as a kind of intellectual machinery or apparatus for rendering reality thinkable in such a way that it is amenable to political deliberations' (Rose & Miller, 1992, p. 179). Against this background, the notion of programmes of governance elaborates on a definition of a specific problem, for instance, weak state institutions or 'failed states' as a security threat, and develops an agreement as to which solution should be pursued by employing various technologies to facilitate the processes of problematizing as well as implementing the programme (Rose & Miller, 1992, pp. 182-183). Put differently, the researcher who studies these practices sooner or later touches on a particular form of reason which appears to be their common denominator and is tied to various instruments and technologies. In accentuating this relationship between instruments of governing and different understandings of 'political reality', Foucault scrutinizes that political problems are subject to a process of definition. It is a constituting element of the governmental sphere that it collects and moulds empirical data as it needs to formulate a problem which can be tackled through strategies, policies and regulations. Hence, governing 'is a problematizing activity: it poses the obligations of rulers in terms of the problems they seek to address' (Rose & Miller, 1992, p. 181). To illustrate this point, Rose and Miller refer to the economy in that 'it is first necessary to conceptualize a set of processes and relations as an economy which is amenable to management', in order to be able to govern it (Rose & Miller, 1992, p. 182). Studying practices of EU mediation in this way means that

one tries to see how the different solutions to a problem have been constructed; but also how these different solutions result from a specific form of problematization. And it then appears that any new solution which might be added to the others would arise from current problematization, modifying only several of the postulates or principles on which one bases the responses that one gives. (Foucault as cited in Rabinow, 1998, pp. 118-119)

To embrace the notion of political rationality, this study suggests focusing on three interlinked elements: problematization, *telos* and strategy. This way it is, at first, possible to trace how an event in a conflict-affected country is understood by using various ideas and concepts and, in

doing so, rendered manageable. Second, it can be examined how this problematization suggests an idea of both the target population and a solution to the identified issues of concern. This solution adheres to a goal or *telos* on what should be aimed for and why to address the issue brought up by the problematization. Third, in the process of transforming it into a policy response, both the problematization and its *telos* inform the strategy which materializes by giving rise to and drawing on a specific set of tools, techniques, and instruments. To prevent misunderstandings, it is important to emphasize that the notion of political rationality does not presuppose a meta-narrative but helps to explore what Stephen Legg calls the 'radical openness and multiplicity of the bodies at the heart of assemblage [...] thinking', which 'stress that each state contains the traces, remnants, seeds and potential for the alternate state, and need not exist in hostile opposition' (Legg, 2011, p. 129). Finally, Callon's four moments of translation – problematization, interessement, enrolment, and mobilization – and the notion of political rationality and *techne* can complement each other. The four elements of translation shed light on how the techniques and tools help to establish the network of actors through interessement and enrolment, and aid with assessing how the networked interactions of the assemblage stabilize by producing obligatory passage points and selecting spokespersons. The Foucauldian concepts capture the processes of the problematization in greater detail. To recall, Callon's problematization embraces how a problem is defined and how the idea or hypothesis of solving it is developed, thereby also identifying actors and establishing their roles in the network which the problematization is trying to engender. In this regard, the three aspects of political rationality zoom in on how an event or crisis, after becoming known to EU officials, is subjected to a process of defining it as a problem in light of a specific *telos* and eventually translated into a tangible strategy. The concept of *techne* examines how tools and instruments shape these processes. It is sharpened further by Callon's interessement devices, which try to lock relevant actors into their roles as developed during the problematization, and enrolment, which grasps the process of how an assemblage develops, continues to exist, changes, and possibly dissolves.

Before turning to the choice of methods, a potential criticism of this approach should be addressed. A particular reading of Foucault's governmentality lectures and works on the sociology of translation by Callon, Latour or Law can raise the question of whether or not there is a tension between concepts of governmentality studies and the sociology of translation. Some scholars might argue that Foucault focuses more on reproduction of power relations and social orders, whereas the sociology of translation emphasizes change, the

processes of how practices come into existence and the performative nature of the social through enactment and re-enactment of networked relations. In response to this potential criticism, two points shall be raised. First of all, it is crucial to be aware of a tension between reproduction and change which is inherent to practices in that they maintain and alter the social world. In other words, the research approach of this dissertation conceptualizes this tension in that it facilitates accounting for both how mediation practices uphold and reproduce orders and how they can challenge and alter them. Therefore, this tension is not a conceptual problem but a puzzle which the researcher has to be aware of as it is at the heart of the research objective of practice theory. Furthermore, it should be noted that the key thinkers of the sociology of translation developed their approach in connection with the achievements of Foucault's work. Or in Bueger's and Bethke's words, 'ANT can also be understood as an "empirical version" of the post-structuralism of Michel Foucault or Gilles Deleuze […]. While these post-structuralists are interested in webs of epochal dimensions, ANT is interested in the smaller scale' (Bueger & Bethke, 2014, p. 35; Law, 2009, pp. 145-146).

2.4. Choice of methods

Data collection and analysis

The study draws on textual artefacts and 63 oral accounts which have been collected using semi-structured interviews. The latter assemble a group of actors ranging from officials of the European Commission, the EEAS, delegations, and the Council, member state representatives, external consultants, representatives of the conflict parties, members of international and local civil society organizations, to researchers and conflict resolution practitioners. The process of gathering data was accompanied by three guiding questions to reflect on how the practice-based approach informs the choice of methods: At first, how to assess documents and transcripts of semi-structured interviews; second, how to select participants; and third, how to decide on a period of time for studying how EU actors have been developing a response to a particular violent conflict.

Regarding the first question, it is important to understand the relation between documents and practices. On the one hand, documents are not identical with practices. On the other, they are not just texts but 'require to be read as documents which relate to a bodily material practice which is outside of the text itself, but to which the text is related' (Bueger, 2014, p. 402). This source of data is complemented with the transcripts of semi-structured interviews. Interview data also has a unique relation to practices. It is a format which allows actors to reflect on

practices whilst in conversation with the researcher, hence, co-producing interview data. In this regard, Bueger's differentiation between two types of interviewees and data is crucial. The conducted interviews include actors who are directly involved in the practices of mediation as well as individuals who have been observers of these practices (Bueger, 2014, pp. 400). Accordingly, questions about the daily routine, ways of assessing and evaluating the developments of the peace process and forms of cooperating with other actors were raised while interviewing the first group of people. Interpretations of these processes were gathered during interviews with the second group. Hence, '[t]ype one practitioner questions help to collect raw data, and co-produce first interpretations, while type two observer questions concern (often already settled) interpretations' (Bueger, 2014, pp. 400-401).

The documents and transcripts are analysed pertaining to the refined four moments of the process of translation that is through political rationality, interessement devices, enrolment and mobilization. However, to untangle the aggregate of mediation practices, the study begins with assembling them through the lens of the concept of *techne* which suggests focusing on how-questions and traces all the tools, devices, and textual artefacts which have been developed and employed by EU actors from the moment of noticing an event or crisis in the conflict-affected country, to developing a strategy and implementing the response. These tools and devices depict the material form or observable elements of practices such as conflict assessments, scoping missions, routinized practices like briefings and meetings with local counterparts of EU officials in the respective conflict-affected country, practices of internal decision-making, funding instruments, grant application requirements, and forms of collaboration with external experts. Assembling the tools and devices and identifying the different practices of which they form a part, is the first step towards understanding how instruments of mediation are considered to serve a specific purpose, thereby pointing to what this purpose is about. Moving on to the four moments of translation, questions of how mediation instruments are deployed and what techniques and tools ensure the 'readiness' of EU actors to use them, contributes to deciphering the political rationality or implicit knowledge of this set of practices and how the officials understand themselves and the conflict in which they intervene. Therefore, the dissertation traces, at first, how actors have problematized the conflict in light of a new event; second, which goal or *telos* this problematization envisions in relation to resolving the issue; and third, it assesses the processes of devising a strategy. Against this background, it is possible to analyse which interessement devices the problematization gave rise to, whether or not they successfully

enrolled the targeted actors, and finally, the processes of mobilization through designating spokespersons to represent the different actors of the assemblage.

Pertaining to the second question on how to select people to be interviewed, this study builds on the advice of Latour and follows the actors by taking the Mediation Support Team of the EEAS as the point of departure. The first round of interviews focused on tracing how the members of the Mediation Support Team explain their responsibilities, which concepts they use, and to which documents they refer to as well as how they form associations with other EU and non-EU actors to get things done. Through collecting these references and interactions in a snowballing manner, the mapping of the assemblage of mediation gradually came to the fore. The sources for analysing textual artefacts were complemented by tracing the history of EU relations with the respective conflict-affected country and the evolution of the EU approach to conflict. Moreover, zooming in on the processes which produced key documents such as the *Concept on Strengthening EU Mediation and Dialogue Capacities* or policy documents, which detail the Union's approach towards Myanmar and Georgia, facilitated an understanding of which group of actors was taking the lead in advocating a particular idea over another, what controversies it caused and which aspects they were able to easily agree upon.

The third question of choosing a specific period of time as the focal point of research is addressed in three ways. First, both the history of the EU as a mediator and its relations with the respective conflict-affected country is accounted for through the analysis of textual artefacts. Second, for the interviews, the study focuses on at least five years, beginning in the present that is the time of conducting fieldwork. In doing so, the years from 2011 to early 2016 are included in order to capture the first five years of the Mediation Support Team in office. After all, it is this actor-network providing in-house mediation support with its goal of promoting a more systematic approach to mediation and its role in the assemblage of mediation which is a key concern of this study. Moreover, five years in the case of Myanmar and eight years in the case of Georgia are sufficient to trace how EU actors have developed a response to a particular event in the respective country and to what extent these practices matter in the daily routine of EU and non-EU actors who are enrolled in the assemblage of mediation.

This approach to collecting and analysing data comes with a number of challenges, of which the following six should be taken into account ranging from sources and methods of

collecting data, access to specific groups of actors, the implications of studying ongoing conflict resolution processes, to the situatedness of the researcher regarding the assemblage of mediation, and clarifying what is meant by certain terminology like 'the EU'. The first challenge is about policy documents as a source of data for studying practices. Policy documents are the end product of debates and discussions during the process of drafting and eventually adopting a policy. Accordingly, controversies are neither fully reflected in the final product nor are the details as to how the involved actors assessed the subject matter under discussion. As a result, the analysis traces ideas on conflict and how to respond to it over time but the findings should be treated as what they are, that is traces left behind by the actors who engaged in multiple processes of translation. Nevertheless, since the textual artefacts embody the knowledge claims and envisioned actions on which EU actors were able to agree on, these traces allow for assessing the problematization, *telos* and to an extent also the proposed strategy of the subject matter under discussion.

Second, attempting to grasp the inner workings of actor-networks such as departments and units of EU institutions, that is to say, how the different techniques, instruments, strategies and mechanisms operate in action, would be all but impossible without collecting the various perspectives of people working for or with the EU. The format of semi-structured interviews is the best possible method of collecting the accounts of relevant actors although it is not the most suitable format. The interview invites the actor to reflect on EU mediation practices. Therefore, this level of reflection is the lens through which narratives are expressed as opposed to the researcher being able to directly observe the actors in engaging in their daily routines. Against this background, the complex situation presents itself by interviewees taking aspects of their work for granted and considering some of them as not worth mentioning, while, at the same time, having an understanding of the research topic and selecting themes and events accordingly. On top of that, the focus on practices goes hand in hand with an interest in details but the people interviewed generally had a large number of items on their agenda and sometimes struggled to remember, for instance, the exact sequence of events or the names of participants in a meeting. Moreover, it can be in the interest of interviewees to hide controversies and try to cover up mistakes as well as using the interview as an opportunity to enforce a particular narrative over another or to legitimize actions retrospectively. In short, time constraints, the format of the interview or conversation, but also the presence of the researcher, often play against the goal of a comprehensive account, thus, it is all the more important to meet these challenges. One way of doing so is to lessen the

directing effect of the rather static question-and-answer scheme of the interview by encouraging a conversation in which the interviewee feels free to tell his or her story of how he or she began to work on or in the conflict-affected country, what the workday looks like, how he or she understands the approach of the EU and how they developed it, what challenges they have to deal with, and how they are advancing a particular strategy (see Chase, 1995). Hence, my interview grid structured the interview in three sections – the everyday practices of the interviewee's job, his or her evaluation of the peace process and the conflict he or she dealt with, and the Union's role in it. Within these sections, however, the people interviewed were free to address the themes by employing their own criteria to structure their response. This rough guideline served to remind the researcher of the foreshadowed problems of tracing the assemblage of EU mediation. During the moment of the interview it is pivotal to focus on observing and learning how practices engender particular knowledge claims and action. Moreover, being a certified mediator was helpful as it facilitated noting differences and similarities in the various training programmes of EU officials but also opened doors for the researcher to become a part of Brussels' 'mediation world'. The researcher participated in an NGO-led track 1.5 mediation process as well as several events which brought EU officials, civil society representatives and researchers together to discuss and reflect on the current practice of mediation. These platforms provided insights into ongoing debates and complemented the accounts of the semi-structured interviews.

Third, the researcher was facing difficulties of access to specific groups of actors. Not only can triangulating data prove to be difficult if it is about, for instance, verifying an aspect which was supposedly discussed during a meeting between the EU ambassador and the President of Myanmar, but also getting the opportunity to interview high-level actors from the conflict-affected country was much more difficult than setting up an appointment with EU officials. While this can be explained in many different ways, one reason is that being primarily based in Brussels gave the researcher the opportunity to build a network over time which facilitated the process of access to both EU and non-EU actors. However, especially when it comes to government actors and representatives of the conflict stakeholders from the case study countries, EU officials were much more hesitant to share contact information. At the same time, efforts of using the official channels to schedule meetings with government officials in Georgia and Myanmar were unsuccessful. Hence, official statements but also meeting with members of NGOs with links to the government or another conflict party was of

immense importance. In this respect, it is striking to observe the exclusion of the subjects of intervention from the 'liberal peace' debate but also to a great extent from the mediation literature (e.g. Sabaratnam, 2013). Scholars are concerned with the beliefs, interests, mediator style and strategy of the intervening party in a way that seems to presuppose that neither the representatives of conflict parties nor the target population really matter in these processes. This gives rise to the impression of a vacuum in the conflict country as if the absence of strong government institutions as envisioned in Europe, could cause external parties to directly implement whatever they choose. For instance, the common threat of critiques of the 'liberal peace' as imposing 'western' values often does not interrogate how these values or policies are imposed other than identifying broad schemes such as top-down approaches or Paris' four mechanisms. This is not to question that statebuilding interventions often override local interests, traditions, and needs but to object to the underlying assumption of the powerful intervener and the local victim or helpless recipient of intervention. Assessing the approach of external actors as mainly unidirectional is also problematic because it omits the entire process of how external actors obtain information on the conflict and how they form an understanding of what has to be done. To avoid these pitfalls, this study tries to trace the associations between the external actors and the disputants and stakeholders during the processes of mediation as all of them form a part of the assemblage of EU mediation. Conflict stakeholders and local as well as international partners actively participate in the processes of translation and are often specifically addressed through interessement devices in order to lock them in their roles and enrol them in the assemblage. Moreover, through tracing how knowledge claims of EU officials are produced, this study tries to chart the connections and dependencies between external and local actors.

Fourth, this study focuses on processes of conflict resolution that are ongoing which influenced the way in which research was conducted. Actors are not only operating in a quickly changing environment but are very conscious of the sensitivity of certain issues. What is more, these processes involve confidential aspects and give publishing a statement of a high-level stakeholder or EU official a different weight. In trying to address these shortcomings, interviewees are not quoted directly and a method of coding interviews is employed which does not reflect the position of the interviewee in the hierarchy of the respective institution (for a list of interviews see Annex 9.2).

Fifth, the boundaries between the practice of research and practices of EU mediation are blurred not only with regard to ideas which travel from one field to another but also in terms of conflict resolution professionals who often combine research and work as implementing partners or external consultants. Moreover, the question remains whether or not researching EU mediation enrols the researcher in the assemblage of EU mediation.

Sixth, turning to the EU as an actor, what does it mean to speak of 'the EU', 'EU official', or 'Brussels'? EU external action is mandated through Council decisions, executed primarily by EEAS and European Commission services with some of them operating from Brussels and others in the respective conflict-affected countries. In many of these countries, a number of EU member states have their own diplomatic representation which works alongside the EU delegation. Embracing the subject matter of this study as an assemblage solves these methodological problems by disaggregating the EU into various actor-networks. Approaching EU mediation as an assemblage makes an analysis possible which does not claim to put forward a grand theory or solving the questions of the EU's actorness (Niemann & Bretherton, 2013) or identifying the EU's type of power. In European Studies these issues have been widely debated. Scholars who aspire to identifying the nature of the beast, try to capture the EU as an 'international presence' (Allen & Smith, 1990) or an 'international identity' (Whitman, 1998) to name but a few. Another strand of the literature examines what kind of power the EU exercises; the concepts range from civilian power (Duchene, 1972), normative power (Manners, 2002 & 2006; Whitman, 2011) to a superpower in the making (Galtung, 1973). From the angle of an actor-network, power is neither understood as belonging to one kind or another, nor that is it situated at a centre or an institution but is heterogeneous, dispersed and, most importantly, relational. In his microphysics of power, Foucault does not deny that institutions can be powerful but his analysis of power considers the multitude of elements and relations almost microscope-like and emphasizes its changing and dynamic characteristics. 'Any major system is, therefore, actually in a state of constant mutation. It is not a starting point so much as a point of arrival for the analysis of power relations' (Walters, 2012, p. 14). The approach taken in this study has to be differentiated from the work of another group of scholars who focus on assessing implementation and impact of EU foreign policies. Even though implementation and, to an extent, impact form a part of this research, they matter differently than in the research of Ginsberg or Hill. Unlike assessing impact of EU mediation policies or foreign policies in general like Ginsberg does based on his model for measuring external impact of EU foreign policies (Ginsberg, 2001) or

through Hill's concept of the EU's capability-expectations gap (Hill, 1993), implementation is viewed as an integral part of how practices are understood in this study and impact matters only in as far as it is addressed by interviewees.

Case study selection

The objective of this study, namely to trace the assemblage of EU mediation by focusing on its political rationality and the techniques, which bring about and embody the response to a given conflict, necessitates a strong empirical focus and attention to detail. Accordingly, this project offers two case studies on EU mediation efforts in Myanmar and Georgia. The cases have been selected on the basis of three criteria. First, all five types of EU mediation involvement as outlined in the *Concept on Strengthening EU Mediation and Dialogue Capacities*, namely promoting, supporting, leveraging and funding of mediation efforts of others as well as the EU as the mediating actor, should be accounted for, thereby allowing the EU's own concept of mediation to guide the research (Council of the European Union, 2009a). Second, the Mediation Support Team of the EEAS with its goal of promoting a more coherent and professional approach to mediation primarily works with EU delegations and EUSR teams which differ with respect to their level of conflict expertise and the nature of their mandate. As already mentioned above, the actor-networks engaging in EU mediation are diverse and can explain the heterogeneity within the political rationality of mediation and sometimes contradicting ways of interpreting and communicating the EU response towards a given conflict by EU actors. Along these lines, the case of Myanmar is an example of an EU delegation being in charge of supporting the peace process of the country and Georgia presents a case in which the EU delegation administers the funding instruments for peacebuilding activities of the European Commission, whereas the EUSR team is responsible for the EU's role in the Geneva talks. Third, since mediation is part of foreign policy, all major decisions are made by member states' representatives in the Council and monitored during implementation more or less closely depending on the importance they assign to the conflict country. Moreover, different sets of policies or codified practices govern the relations between the EU and a non-EU country depending on whether it is situated in its neighbourhood or not. This has ramifications for mediation practices and is acknowledged by taking the policy context and in this sense also geographical proximity into consideration: Georgia is part of the European Neighbourhood Policy while policies towards Myanmar are guided by the Comprehensive Framework adopted by the Foreign Affairs Council in 2013.

2.5. Summary

The objective of the dissertation is to study the practices of EU mediation in order to explore how the understanding of violent conflicts by EU officials is reflected in their ways of responding to them through practices of mediation. To this end, it conceptualizes mediation as an assemblage and employs the Latourian notion of the actor-network as a method to examine it. It builds on his argument in *Reassembling the Social* that if the interactions between actors 'create networked relations, then it is through tracing these linkages that the origins of "social construction" emerge' (Srivastava, 2013, p. 77). In other words, following the actors and how they form associations will render visible how the practices of mediation produce certain knowledge claims and how these translate into action. Accordingly, the concept of the process of translation, which embraces how actors form these linkages, is at the heart of how an assemblage emerges, persists, and possibly dissolves through networked relations. Inspired by Callon and two concepts of Rose and Miller's governmentality studies, the four moments of translation are refined with the notion of political rationality and *techne*. The political rationality emphasizes three interlinked elements: problematization, *telos* and strategy. It constitutes the first moment of translation during which an event in a conflict-affected country becomes known to EU officials and is understood as a form of crises to which the Union must respond. By using various ideas and concepts, a group of actors defines the event as a problem and renders it manageable, which engenders a *telos* and a strategy for EU action, and tries to establish itself as an obligatory passage point, thereby making it indispensable. The strategy materializes in the second moment of translation, interessement, by giving rise to and drawing on a specific set of tools, techniques, and other devices to enrol the actors who were identified during the process of problematization as essential for addressing the crises. The third moment of translation, enrolment, grasps whether or not actors accept the defined roles. If they do, they are successfully enrolled in the assemblage, which is further stabilized through the processes of mobilization by designating spokespersons with the ability to represent all enrolled actors of the assemblage.

This study pursues three objectives: at first, it sets out to inquire how conflict is understood in the EU context and rendered manageable with mediation being the 'tool of first response to emerging or ongoing crisis situations' by assessing the first moment of translation (Council of the European Union, 2009a, p. 4). The second objective is concerned with tracing the associations between EU and non-EU actors to examine how knowledge claims are produced.

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To do so, it is essential to consider diverging problematizations and the struggles of EU actors to enrol the others by making them accept the roles as envisioned by their problematization. Finally, this study hopes to offer a fresh view on the 'liberal peace' debate by avoiding the pitfalls of this framework but building on its accomplishments, namely pointing to an aggregate of concepts and ideas of a particular form of state and its role in conflict resolution which is put forward by most external interveners and peacebuilders. Moreover, the sociology of translation allows for tracing where these concepts come from and how they inform the processes of developing a policy response.

The next chapter will map how the practices of EU mediation emerged, thereby trying to understand how they became a part of EU foreign and security policy instruments and what idea of mediation was envisioned throughout these processes. This will involve analysing relevant programmes, policies, communications and strategy papers of the past 15 years but also inquiring how the recommendations of the *Concept of Strengthening EU Mediation and Dialogue Capacities* began to materialize in late 2011. The chapter will sort through the archive of EU documents to assess the political rationality and interessement devices of the assemblage of EU mediation as it presents itself on paper. What is more, it will take the analysis one step further by tracing how the recommendations of the Concept engendered the practices of in-house mediation support. These practices will not be explored in action so to say, but will be assembled to map the mechanisms, procedures, and tools available to EU officials. Exploring these practices in action remains to be done in the two case study chapters on EU engagement in Myanmar and Georgia.

3. Tracing the emergence of the assemblage of EU mediation

An oxymoronic puzzle confronts the researcher, who is concerned with the question of how the assemblage of EU mediation emerged. On the one hand, a lack of awareness of cases of EU involvement as a third party became apparent during interviews with EU actors and external consultants. On the other, they decidedly claimed that the Union engaged in mediation in the past. What is more, compiling lists of such cases by asking several officials to enumerate a few of the more recent examples revealed a controversy in that some would consider the EU's role in a particular conflict resolution process as mediating between the disputants, while others did not. This chapter argues that the assemblage of mediation gives rise to these differences in perceptions. Moreover, it develops the reasoning in support of the main argument of the dissertation in that it shows how the practices of mediation are organized around a concept on violent conflict which problematizes conflict as a security threat but is increasingly challenged by a transformative rationale which the Mediation Support Team advocates. However, the common denominator of both concepts is an understanding of what peace entails. It perceives peace, stability and security to be inseparable from sustainable economic development, the eradication of poverty, strong and democratic state institutions and an effective system of multilateralism. Taken together, this reasoning gives rise to a state-centred approach to violent conflict. More specifically, this chapter demonstrates how the group of actors, which developed the *Concept on Strengthening EU Mediation and Dialogue Capacities*, conceptualized the practices of mediation in-house support in a way that they created an actor-network with different ideas on the Union's engagement in violent conflicts as opposed to the knowledge claims put forward by other already existing actor-networks. In doing so, they emancipated practices of mediation from their roots in security practices but only to a certain extent. At the European Council meeting in Cologne in 1999, when the heads of states were aspiring to a European security and defence policy, they made instruments of conflict prevention a priority and mediation fell into this category as the *Gothenburg Programme on the Prevention of Violent Conflict* and the *Commission Communication on Conflict Prevention* of 2001 illustrate. In 2009 the Concept established mediation as a policy instrument that had to be addressed in its own right. The resulting practices of in-house mediation support introduced a transformative approach to violent conflict, whereas the analysis of textual artefacts on the EU's security policy and

earlier documents on conflict prevention points to a securitized understanding of conflict. Although this controversy between two opposing philosophies or concepts of conflict has not been settled yet, the ideas of the Union's approach to external conflict and crisis primarily reflect the securitized rationale which has a bearing on the assemblage of mediation. Building on Foucault's line of reasoning 'that these types of practices are not just governed by institutions, prescribed by ideologies, guided by pragmatic circumstances – whatever role these elements may actually play – but possess up to a point their own specific regularities, logic, strategy, self-evidence and "reason"', it is possible to observe a common denominator within both concepts of conflict (Foucault, 1991, p. 75). They share an understanding of what constitutes peace by perceiving democracy promotion, good governance, sustainable economic development, and an effective system of multilateralism, as its main components. The *telos* of building a strong democratic state in the conflict-affected country, which is capable of tackling its internal conflicts, is rooted in the problematization of weak state institutions, poverty and slow economic growth, and a corrupt and exclusionary political system as root causes of violent conflict. As it will become apparent, this political rationality reflects the history of the European Union and plays a crucial role in the relative stabilizing of the mediation assemblage albeit being challenged by some of the actor-networks which are enrolled in it. In other words, the controversies within the assemblage can explain why there is no coherent and mutually agreed concept of EU mediation; and depending on the respective definition, officials might or might not perceive a case of involvement in a conflict resolution process as mediation.

To substantiate this argument, the chapter proceeds as follows. First, following the *Concept on Strengthening EU Mediation and Dialogue Capacities* allows for grasping how its authors conceptualized mediation as a policy tool and the traces they left behind. Hence, as a second step, the practices of mediation are explored pertaining to how the textual artefacts envisioned their current form. This means focusing on the infrastructure and tools, in short, the technologies or *techne* of mediation practices. Finally, the EU documents on violent conflict of the past 15 years are examined in regards to the moments of translation in order to trace the knowledge claims which formed the background against which practices of mediation developed and which were, at least to some extent, called into question by the actor-network providing in-house mediation support.

3.1. Examining the techne of mediation practices

The Concept: conceptualizing mediation as an EU policy instrument

The Concept operationalizes mediation as a policy instrument by defining it in three ways: first, it identifies five types of EU involvement in mediation; second, it offers a narrow concept of mediation; and third, by slightly re-defining it, mediation is then used to capture three related but distinct tools. A brief survey of the Concept's three-fold approach to mediation, and juxtaposing it with scholarly understandings of mediation, helps to carve out differences between them, so as to ascertain the characteristics of EU mediation instruments. The Concept foresees five types of mediation involvement for EU actors (Council of the European Union, 2009a, p. 7). With one of them being the lead- or co-mediator and four supporting tasks, the authors of the Concept clearly did not envision the EU to follow suit and aspire to becoming an UN-like mediator. The four ways of assisting in mediation processes are promoting, leveraging, supporting and funding of mediation of other third parties. EU actors promote mediation through the Union's own history as a peace project; they can provide leverage through making use of its financial and political capacities, including the full range of EU instruments across the diplomatic, trade, development, civilian and military crisis management spectrum. In supporting mediation efforts of others, EU actors provide training, expertise, capacity building or logistical support to relevant stakeholders on a need-basis. Therefore they do not necessarily have to engage as mediators themselves but can choose to support initiatives of other actors (Council of the European Union, 2009a, p. 6). An additional way of doing this and the fifth type of EU mediation involvement is to fund peace processes. A closer look at the five types of mediation involvement demonstrates that they are not only distinct practices but in fact aggregates of practices which enrol various actors into the Union's assemblage of mediation. These actors also form a part of other networked relations. For instance, employing practices of development cooperation to leverage a process of mediation could take shape in supporting Confidence Building Measures or threatening to withhold funds of the bilateral envelope for the conflict-affected country to name but a few. In both cases actors would be temporarily enrolled in the assemblage of mediation whose work would not be primarily focused on mediation and who might not know a lot about the specifics of the conflict resolution process such as members of the Council or actors managing the financial instruments of the Union. Nonetheless, they would be involved in the processes of decision-making and implementation of the agreed measures. Surely by now any presupposition that practices of mediation only involve actors who are knowledgeable about

this form of third party involvement or conflict resolution has to be abandoned. What is more, it is important to take note of the fact that practices of mediation, according to the Concept, are an aggregate of practices by distinguishing between those practices that give rise to the mediation process (for example, roundtable meetings, shuttle diplomacy) and those which try to advance it (like Confidence Building Measures, financial rewards for making concessions on conflict issues, or sanctions). Moreover, promoting, funding, supporting, and leveraging of mediation efforts incorporate practices into the assemblage of mediation which are only relevant because they might create an effect which advances the conflict resolution process.

In addition to the broader practices of EU mediation involvement, the Concept also introduces a narrow definition. It understands mediation itself as a process in which an acceptable third party assists the disputants in finding a mutually satisfactory agreement. Up to this point, EU actors share the notion of mediation put forward by scholars such as Jakob Bercovitch and Christopher Moore, however, they diverge significantly from scholarly approaches pertaining to the goals of EU mediators, and their attempt of differentiating between mediation, facilitation and dialogue (e.g. Bercovitch, 1992, 2011; Moore, 2003). EU actors distinguish between the general goal of mediation – the agreement – and specific goals related to the conflict context and the expectations of the mediator and the disputants. Their immediate goal is to either prevent or end violence as a short-term response, whereas in the long-run they aim at building 'peace and stability' through addressing the root causes of conflict (Council of the European Union, 2009a, pp. 2-3). By including the expectations of the mediator as an element which influences the goals the EU pursues in a mediation process, the authors of the Concept seem to reflect or, at least, are aware of the EU as having various interests and expectations towards the direction and outcome of a peace process.

The narrow definition of mediation establishes the basis for the three practices or, to use the terminology of the Concept, tools of mediation: mediation, facilitation, and dialogue. With mediation, the Concept empowers EU actors to shape both the process and the outcome. Should the third party opt for a less directive approach, the Concept includes facilitation and dialogue as additional tools. Facilitation is conceptualized as 'mediation light' meaning that the third party should refrain from influencing the outcome but instead focus on the process; dialogue is a trust-building measure without a formal mandate or set timeframe (Council of the European Union, 2009a, p. 3). The Concept emphasizes that differentiating between mediation, facilitation and dialogue as related but nonetheless distinct tools is not always

feasible and suggests the use of the slightly confusing term 'mediation' to encompass all three. Indeed, it is difficult to draw dividing lines between the tools mediation, facilitation and dialogue as defined in the Concept. Seen from a conceptual perspective, broad mediation definitions of scholars like Bercovitch do not distinguish between mediation, facilitation and dialogue as this is where they refer to strategies of mediation. Against the background of the two most commonly applied classifications of mediation strategies, that is Bercovitch and Houston's *communication-facilitation*, *procedural strategies*, and *directive strategies* and Touval and Zartman's *facilitation*, *formulation* and *manipulation*, a mismatch between the Union's and scholarly definitions becomes apparent (Bercovitch & Houston, 2000, p. 175; Touval & Zartman, 1985). Mediation strategies seem to combine dialogue and facilitation as communication-facilitation or simply facilitation. In addition, the distinction between different degrees of mediator involvement which the scholarly literature depicts as formulation and manipulation or procedural and directive strategies is missing in the EU Concept. This is noteworthy for two reasons: first, that traditional scholarly approaches to mediation do not conform to the EU's conceptualization confirms the argument put forward in the previous chapter, which claims that concepts of the established mediation literature do not capture the respective practices of the Union. As a result, this study builds on the EU's own understanding and only employs the concepts of the mediation literature to highlight these differences. Second, the Concept considers two tools at the end of the spectrum of less directive approaches which are characterized as excluding substantial involvement on the part of the third party.

To operationalize this approach to practices of mediation, the authors of the Concept developed a number of recommendations and suggested a mediation support group as a pilot project. This group was to be tasked with implementing the Concept and developing the recommended practices of operational support to ensure 'expertise on mediation processes and related thematic areas' (Council of the European Union, 2009a, p. 12), create a rooster of external experts, offer training and coaching for relevant EU officials, engage in knowledge management in the form of analysis and best practices, and finally facilitate outreach to relevant actors (Council of the European Union, 2009a, pp. 12-13). This meant building on already existing capacities but also developing new ones, thereby creating the basis for the current practices of EU mediation support to emerge. The first step of implementing the Concept was the creation of a new actor-network, namely the Mediation Support Team.

The Mediation Support Team is one of three teams of the *Conflict Prevention, Peace-building and Mediation Instruments Division* or K2 of the Directorate for *Security Policy and Conflict Prevention* of the EEAS. The other two teams work on early warning as well as conflict analysis and conflict sensitivity. As a team of five, its only hierarchical structure consists of having a team leader but otherwise divides the work according to a set of four criteria, except for one person who focuses on contracts, contracting and administering the financial instruments (EU-36[3], May 2015). The responsibilities of the remaining four team members are derived from, first, geographic foci; second, thematic expertise on gender, transitional justice, and security arrangements to name but a few; third, activities such as deployment of experts, training, knowledge management; and finally, cultivating partnerships to the UN, African Union and other relevant actors in the field (EU-36, May 2015). Only one of the five positions in the team is fixed and filled by rotating civil servants of the EU; the other four team members are recruited externally or on secondment based on the criteria of mediation expertise and are given short-term contracts. Their professional backgrounds illustrate the blurred boundaries between the governmental sphere, international organizations, research, and the NGO world. For instance, some of them have worked for the UN and UN agencies including the Mediation Support Unit, United Nations Peacebuilding Office, UNHCR, UNDP, ILO; another was a conflict researcher at the Nordic Africa Institute in Uppsala Sweden and published on mediation and peacebuilding before joining the Mediation Support Team. Their working experience also spans Foreign Ministries of member states as well as NGOs such as International Alert and the Brussels-based network of mediation, mediatEUr. In other words, they have been once enrolled in actor-networks with which they partly continue to form associations also in their position as Mediation Support Team members.

The team itself is located in Brussels. While it maintains close contacts with geographic desks, delegation personnel, EUSR team members and CSDP staff, who work on and in conflict-affected countries or regions, it operates on a request-basis. Consequently, the group of officials, who can enrol in the assemblage of EU mediation, is not constant over time and comprises different actors across conflict-affected countries. Moreover, the team does not have a say on who mediates on behalf of the Union. The codified practices of the Common Foreign and Security Policy authorize the Council to mandate actors to engage in mediation.

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[3] The interviews are numbered and the coding can be translated as follows: EU=EU official, CSO=Civil Society Representative, CA=Conflict Advisor, MSD=Member State Diplomat.

The typical target group comprises senior diplomats, who are appointed as EU Special Representatives, and members of the team of the High Representative/Vice President of the European Commission. Taking into account the differentiation of five types or practices of mediation involvement as depicted by the Concept, EU ambassadors and the actor-networks of delegations can also form a crucial part of the assemblage of mediation. So how are potential mediators selected? The responsible actor-network is again the Council and its decisions are, in the terminology of the interviewed EU officials, often 'political' (e.g. EU-7, July 2015). One official explained this by detailing the processes that take place before the appointment of an EUSR. For instance, before the first EUSR for the South Caucasus was appointed in 2003, the potential candidates were touring the capital cities of the member states in order to rally support. As a result, aspects such as the candidate's nationality and which member state holds the Council presidency at this moment in time matter amongst others.

The Mediation Support Team systematically enrols external actors in the assemblage of mediation. It collaborates closely with external consultants through the European Resources for Mediation Support or ERMES framework and another contract with the Brussels-based mediation organization, mediatEUr, to specifically advise EU delegation personnel. ERMES is funded through the Instrument contributing to Stability and Peace (IcSP) under component two *Assistance for conflict prevention, peacebuilding and crisis preparedness* and offers two-year contracts which are signed with the successful applicant organization following a call for tender. ERMES is another implementing measure of the Concept which envisions close collaboration with international and non-governmental organizations and ensures access to trainers and experts to complement the Mediation Support Team on a need-basis in the areas of thematic expertise and technical assistance. As such, ERMES provides the entry point for non-EU actors to the assemblage and is an interessement device in that it locks the actors in their roles as placing their expertise at the disposal of the Union. Although they come from different organizations, their services to the EU will count as an output of the Union. Of course external consultants cannot engage as mediators in peace processes on behalf of the Union owing to the codified practice of the mandating process of the Council. However, they can facilitate track 2 dialogues, conferences, workshops; carry out research, draft factsheets and offer training and coaching in the name of the EU (EU-2, December 2014). Collaborating organizations under the ERMES framework were in 2014 amongst others Humanitarian Dialogue, the Crisis Management Initiative, International Alert, and Search for Common Ground (EU-2, December 2014). As such, they covered thematic areas such as

decentralization, mediation and process design, and regional or country-specific expertise and often came from organizations with close ties to think tanks and academic institutions. This again demonstrates the intertwined nature of relations or associations between policy, NGO, and research networks in the area of peace, security and conflict, and is an important observation about the assemblage of EU mediation. For instance, it might very well explain how concepts travel into the policy domain through processes of translation and often acquire a new meaning along the way.

This said, what are practices of in-house mediation support? The only more detailed description of the instruments or practices of the Union's approach to conflict can be found in the *EU Handbook for Decision Makers: The Common Security and Defence Policy of the European Union* (Rehrl, 2014). In this book, Andrew Byrne depicts the unit *Conflict Prevention, Peace-building and Mediation Instruments* by introducing the EU's early warning system, the tool of conflict analysis, mediation support, enhancing partnerships, the recently re-named funding instrument of conflict- and crisis-related programmes, the IcSP, and Justice and Security Sector Reform (Byrne, 2014, pp. 130-133). He refrains from displaying how the elements are linked and work together which is unfortunate as this is what this chapter is trying to understand. It is important to note that he distinguishes between mediation support and other tasks and areas of responsibility of the unit without explaining how mediation is understood in this context. The Concept, the Mediation Support Team factsheet and accounts of the team members, indicate that the dividing lines between the different tasks are much more blurred since, by way of example, strengthening partnerships and conflict analysis are also practices of the Mediation Support Team. However, Byrne's description of the *Conflict Prevention, Peace-building and Mediation Instruments Division* or K2 lends itself to put mediation support into perspective pertaining to the division's practices in producing the EU's response to external conflict and crisis (for a graphical representation of the infrastructure of practices of mediation support of the *Conflict Prevention, Peace-building and Mediation Instruments Division*, please see Fig. 1). Although mediation support is a part of K2 and represented in the division by the Mediation Support Team, the boundaries between the practices of the teams of K2 are often flexible and collaboration with other units of the EEAS common. The Mediation Support Team contributes

Fig.1: Infrastructure of the practices of EU in-house mediation support

External consultants and experts (ERMES), mediatEUr

Early Warning System

Justice and Security Sector Reform

Conflict Analysis and Conflict Sensitivity

Council | EEAS | Commission

HR/VP
EUSRs
EU delegations
CSDP missions

can request

Mediation Support Team

Operational support and expert deployment

Coaching and training

Knowledge Management

Partnerships and outreach

Light touch

Conflict analysis

PEA

EU response

Mediation, facilitation, dialogue

Funding, supporting, leveraging and promoting mediation (of other actors)

UNDPA, MSU, AU, NGOs, INGOs

EuropeAid's Fragility and Crisis Management and Quality and Results Unit

DEVCO: MIP and Country Strategy Papers to ensure policy coherence regarding peace support

Short-term funding through IcSP (part of Foreign Policy Instruments)

Component 1: Crisis response

Component 2: Assistance for conflict prevention, peacebuilding and crisis preparedness

Component 3: Chemical threats (managed by DEVCO)

to developing responses to tackle risks identified by the early warning system, which might turn out to be a reciprocal process of the early warning system playing a more substantial role in the process of initiating mediation support in the future. It was launched in 2012 as an instrument of keeping track of changes in conflict-affected countries and regions which might cause a violent escalation and to increase the EU's capacity of early action (EEAS, 2014). The next element in Byrne's text, conflict analysis, is taken care of by the respective team in the division but is often carried out as the so-called *light touch conflict analysis* in collaboration with a member of the Mediation Support Team. Enhancing partnerships, to further follow Byrne, is a practice in which the staff of the division is engaged in more generally and accordingly also the Mediation Support Team members. The Instrument contributing to Peace and Stability is not directly a part of the division but the most important funding instrument of mediation. Finally Justice and Security Sector Reform is included and represented through one person in the division but currently not a focal point of K2 (EU-36, May 2015).

The practices of the Mediation Support Team in particular span operational support, coaching and training, knowledge management and lessons learned as well as enhancing partnerships. Operational support, for instance, can take the form of a workshop for a delegation on conflict analysis combined with training and coaching on mediation as a tool to tackle the complex realities of the conflict-affected country. Fig. 2 sketches the light-touch conflict analysis. It is carried out as one to two days of workshops and often involves the collaboration with external actors. Most importantly, the process of analysing a given conflict and the outcome, a short report, is valued equally (EEAS, 2012a, p. 3). A workshop, which was conducted in Myanmar in October 2014, lends itself to illustrate how the practices that draw on the tool of conflict analysis and mediation support, look like in action. The workshop lasted for a week and brought together the entire staff of the EU delegation in Yangon. Members from K2, in particular the teams working on conflict analysis and mediation, were in charge but external consultants, including employees from the Folke Bernadotte Foundation and conflict resolution professionals with expertise on Myanmar, complemented the team. They provided training on the conflict dynamics in the country, built on the experience of the delegation staff and employed role plays and simulations. The schedule also involved individual trainings and coaching sessions on mediation.

For in-depth conflict analysis, the respective factsheet refers to field research of an external consultant and *Political Economy Analysis*, the second tool of a structured conflict analysis. It is worth noting that *Political Economy Analysis*, a tool with a specific focus on 'how political

and economic processes interact in a given society, and support or impede the ability to solve development problems that require collective action' (DEVCO, 2012, p. 3), is recommended for in-depth analysis. It builds on concepts such as the collective action problem, state-society bargaining, formal and informal institutions, the influence of elites and elite incentives, and finally the role of leadership and advances a perspective which links conflict and economic indicators (DEVCO, 2012, pp. 3-4). It should be added that *Political Economy Analysis* was not mentioned during any of the interviews.

Fig. 2: EU Light-touch conflict analysis
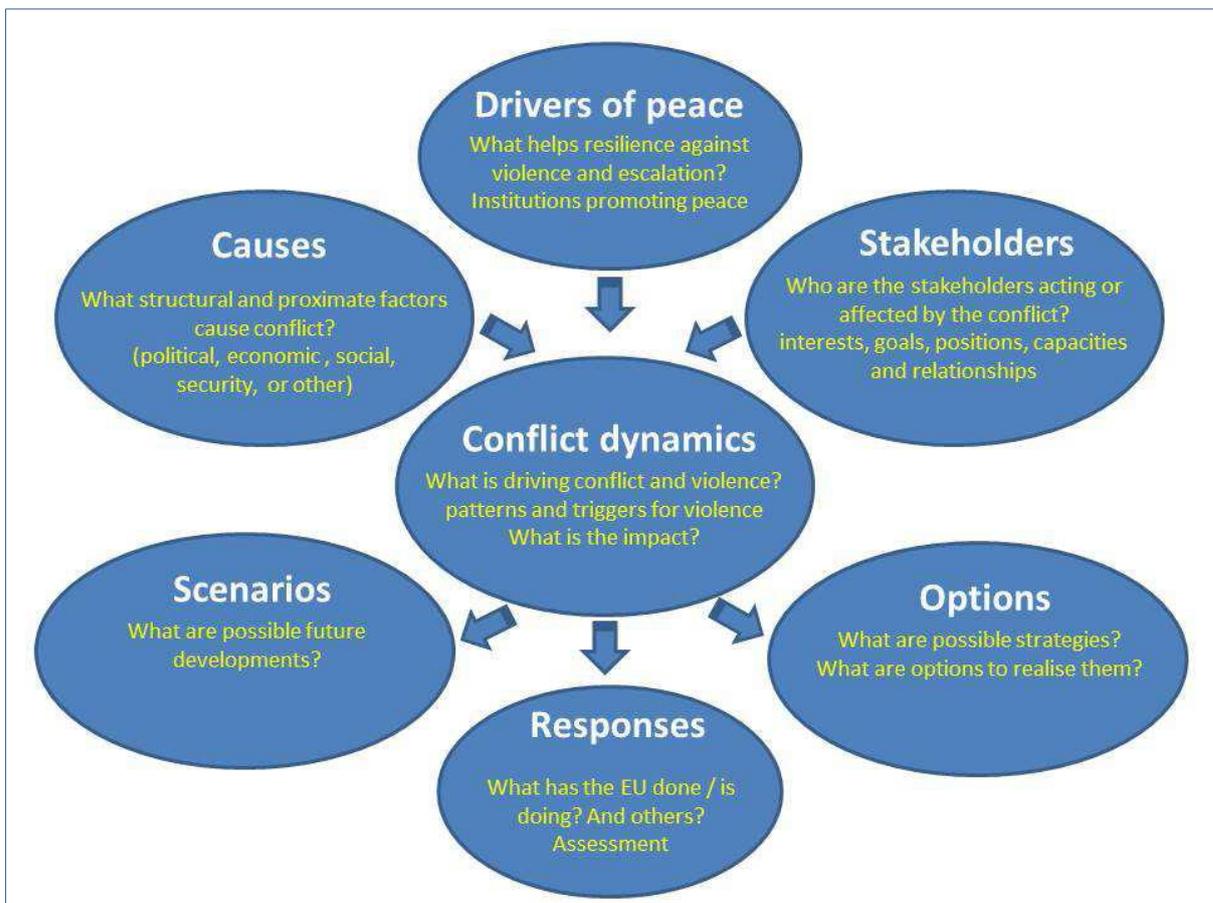
Source: EEAS, 2012b, p. 3

To operate in such a way as the K2 division and particularly the Mediation Support Team does, requires a very specific mode of funding: these practices have to be fast, flexible, specific and risk-taking. The Instrument contributing to Stability and Peace is the funding instrument which was tailored to satisfy these criteria and EUR 2.34 billion were made available for the period of 2014 to 2020 (IcSP, 2014, p. 37). It consists of three components, namely crisis response to which more than 70 percent of the budget is allocated, assistance for conflict prevention, peacebuilding and crisis preparedness with 9 percent and the last 21

percent are part of the component of chemical threats which is managed by DEVCO. Mediation falls in the first and second category. The IcSP is a subsidiary instrument, hence, funding is granted only if there is no other EU instrument available to finance the respective project. This instrument comes with another characteristic that makes it distinct from other EU instruments. The Official Development Assistance criteria do not apply to the IcSP and its legal basis, i.e. Article 209 'Development Cooperation' and Article 212 'Economic, Financial and Technical Cooperation with Third Countries', assures a worldwide scope (IcSP, 2014, p. 5). Through its thematic strategy paper and multiannual indicative programme, the IcSP is meant to '[…] address those conflict, peace and security issues having an impact on development or other cooperation policies of the EU – and very often on the EU's own security, too – and which cannot be addressed under any other cooperation instrument of the EU' (IcSP, 2014, p. 5). To launch a project, which is funded by the IcSP, the proposal has to pass a number of stages beginning with an internal discussion within the EU delegation to develop the project idea which then goes all the way up to the Political and Security Committee, the Cabinet and College. To facilitate rapid action, the process can be compressed in very urgent cases to initiate a project within three weeks or a month (EU-9, March 2015). As such the IcSP has a gap-filling role in the funding structures of the EU and the responsible officials enrol in the assemblage of mediation through the networked relations with delegations, the Mediation Support Team and other actors through an IcSP-funded project on mediation.

Drawing conclusions

The actor-networks or teams of the *Conflict Prevention, Peace-building and Mediation Instruments Division* and particularly the tools and instruments at the disposal of the Mediation Support Team constitute the different building blocks of the practices that form the supporting mechanism for EU officials to develop a response to a given conflict. Pivotal aspects of the practices of the Union's mediation in-house support include operational support, coaching and training, knowledge management and lessons learned as well as enhancing partnerships. They enable a team of people with expertise on mediation to support those EU actors who work in conflict-affected countries or regions but do so without establishing a system of trained mediators such as a standby team. Based in Brussels, the Mediation Support Team is neither present in the field nor represented by a team member who is permanently deployed to the delegations in conflict-affected areas. Following a request

which requires on-site assistance, one of the four team members will have to go on mission. In their supportive role, they can advise, suggest and explain but, in the end, they are not the ones doing the job. Moreover, the practices of the EU's in-house mediation support are not codified as a part of mandatory procedures that require EU officials, who are working on conflict-affected countries or regions, to consult with them on a regular basis. Even if a collaborative relationship is successfully established, EU staff with fixed positions are subject to a rotation system and, thus, changes in personnel are quite frequent. On top of that, recruitment and selection of staff for key positions such as Heads of Delegations or EUSRs do not necessarily focus on the needs of the conflict-affected country as they are also 'political decisions' which have to satisfy member state interests. As a result, the Mediation Support Team faces geographical and staff constraints as well as obstacles of supporting EU mediators owing to the principle of working on a request-basis. These constraints and challenges explain why some argue that it is too early to speak of a distinctive EU approach to mediation yet, especially since this approach is currently developing within one division of the EEAS and its implementation requires the cooperation of a substantial number of EU officials spread out over conflict-affected countries (EU-34, November 2013). In fact, the actors who form a part of this assemblage span the Mediation Support Team, delegation staff, and EUSR teams as well as conflict resolution experts and representatives of non-governmental organizations, who often bridge the academic and policy world.

However, the ways in which the tools and instruments of mediation are employed are not only subject to the codified practices of the Council of the European Union with its authority over foreign and security policy or the practices of mediation support and funding, but are also informed and structured by a particular understanding or reasoning on both violent conflict and mediation as a policy instrument. Accordingly, the remainder of the chapter substantiates the argument that it is this political rationality which establishes the EU approach to mediation in its current form. Although the assemblage of mediation of the Union is loosely knitted, different across cases, and often not very stabilized as a result of failed processes of translation, its practices are neither unstructured nor random but governed by a specific set of concepts and assumptions about conflict and mediation which already contain the fundamental ideas for addressing the issues in the relevant country or region. From an etymological angle, the notion of approach means 'bringing near' and coming closer to something. With time the dimension of understanding an approach as the 'means of handling a problem' has developed (Harper, 2001-2016). Hence, an approach is an undertaking which

is focused to the extent that it is concentrated on an issue or a problem and, following the later meaning of the term, it is focused on a problem in a way that it already suggests the means of handling it. In view of this definition, it is possible to speak of an EU approach to mediation.

3.2. *The first moment of translation: tracing the political rationality of the assemblage of EU mediation*

The moments of translation were conceptualized in the previous chapter as embracing at first, the political rationality which consists of the problematization, *telos* and strategy. The second element of translation is the use of interessement devices to enrol the actors targeted by the problematization. Third, the concept of enrolment assesses whether or not the interessement devices have made the actors accept their defined roles. Mobilization as the fourth moment of translation includes those processes which stabilize the assemblage in that spokespersons are able to represent all the actors involved.

Turning to the first moment of translation of the assemblage of EU mediation as depicted by the *Concept on Strengthening EU Mediation and Dialogue Capacities*, the authors of the Concept draw on a problematization which is twofold for it identifies two problems that mediation instruments can solve: violent conflicts and the need to enhance the Union's profile as a global actor. In this regard, they have introduced mediation and dialogue instruments as cost-efficient and effective in two ways, that is in resolving conflicts around the world and making the EU a more coherent and capable actor on the international scene. These claims would establish the instruments of mediation as something no one can seriously object to if the Council was to accept this problematization which it did by adopting the Concept in 2009. As an interviewee recalls, the process of drafting and finally adopting the Concept was relatively smooth compared to the decision-making of the Council more generally with only a few issues of concern revolving around relations to the United Nations (UN) and one of five guiding principles of mediation (MSD-1, November 2014). Many member states already had long-standing relations with the UN and particularly its Mediation Support Unit and were keen on avoiding any competition. By making cooperation a key task of the envisioned Mediation Support Group and giving supremacy to the UN as the more experienced actor in mediation, they took the first hurdle towards adopting the Concept. The discussion on guiding principles of mediation brought up the question of how to deal with the tension between human rights and transitional justice. Whereas justice is essential to reconciliation, it can pose a challenge to mediators in the beginning of peace processes as these often involve actors who

would need to be brought to justice but whose consent is required for reaching a ceasefire or peace agreement. The Concept suggests dealing with matters of transitional justice on a case-by-case basis; a suggestion which member state representatives were able to accept (Council of the European Union, 2009a, p. 9). The way this issue of contention was solved points to a more general pattern of the document. It only puts forward a relatively broad rationale of mediation and offers recommendations on how to strengthen the EU's capacities accordingly but leaves many questions unanswered and does not detail a strategy for implementing the suggested measures. A closer look at the recommendations explains this apparent lack of detailed instructions. Operational support and planning, training, knowledge management and analysis as well as enhancing the EU's network with relevant actors are all items on the agenda of how to strengthen mediation and dialogue instruments. Hence, the Concept does not aim at suggesting a strategy but only offers guidelines for the Mediation Support Group. In doing so, the Concept establishes the Mediation Support Group as the obligatory passage point as regards mediation expertise within the EU and envisions this team to take care of developing the practices of the Union's in-house mediation support. Against this background, the problematization and *telos* of both problems, which the Concept poses, namely EU foreign policy and violent conflict, shall be examined consecutively.

Problematizing the EU as a foreign policy actor

The Concept is part of the EU's Foreign and Security Policy; more specifically, it resulted from the European Security Strategy (2003) and policies on conflict prevention, as it is an implementing measure of the former and in line with the *Gothenburg Programme on the Prevention of Violent Conflict* and the *Commission Communication on Conflict Prevention* (2001a). In fact, mediation has evolved from attempts to enhance EU conflict prevention capacities in the context of ensuring European security. The security and defence policy as envisioned in 1999 at the European Council meeting foresees the EU to have the full range of conflict prevention and crisis response instruments at its disposal (Vanheusden, 2010, p. 3). This was taken up in the European Security Strategy *A Secure Europe in a Better World* (European Council, 2003). The SG/HR Report on the Implementation of the European Security Strategy (2008) finally elaborates on the need to prevent conflicts early on and, in contrast to the European Security Strategy, explicitly mentions mediation and dialogue capacities in this respect although not in a very urgent manner: 'We should also expand our mediation and dialogue capacities' (European Council, 2008, p. 8). But what for? The report

suggests mediation and dialogue instruments as one way of responding to threats and to prevent them 'from becoming sources of conflict early on'; thereby addressing the Union's security concerns (European Council, 2008, p. 9). Furthermore, it is guided by the idea of making the EU more effective in addressing external challenges which mediation accommodates as it is considered to be both cost-efficient and effective (Council of the European Union, 2009a, p. 3).

The problematization of the EU's coherence and effectiveness as a foreign policy actor is particularly explicit in the five guiding principles for mediation: coherence, comprehensiveness, assessment of risks, transitional justice and human rights, and promoting the participation of women (Council of the European Union, 2009a, pp. 6-9). In the first instance, the principles address the implications of mediation, facilitation and dialogue as instruments of EU external action. Practices of mediation are not so much about the craft of mediation – if needed, mediation and conflict expertise is provided through operational support and training – but demonstrate a strong focus on what mediation tools can deliver for the Union. Based on the problematization of the Union's capacities as a foreign policy actor, the authors develop the *telos* of mediation instruments in the form of increasing the effectiveness of the EU as an international actor by reinforcing the strengths of other instruments, and, at the same time, accounting for the Union's policy objectives. This standpoint takes for granted that mediation can improve the effectiveness of EU foreign policy, and that actors, who mediate on behalf of the Union and who are not necessarily trained mediators, can still make use of mediation instruments in such a manner that it enhances the effectiveness of policies. Moreover, the angle or perspective underlying the guiding principles of mediation is striking not so much regarding what is but what is not mentioned. Policy coherence, comprehensiveness, risk assessment, transitional justice and human rights, and the participation of women are all assessed from a twofold standpoint of how to ensure and increase the effectiveness of external action and how to uphold the EU's normative commitments (Council of the European Union, 2009a, pp. 6-9). The Concept introduces mediation primarily from the perspective of how mediation instruments can serve the EU; thus, it is presented as a set of practices which can improve the EU's external governance. The following section illustrates this nicely:

Early mediation initiatives in a preventive context can, if successful, pre-empt the need for more expensive ESDP (or UN peacekeeping and peace-building) missions. Appropriate and well coordinated EU mediation capacities in the field - both in the work of EC Delegations and in the context of ESDP missions - serve as a

useful means of fostering political reconciliation, strengthening the rule of law and facilitating the implementation of peace agreements and thus also contribute to early exit of ESDP missions. (Council of the European Union, 2009a, pp. 6-7)

This subtle tendency of the Concept as looking at mediation through the lens of EU effectiveness renders visible a very EU-centred perspective. This manifests itself, for example, in the way how the Union's approach to working at different levels in the conflict-affected society is presented:

[…] Building on the EU's engagement at the grassroots level and its emphasis on civil society development, this holistic approach on conflict resolution contributes to the development of a unique and differentiated role for the EU amongst other providers of international peace mediation. (Council of the European Union, 2009a, p. 7)

Also the principle of risk assessment only takes the EU's credibility into consideration and does not reflect on adverse effects of EU engagement for stakeholders in the conflict-affected country or region. That the Concept focuses on the EU, thereby omitting the perspective of the recipient country of mediation, could indicate its purpose of convincing relevant EU officials and member state representatives of the Council of the value-added of EU mediation instruments. The Concept drafts rough guidelines for improving the effectiveness of the Union as a foreign policy actor based on the belief that the tools of mediation can reinforce other instruments. But which understanding of conflict informs the optimism of the Concept that mediation instruments can foster peace and stability? And is this philosophy of conflict representative of the EU's approach to conflict?

Two philosophies of conflict, one approach?

In the Concept, mediation features prominently as 'a tool of first response' which can be used 'in situations of instability and conflict' as it offers the possibility of transforming them (Council of the European Union, 2009a, pp. 2-4). Except for a few additional references to conflict, the authors of the Concept were not very explicit about how they understand conflict. This reflects a general tendency of EU documents on conflict, namely a lack of a precise definition. Instead most explanations are intertwined with a normative dimension and purpose or *telos* which depict when and how conflict should be dealt with. They seem to treat what constitutes conflict and its causes as integrated, thus making a definition of conflict dispensable. Accordingly, the documents are much more informative when it comes to what is identified or problematized as causing conflict. Assessing the textual artefacts of the last 15 years by tracing the hints at how conflict is problematized and which *telos* it suggests reveals

two opposing concepts of conflict – a transformative and a securitized rationale – although both of them feed into the Union's approach to external conflict and crisis. In view of these two philosophies, the Concept on mediation seems to draw on a transformative understanding. What is more, the documents of the Mediation Support Team, which the Concept created, are informed by the ideas of conflict transformation.

Reviewing the textual artefacts chronologically, the *EC Check-list for Root Causes of Conflict* is one of the first documents, which is meant to assist EU officials in responding to external conflict and crisis. It introduces root causes synonymously with early warning indicators and suggests searching for the causes of conflict by assessing at first, the legitimacy of the state; second, the rule of law; third, respect for fundamental rights; fourth, civil society and media; fifth, relations between communities and dispute-solving mechanisms; sixth, sound economic management; seventh, social and regional inequalities; and finally, the geopolitical situation of a country (European Commission, 2001b). What about these indicators causes conflict according to the checklist? The document states that the legitimacy of the state is contested when checks and balances are missing in the political system which is embodied in a disrespected constitution and flaws in the separation of powers. Moreover, state legitimacy is also affected without an inclusive government and administration, resistance to national authorities and widespread corruption. The second set of indicators for root causes of conflict concerns the rule of law and is assessed through the strength of the judicial system, unlawful state violence, civilian control of security forces and the spread of organized crime. Without reiterating the remaining six categories of root causes or early warning indicators, it is already possible to detect a tendency or presumption which guides the checklist: it problematizes a weak and contested state as causing conflict. More specifically, the indicators consider a non-inclusive, disrespected state without proper checks and balances, without a strong judicial system, without respect for fundamental rights including free and fair elections, and without a vibrant civil society and sound economic management to be the root causes of conflict. Taking on the reverse approach, that is to give a positive answer to all the questions through which the indicators are operationalized, a blueprint of what liberal democracies are said to aspire to, becomes visible. Thus the rationale underlying the checklist is that conflict, most likely violent conflict, stems from state institutions and societal structures which do not conform to the standards of liberal democracies. Such an approach also implies an answer to the question of how to solve conflicts; the *telos* would be strengthening and, if necessary, building a democratic and economically prosperous state.

A comparative glance at classifications of other actors like DFID or Swisspeace will help to determine whether or not the problematization of particular deficits of a state as a concept to explain root causes of conflict is unique to the checklist of the European Commission. DFID's examples of *Sources of Tension and Conflict,* but also the methodology of FAST, the early warning system of Swisspeace, reveal many similar factors related to political representation, governmental and judicial institutions, economic management and civil society (DFID, 2002; Swisspeace, 2007). Nonetheless there are significant differences between these approaches and the EC checklist as to the terminology and understanding of conflict. To begin with, DFID looks at examples of sources of tension and conflict, which avoids having to answer the question of what causes conflict by emphasizing the exemplary nature of the listed sources; it does not grant it the status of a checklist. Swisspeace, to include a second set of indicators, addresses root causes in addition to what is called proximate causes and intervening factors. For both kinds of causes, FAST differentiates between historic, political/institutional, societal/socio-demographic and economic aspects of a given conflict but the classification and particularly the content of each category changes from case to case. In contrast to the EU's checklist, they are much more hesitant to link causes or sources of conflict to a specific form of government although both acknowledge that an unrepresentative political system can contribute to the violent escalation of a conflict. At first glance, this seems to indicate a different understanding of conflict; the main differences being a much more careful notion of what causes conflict and a less state-centred perspective. Nevertheless, the common denominator between the three approaches is teleological in that it highlights the benefits of democratic systems as opposed to non-democratic states.

It should be noted that the EC checklist is one of the first EU documents on this matter and as such cannot be seen as representative of how the EU understands conflict. Therefore it is important to move on to the next policy document which demands a stronger focus on conflict prevention, the European Security Strategy, and read it against the question of how it conceptualizes conflict. Here conflict is problematized as a threat to European security, especially because of its link to other factors like failure of economic growth, poverty, and bad governance (e.g. European Council, 2003, p. 3). It reveals an understanding of security which is 'redefined in terms of widened conceptions of risk: economic, resource, environmental, health related, etc.' (Feron, 2015, p. 984). The resulting securitization of violent conflict builds on correlations such as the high probability of finding poverty, high levels of corruption, weak state institutions, and low economic indicators in states or regions

of violent conflict. In other words, the European Security Strategy borrows the concept of the failed state. Against this background, it asserts certain causal mechanisms. First of all, conflict, insecurity, and poverty constitute a downward spiral. Second, security is a precondition for development. Third, 'bad governance, civil conflict, and the easy availability of small arms have led to a weakening of state and social structures' (Feron, 2015, p. 6). Exploited by 'criminal elements', the explanation continues, the state is doomed to fail and the reign of organized crime begins (European Council, 2003, p. 6).

The Report on the Implementation of the European Security Strategy of 2008 makes the link between conflict and state fragility explicit which is sharpened further in the understanding of weak governance and recurring conflict as a cycle (European Council, 2008, p. 7). It also offers a new interpretation of similar propositions in the Security Strategy of 2003 by stating that this document and '[…] the 2005 Consensus on Development have acknowledged, there cannot be sustainable development without peace and security, and without development and poverty eradication there will be no sustainable peace'. In short, the 2008-report joins the World Bank and the UN in advocating the security-development nexus. This concept has been criticized for securitizing development cooperation, potentially legitimizing policies which prioritize security over development goals (Picciotto et al., 2004) as well as evoking a new wave of aid-industry 'boosterism' (Duffield, 2010), thereby leading to more interventions. Whereas policy actors welcome the concept as contributing to a more comprehensive approach, David Chandler, for instance, makes the exact opposite point by arguing that the security-development nexus represents the process of losing the 'policy-making framework that previously provided a strategic framing for concepts of development and security', and that it allows external actors to politically disengage by inviting a substantive number of actors to join in the efforts in a burden sharing manner, while at the same time, diversifying responsibility of individual actors (Chandler, 2007, p. 364). Retrospectively, the concept of the security-development nexus is yet another opportunity for the EU to promote its Comprehensive Approach to External Conflict and Crisis (European Commission & HR/VP, 2013). In 2008 its basic elements have already been in place:

We have worked to build human security, by reducing poverty and inequality, promoting good governance and human rights, assisting development, and addressing the root causes of conflict and insecurity. The EU remains the biggest donor to countries in need. Long-term engagement is required for lasting stabilisation. (European Council, 2008, p. 2)

As such, the report reiterates two familiar conceptions. First, the idea of human security as it developed within the UN system during the 1990s which is central to the security-development nexus and stresses the need to broaden the meaning of security from only territorial to people's security and from military protection to 'sustainable human development' (UNDP, 1994, p. 24). In this way, the meaning of development and security has been modified, as Chandler concludes (Chandler, 2007, p. 367), which the concept of human security exemplifies as it

[…] in its broadest sense embraces far more than the absence of violent conflict. It encompasses human rights, good governance, access to education and health care, and ensuring that each individual has opportunities and choices to fulfil his or her own potential. Every step in this direction is also a step towards reducing poverty, achieving economic growth and preventing conflict. (UN, 2004, p. 4)

Second, the Report on the Implementation of the European Security Strategy continues to draw on the concept of the failed state. Also, the focus on the root causes of conflict is still prevailing and quite confidently so. It makes the bold statement that the EU has been 'addressing the root causes of conflict and insecurity' (European Council, 2008, p. 2), thereby asserting that they know what the root causes of conflicts are and how to tackle them. This is more than what most conflict scholars consider to be feasible. The contemporary literature on political violence has increasingly acknowledged the complexity of it and is 'less keen on finding the "root cause" of a given conflict and more intent on digging out its fluctuating patterns and dynamics' (Feron, 2015, p. 984). The report, however, does not only claim that the EU has been addressing causes of conflict but also highlights the importance of 'preventing threats from becoming sources of conflict early on' (European Council, 2008, p. 9). The identified threats range from proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, terrorism and organized crime, cyber security, energy security, climate change to concerns over 'frozen conflicts', piracy, etc. (European Council, 2008, pp. 3-9). The overall *telos* to which the problematization of failed or failing states and the security-development nexus gives rise to is, according to the report, to aspire to a more effective and capable Europe, to enhance the engagement with the neighbourhood, and to build partnerships for effective multilateralism. There is a remarkable similarity between the comprehensive approach, which the rationale of the security-development nexus calls for, and the listed suggestions for a more capable and effective Europe. Moreover, the trend towards a so-called comprehensive approach of addressing today's security challenges and their developmental underpinning is serving the

EU's 'predisposition' of being 'the biggest donor to countries in need' (European Council, 2008, p. 2).

What both documents, the European Security Strategy and the report on its implementation, fail to acknowledge is the role development and security policies and the programming of respective actions can play in fuelling conflicts, in creating new dynamics on the ground by prioritizing specific areas of intervention and neglecting others, and in interrupting or changing institutional structures and established practices in the conflict-affected country. However, negative effects of development and security policies in conflict-affected countries are not a new insight in policy circles but are well-established and the common denominator of principles such as 'do no harm' (Anderson, 1999). Hence it is hardly surprising to find these concepts also in EU documents with a focus on development cooperation. The *European Consensus on Development* (2006), for instance, stresses the importance of ownership and partnership for development cooperation and adjoins a number of principles which define the basic pattern of engagement, that is promoting the common values of 'respect for human rights, fundamental freedoms, peace, democracy, good governance, gender equality, the rule of law, solidarity and justice' through political dialogue, engaging civil society, promoting gender equality and addressing state fragility (European Parliament, European Commission & Council of the European Union, 2006, pp. 3-5). From this observation an important finding can be derived, namely that particular concepts and insights can feature prominently in one document but are missing in others. This raises the question whether or not different actor-networks within the Union promote different concepts and ideas depending on what kind of practices they are involved in? Examining the textual artefacts of the *Conflict Prevention, Peace-building and Mediation Instruments Division* can shed light on this question.

According to the *Thematic Evaluation of European Commission Support to Conflict Prevention and Peace-building*, conflict sensitivity was often amiss in external and development assistance and especially addressing the root causes of conflict proved to be difficult (ADE, 2011, pp. 19-27; 28-34). In view of these challenges, the tool of conflict analysis has been designed to serve the purpose of safeguarding conflict sensitivity which is defined as 'ensuring that, to the best of its abilities, EU actions (political, policy, external assistance) **avoid having a negative impact** and **maximise the positive impact** on conflict dynamics, thereby contributing to conflict prevention, structural stability and peace building'

(EEAS & European Commission, 2012, p. 1). The tool of EU conflict analysis is different when compared to the checklist and earlier statements, in that it offers an analytical framework for assessing the situation of a conflict-affected country but does not list root causes. Instead the four elements of this analytical grid are context, causes, actors, and conflict dynamics, and it introduces concepts such as radicalization, violent extremism, and resilience (EEAS & European Commission, 2012, p. 4). Followed by an assessment of already existing responses, the results of the analysis should be utilized to develop a strategy for EU action. Slightly reworded, this is the Union's *Light-Touch Conflict Analysis*. The second tool of a structured conflict analysis, the *Political Economy Analysis* introduced above, is an analytical framework with a development focus which sees the political from an economic perspective. Consequently, *Political Economy Analysis* recognizes the link between economic factors and conflict, that is to say, it perceives political violence to be reactive (Feron, 2015, p. 982). This idea also resonates in the security-development nexus when it assumes that 'without development and poverty eradication there will be no sustainable peace' (European Council, 2008, p. 8), thereby suggesting an economic or rationalist understanding of conflict along the lines of theories of relative deprivation or even greed (Feron, 2015, p. 987; Gurr, 1970; Collier & Hoeffler, 1998). What is more, it is DEVCO's *Fragility and Crisis Management Unit* and the *Quality of Delivery Systems Unit* which are responsible for *Political Economy Analysis*; thus, this practice is a product of a different actor-network than that of the *Conflict Prevention, Peace-building and Mediation Instruments Division*.

Turning to the textual artefacts of K2, the factsheets, it is possible to observe that their authors advocate a different philosophy of conflict. The factsheets or 'knowledge products', as they are referred to in the titles of the more recent examples, are documents with condensed information on thematic areas relevant to mediation and conflict management. They are published by the K2 division and primarily address EU officials and serve the purpose of informing them on how to deal with certain issues and what kind of support they can rely on. These factsheets provide some insights into what concepts and ideas wander around the people working in the division of *Conflict Prevention, Peace-building and Mediation Instruments*. As such, the factsheets help to better understand how this group of people grasps violent conflict. Since only one member of the Mediation Support Team has a fixed position as an EU civil servant, whereas the rest of the team is selected based on thematic expertise, it is likely that the 'knowledge products' are not representative of the views and the level of

knowledge on conflict of EU officials outside of the division. This recruiting practice as well as the collaboration between the Mediation Support Team and external consultants from civil society organizations might explain the different philosophy of conflict and the use of concepts of prominent academic debates. In fact, it is not rare to find references to resources of institutions which bridge research and practice such as the Berghof Foundation. For instance, the greed and grievance debate and the concept of resilience found their way into some of the factsheets (e.g. EEAS, 2012b). When comparing the *EC Check-list for Root Causes of Conflict* and the *Conflict Analysis Factsheet*, it is quite evident that the gap between research on violent conflict and the EU's policy documents in this area has been decreasing over the last 15 years. By now, the EC checklist of 2001 which enumerates leading questions and puts the state centre stage is not the only document for analysing the root causes of a given conflict. On the contrary, the approach to conflict analysis as outlined in the respective factsheet acknowledges that the 'constantly changing, complex web of causes and actors, their interests, agendas, and actions can make it difficult for decision makers to understand how, where and when to intervene' (EEAS, 2012a, p. 2) and does not any longer define what problems EU officials should look for but offers a framework for analysis which invites EU officials who are working in a conflict-affected country to share their perspectives and experiences on the matter. When comparing different factsheets, it becomes obvious that the K2 division generally and the Mediation Support Team in particular advocate a multifaceted understanding of conflict and a strong belief in conflict transformation. Building on the Concept, the factsheet on mediation support emphasizes that '[t]he EU understands "mediation" as a way of assisting negotiations between conflict parties and *transforming conflicts* with the help of an acceptable third party' (EEAS, n.d., p. 2; Council of the European Union, 2009a, p. 2, emphasis added). The rationale of transforming conflicts motivates the long-term engagement in mediation to bring about peace and stability and potentially addressing the root causes of conflict (Council of the European Union, 2009a, p. 3). Accordingly, mediation support is geared towards enabling actors and strengthening their capacities for conflict transformation (EEAS, 2012b; EEAS, 2012c).

So what does conflict transformation entail? According to one of the 'fathers' of the conflict transformation approach, John Paul Lederach, whose work is inspired by the Anabaptist-Mennonite religion, conflict transformation has various components: To begin with, it is based on a positive understanding of conflict and builds on the consent of actors to engage in the process of conflict transformation. It sees conflict as the inevitable and necessary ebb and

flow of relationships, tries to understand its patterns and apprehends it as a 'motor of change' (Lederach, 2003). Along similar lines, the *Guidance Note on the Use of Conflict Analysis in Support of EU External Action* problematizes the violent escalation of conflict as opposed to conflict as such when it states that conflict 'is an important part of social and political change. **Violent conflict is a problem** that the EU is committed to addressing' (EEAS & European Commission, 2012, p. 1). A transformative approach aims at reducing violence and working towards justice, thereby aspiring to transform the destructive dynamic of conflicts into a driver of positive change, or to use the EU language, the immediate goal or *telos* is to end violence and to build peace and stability in the long-term through addressing root causes and changing the parameters and structures of violent conflict. To this effect, John Paul Lederach suggests

'[…] that we need to develop capacities to engage in change processes at the interpersonal, inter-group, and social-structural levels. One set of capacities points toward direct, face-to-face interaction between people or groups. The other set underscores the need to see, pursue, and create change in our ways of organizing social structures, from families, to complex bureaucracies, to structures at the global level. This requires a capacity to understand and sustain dialogue as a fundamental means of constructive change.' (Lederach, 2003)

In fact, conflict transformation, as Lederach continues, works on relationships between people (Lederach, 2003). Many aspects of his thoughts fed into the Concept, such as the focus on mediation and dialogue, and the Mediation Support Team's 'knowledge products'. When assessing how the EU could support national peace infrastructures, the transformation potential is at the heart of the key questions, for example, on effectiveness:

Are a sufficiently diverse number of conflict parties willing and well-disposed towards *conflict transformation* and dialogue? What is the role of the government in relation to the local capacities for peace? Is the government actively supporting and promoting *conflict transformation* at all levels of society? Does the peace architecture reach all levels of society? Are these different levels of mediation and dialogue sufficiently well connected; e.g. is there information flow, are obstacles addressed, is the comparative advantage of *conflict transformation* at the different levels well exploited? Could external support harm the effectiveness of *conflict transformation* efforts in the peace process in specific conflict situations? (EEAS, 2012b, p. 6, emphasis added)

However, the more multifaceted understanding of conflict is rather a niche phenomenon produced by the respective actor-network. The *EU's Comprehensive Approach to External Conflict and Crises*, a core policy document, states the rationale of EU engagement in conflict and crises as follows:

More specifically the High Representative and the Commission are - with this Joint Communication – setting out their common understanding of the EU's comprehensive approach to external conflict and crises and fully committing to its joint application in the EU's external policy and action. This understanding covers all stages of the cycle of conflict or other external crises; through early warning and preparedness, conflict prevention, crisis response and management to early recovery, stabilisation and peace-building *in order to help countries getting back on track towards sustainable long-term development*. (European Commission/HRVP, 2013, p. 2, emphasis added)

This statement problematizes conflict primarily as an event interrupting long-term development, getting a country off track and rendering it in need of help and recovery. Any reference to sources of conflict is missing and sustainable long-term development instigated as the ultimate goal. Following this logic, the EU comes to rescue the country from 'conflicts, crises and other security threats' (European Commission/HRVP, 2013, p. 3). This differs greatly from the transformative approach to conflict, thereby indicating two opposing ways of thinking about conflict but aligns them on the level of EU instruments. This is illustrated by the transformation timeline adapted from Lederach which can be found in the *Guidance Note on Conflict Analysis in Support of EU External Action* (EEAS & European Commission, 2012, p. 3). It illustrates the process and available EU instruments for building peace and stability from different forms of immediate intervention in a violent conflict over techniques and programmes of peace-making and peace-building to a generational vision (see Fig. 3). As such, the timeline exemplifies how the tools and techniques at the EU's disposal are deemed to fit the long-term thinking of transformative approaches to conflict, and integrates means of crisis containment and management of the securitized approach to conflict as short- to medium-term responses. These two diverging philosophies of conflict point to a notable puzzle. As seen in the beginning of the chapter, the assemblage of EU mediation involves many different actors, making the Mediation Support Team with its transformative approach to conflict only one actor-network among many. But what does this imply for the two understandings of conflict? Since they problematize conflict differently, they should also advocate different *teloi* and strategies of engagement but the adapted timeline does not seem to encounter any such difficulties – at least not on the level of hypothesizing the EU response to external conflict and crisis. What is more, it is possible to observe a common denominator of all the documents pertaining to what is referred to as the values or principles of external action of the Union by analysing their normative underpinning and how the documents legitimize EU action. In fact, it is not only the matter of how EU actors problematize conflict, which informs the strategy of the policy response, but also how they perceive the EU as an

actor. Accordingly, the remainder of the chapter traces how the documents situate the Union in the field of conflict resolution and how they legitimize EU mediation involvement.

Fig. 3: EU transformation time line

Shuttle diplomacy/mediation
Conditionality/sanctions
Crisis intervention (e.g. CSDP Mission)
Humanitarian Assistance

Capacity building

Political Dialogue/ Mediation

Election observation

LRRD

Prevention of recurrence of violence

Development

Sate-building

SSR

Institutional reform

Long-term peace and stability

Hot Conflict Immediate Action (0-6 months)

Peace-making Short- to medium-range planning & action (1-2 years)

Peace-building Decade Thinking (5-10 years)

Generational Vision (20+ years)

[Source: J. P. Lederach (adapted)]

Source: EEAS & European Commission, 2012, p. 3

Tracing knowledge claims about the EU as a mediator

The documents spanning security policy, conflict prevention, mediation and the Union's Comprehensive Approach to External Conflict and Crisis, employ a language which refers to particular propositions about the EU's identity on the international scene and to ways of reasoning about Europe and the EU more generally. Relevant documents were selected on the basis of three criteria. First, the research question called for tracing the textual artefacts or outputs of the practices of decision-making regarding policies towards the conflict-affected country. Second, assessing the artefacts of the actor-networks responsible for developing the Union's approach to violent conflict, which is primarily the Council of the European Union and the division K2 of the EEAS, assisted with uncovering how conflict has been defined, which knowledge claims and concepts were integrated into the approach, and how it changed.

Third, following-up on references to textual artefacts mentioned by interviewees as essential to their work or by the authors of already collected documents complemented the selection of textual artefacts.

The elements of this set of propositions about the EU's identity on the international scene encompass the EU as a global actor, the EU as a peace project, and the EU as the largest trading bloc in the world as well as the biggest donor of Official Development Assistance. The reasoning about the Union in the documents connects these elements in various ways. The European Security Strategy, for example, states that 'Europe has never been so prosperous, so secure nor so free' (European Council, 2003, p.1 1) and derives its status as a global actor from its financial weight as it is producing a quarter of the world's Gross National Product, and its responsibility to contribute its share to global security (European Council 2003, p. 1). The *Communication from the Commission on Conflict Prevention* alludes to the nature of the EU as a peace project (European Commission, 2001a, p. 5). The *Comprehensive Approach to External Conflict and Crisis* takes it to the next level by contending that the EU is perceived as an example of peace and stability (European Commission/HRVP, 2013, p. 3). This reasoning also features in the Concept which refers to the EU as a global actor who is considered to be a 'credible and ethical actor in situations of instability and conflict' (Council of the European Union, 2009a, p. 2). Although it is not mentioned on what basis this statement is made, the Concept argues that the EU derives its legitimacy as an actor in mediation from promoting peace, democracy, sustainable development, and human rights (Council of the European Union, 2009a, p. 2). These parameters are part of the EU's Comprehensive Approach to External Conflict and Crises and reflect the EU's instruments – 'spanning the diplomatic, security, defence, financial, trade, development cooperation and humanitarian aid fields' (European Commission/HRVP, 2013, p. 3). In other words, in these documents the EU asserts its role as a mediator on two levels: first, it leverages its financial, technical and political resources and second, it points to the European values or principles of external action. Being the biggest donor of humanitarian aid and Official Development Assistance, the largest trading bloc in the world and its civilian and military instruments give the EU the necessary economic capacities to change incentive structures of disputants by drawing on its financial, technical and political resources. Moreover, the EU's values as being crucial for its legitimacy as a credible actor in conflict resolution appear to be related to the notion of a peaceful Europe. It reads as follows in *the Programme for the Prevention of Violent Conflict*:

The European Union is a successful example of conflict prevention, based on democratic values and respect for human rights, justice and solidarity, economic prosperity and sustainable development. The process of enlargement will extend this community of peace and progress to a wider circle of European states. (European Council, 2001, p. 1)

This brief survey of statements of self-disclosure allows for drawing the conclusion that in its reasoning on the engagement in conflict-affected countries, EU documents share a common understanding which is characterized by being an example of peace, stability, and economic prosperity. This goes hand in hand with the connotation of being perceived as such by others, thereby granting the EU a certain authority on this subject matter. Against this background, the claim of bringing 'peace and progress' to other European states through policies of enlargement (European Council, 2001, p. 1), seems to suggest an assumed causal relationship between the EU's values, its economic and political development, and a pacified Europe.

The values of the EU and understanding them as a precondition of peace and stability are omnipresent in policy documents on mediation practices ranging from security documents, conflict prevention, and development cooperation, to the K2 factsheets. Even the Instrument contributing to Stability and Peace through its funding rationale, is designed to 'reflect in the programming: the promotion of democracy, good governance and human rights and humanitarian law, including children's rights and the rights of indigenous peoples; non-discrimination, gender equality and women empowerment; conflict prevention and climate change' (IcSP, 2014, p. 6). Only the factsheets of the K2 division reveal a form of critical reflection on the EU as an actor in conflict resolution. These reflections revolve around a partial problematization of the EU's normative commitments and adverse effects of engagement of external actors. The factsheet on national capacities for mediation and dialogue, by way of example, stresses challenges resulting from the EU's value system, dangers of replicating power asymmetries, and harm caused by external support to name but a few (EEAS, 2012b, pp. 3-5). The respective document on peace infrastructures highlights a number of problems which arise from diverging norms of the EU and local actors. Discriminating against a group of people like women, for example, would be against the EU's principle of promoting and upholding women's rights (EEAS, 2012b, p. 3). Also negotiating or maintaining a working relationship with perpetrators from the army or political elite might neither be possible nor desirable for EU actors. With regard to the EU's legal obligations, its cooperation with the International Criminal Court (ICC) might require EU officials who are working as mediators or facilitators to share confidential information and to testify before the

ICC (EEAS, 2012c, p. 3). The EU also cannot support certain amnesties which would grant impunity to people who have committed war crimes and international crimes, 'crimes against humanity, genocide and gross human rights violations' (EEAS, 2012c, p. 3). Furthermore, the factsheet on peace infrastructures also points to dangers of doing more harm than good when the external actors, who try to impose solutions, do not carefully assess potential negative effects of funding local initiatives and actors, or pursue their own agendas (EEAS, 2012c, p. 4). These elements are not further elaborated upon which is unfortunate as the following statement would have to be discussed against the background of what constitutes the agendas of external actors and whether they are an integral part of any supporting external actor: 'the outcomes of locally negotiated agreements are often compromises, which are relevant to the resolution of the conflict, but may breach the constitutional values of the state or the broader statebuilding processes in place that aim to build a liberal democratic system based on equal rights for all' (EEAS, 2012c, p. 3). This has crucial implications in two ways: it assumes that the constitution of the said conflict-affected state is sacrosanct and worthy of protection, thereby foreclosing the possibility of conflict, thus, meaning that the constitution itself is not a source of conflict. Second, it refers to a possible tension between a locally negotiated agreement and aspirations of building a liberal democratic system as yet another example of a contingent incompatibility between the EU's and local values.

All in all, the values are the glue which connects and justifies the different components of the EU approach to conflict and, as such, complete the circle of reasoning on the EU's approach to this matter as it becomes apparent in the analysed documents and particularly in Lederach's adapted transformation timeline which enumerates all the elements of the Comprehensive Approach. The notion of achieving peace and stability through promoting the rule of law, security sector reform, democracy, human rights, and development suggests a security agenda as a short-term strategy, which is complemented with instruments that help to bring about a ceasefire, and then gradually allows for introducing developmental long-term measures to transform a given conflict through statebuilding and by integrating the emerging liberal democratic state into a system of multilateralism. This draws on a particular narrative of the history of the Union and presents its political and economic model as an example that democracy, the rule of law, human rights, sustainable development, and effective multilateralism lead to a peaceful and prosperous future. From this the EU derives the legitimacy of engaging in conflict resolution in external conflict and crisis situations for it comes with a shared history in which external intervention helped end the dictatorship of the

National Socialists in Germany and supported the efforts of rebuilding Europe. Seen from this perspective, the long-term goal of peacebuilding revolves around a democratic state which is politically and economically integrated into the 'international community'. This narrative encourages interventions in the form of mediation and peace process support since it is optimistic that these instruments can help to build peace. Albeit emphasizing conflict-sensitivity and local ownership, this understanding of peace can be read as an agenda of a third party rather than offering platforms for negotiation without a set framework of values of the external actors.

3.3. Summary

As carved out in this chapter, EU mediation did not evolve into a coherent assemblage. Establishing the Mediation Support Team as a new actor-network in the infrastructure of the EU's approach to conflict and crisis was the decisive factor which ensured at least a light footprint of mediation practices within the EU. Following the *Concept on Strengthening EU Mediation and Dialogue Capacities*, this team was envisioned as the obligatory passage point as regards mediation expertise of the assemblage. As such, it was tasked with developing the practices of mediation support. Whereas the Concept originally foresaw a Mediation Support Group composed of existing staff, the majority of the members of the Mediation Support Team, who are providing in-house mediation support, was recruited externally, bringing in expertise on mediation including previous experience of working with the UN Mediation Support Unit. The Mediation Support Team also entertains close relations to external experts through the programme ERMES, thereby allowing for various forms of collaboration with non-governmental organizations and conflict resolution professionals to emerge. It draws on its associations with external actors from specialized organizations through ERMES as the interessement device to enrol these actors into the assemblage and to lock them in their roles as providers of thematic expertise to the Union. The Mediation Support Team also advocates the three-fold approach to mediation of the Concept. Hence, mediation is an aggregate of practices which can be further subdivided into those practices that give rise to or produce a mediation process and practices that support such a process but are only linked to mediation because actors, who are already enrolled in the assemblage, form the respective associations. As a result, the practices of the assemblage bring together a group of actors who are not necessarily knowledgeable on mediation but contribute to developing an EU response. Moreover, the practices of the Mediation Support Team adhere to an advising, capacity-building and enabling role but do not include a mediating role as this is the responsibility of

another set of EU actors. On the contrary, officials directly engaged in the practices of mediation are diverse as to their background, ways of being appointed and their job descriptions which differ in that mediation and peace support are not necessarily equally prioritized. The principle of working on a request-basis of the Mediation Support Team also curtails any attempt of the actor-network, which the Concept envisioned to be the obligatory passage point of mediation expertise of the assemblage, to turn into a spokesperson that means to represent the EU. The result of this principle is that the actors, who mediate on behalf of the Union, can bypass the Mediation Support Team. Moreover, the codified practices of the Council of the European Union authorize and mandate EUSRs and Heads of Delegations to represent the EU and substantiate their claim to be the representative of the Union as a mediator.

The involvement of these various actor-networks sheds light on the controversy pertaining to two different rationales or concepts of conflict within the EU approach which reflects the practices of different actor-networks. In an environment in which conflict is predominantly securitized, the Mediation Support Team advocates an understanding of conflict as inherent to social change with the tools of mediation and dialogue as ways of preventing, ending and transforming outbreaks of violence. This transformative approach aims at analysing the sources and drivers of conflict and aspires to transform them, while the other rationale securitizes violent conflict and identifies poverty and weak state institutions or failed states as risks to European security. As it appears, mediation instruments were initially envisioned along the lines of the latter philosophy as a component of conflict prevention within the *Common Security and Defence Policy*. The idea of making the EU a more effective actor on the international scene and developing a more systematic approach solidified in the Concept on mediation of 2009, thereby problematizing not only violent conflicts but also the EU as a foreign policy actor as two problems which mediation instruments can solve. Hence, it is noteworthy that it is primarily the factsheets of the *Conflict Prevention, Peacebuilding and Mediation Instruments Division* which advocate a transformative approach towards violent conflict. So far the Mediation Support Team has not had a major impact on broader conflict strategies as the Comprehensive Approach to External Conflict and Crisis of 2013 illustrates, which depicts violent conflict as a threat to the affected country, thereby limiting conflict transformation, if at all, to the long run. Consequently, the political rationality of conflict which governs EU engagement in this field can be characterized as consisting of three elements: First, it understands conflict primarily as a security threat to both, the conflict-

affected country and the EU, which is challenged by the rationale of conflict transformation. Secondly, building peace, stability and security in the long-term is considered to be inseparable from economic development, the eradication of poverty and building strong and democratic state institutions. Finally, the EU approach to conflict, at least, in its language, is geared towards promoting good governance, democracy, human rights and sustainable development in the conflict-affected country, which reflects the assumption of a causal relationship between economic progress, democratic values and a peaceful Europe. These values are at the heart of another controversy. Whereas the tools of conflict analysis and the principles of conflict sensitivity and local ownership call for an individual solution to a given conflict, the values of EU external action already encompass an agenda of building a democratic state which is well integrated politically and economically into the international multilateral system. This agenda is informed by the history of the Union from which several officials derive a causal relationship between the political and economic model of the EU and a pacified Europe. Paradoxically, this gives rise to concerns as regards tensions between the Union's and local principles and values during peace processes but also constitutes a source of legitimacy for the EU to engage in external conflict and crises since it is a peace project itself. The analysed documents including the Concept on mediation offer very little advice on how to deal with these challenges in the everyday life. Neither do they inform the reader about how practices of mediation look like in action nor to what extent the Mediation Support Team matters in EU-supported peace processes. This chapter hints at an assemblage which is very dynamic and different across cases. As a result, moving on to assemble these practices for the cases of Myanmar and Georgia, it is crucial to address the question of how mediation is employed in action but also to examine the processes of translation which enrol non-EU actors in the assemblage in particular local counterparts and stakeholders of the conflict-affected country, who were almost entirely omitted in the documents.

4. Assembling practices of EU mediation in Myanmar

Pyay Road, a tarmac road with a fly-over bridge leads to the Kamayut Township in Yangon, Myanmar. The newly built premises of the EU delegation are at the corner of Pyay Road and Hledan Road. Unlike most other representations of states and international organizations, it is not located in one of the more exclusive residential areas of Yangon. On the contrary, the delegation's environment is characterized by a hustle and bustle of street vendors, the noise of honking cars, countless shops and small restaurants. The street is filled with people in longis; a single piece of fabric which is tied around the waist and worn by most women and men in Myanmar. On Hledan Road, one can find several shops for mobile phones and SIM cards. On the right, one can see a market with a large selection of fruits, vegetables, meat and flowers. Close-by is a Buddhist monastery. Next to the EU's office there is a building yard. In fact, there is a lot of construction work going on in Kamayut. On the way to the EU delegation in the morning, one passes many people who are sitting in tea houses and street restaurants on plastic chairs; they are having breakfast or are reading the newspaper. One is lucky to walk as one would otherwise be caught up in a traffic jam. The entrance hall of the EU building is empty except for the receptionist and some security personnel. The construction work on the building does not seem to be finished but the delegation is open nonetheless.

It is this atmosphere of fast changes, most visible in the form of infrastructure projects, construction sites and the availability of imported goods, which is important to keep in mind when studying political processes in Myanmar. It seems, the country is in between an old and a new era but it is difficult to tell what this new era will bring about. As the taxi driver said, Yangon looks very different than it did a few years ago but he is not sure if there are other changes under way other than the opening up of the country's economy. For instance, people are still afraid to speak their mind. Other assessments depict the developments in Myanmar after the change to a semi-civilian government in 2011 as a 'remarkable process of reform' (Council of the European Union, 2013, p. 1) or a political transition towards democracy 'managed from "above"' (Callahan, 2012, p. 2). All three statements, taken together, reflect how the process of transition awakens euphoria but the taxi driver's scepticism also emphasizes how deeply the society has been marked by conflict dynamics and authoritarian rule which cannot be changed overnight. The opening up of the country goes hand in hand with a peace process which is trying to resolve Myanmar's ethnic conflict with the help of internal mediators. This response to the country's conflictual past is often referred to as home-

grown or organic in order to highlight the priority of Myanmar's government which is not to delegate the responsibility of resolving the conflict between the central government and the ethnic armed organizations to external third parties.

Against this background, the chapter examines how practices of EU mediation support towards the Myanmar Peace Centre, the government secretariat and platform for negotiating a Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement, are shaped by a particular assessment of the country's situation by relevant EU actors which reflects the concept of violent conflict identified in chapter three. More specifically, it argues in support of the main argument of the dissertation that the reasoning, which feeds into the analysis of EU officials who are enrolled in the assemblage of mediation, draws on a body of knowledge which is state-centred in that it does not only perceive the government of Myanmar as a key party to the ethnic conflict but assigns the state a crucial role in its resolution. As a matter of fact, a democratic, economically sound, and inclusive state which is well integrated in the 'international community' is the *telos* of EU policies. This stems from the problematization of the military regime, human rights abuses, poverty, weak government institutions, and the legacies of the ethnic conflict as the main obstacles towards peace and draws on the knowledge claims of the political rationality of the EU's approach to conflict and crisis as developed in the previous chapter. Addressing the ethnic conflict in its own right, however, was the result of the efforts of a small group of people – spanning EU officials from the new office of the Union in Yangon; Robert Cooper, the Counsellor to the EEAS; and a member of the Mediation Support Team. They advocated the resolution of the ethnic conflict as the make-or-break question for Myanmar's future and managed to transform the previous problematization of the Council of the European Union, which emphasized the democracy deficit and human rights abuses of the military regime rather than the ongoing civil war. This shift in the problematization paved the way for the Union's practices of mediation support to emerge in that the EU granted its support to the MPC. As such, the case study lends itself to assess the practices of in-house mediation support pertaining to how the member of the Mediation Support Team was involved in the early days of EU-Myanmar relations and how this form of collaboration changed over time. It also allows for tracing the consequences of a delegation being in charge of mediation support, such as the practice of staff rotation, since the new group of officials enrolled in the assemblage does not seem to advance the same interpretation of EU engagement as its predecessors. The current practices rather appear to illustrate a slight return to problematizing the lack of democracy, poverty, and a marginalizing political system as hampering the

achievement of the *telos* of a strong and democratic state. This problematization loggerheads with the immediate peacebuilding efforts in that it turns the practices of EU mediation into political and technical support and produces an adverse effect for it inadvertently helps to establish the semi-governmental peace centre as the obligatory passage point of the assemblage not only for EU officials but also for the peace infrastructure in the country. As such, these practices unintentionally sustain authoritarian legacies and enmesh the enrolled actors of the Union in the conflict dynamics. Moreover, the MPC as the obligatory passage point hints at partially failing processes of translation. The practices of funding the peace centre served as interessement devices to lock the government actors into their role of advancing a peaceful solution to the ethnic conflict by engaging in a formalized peace process and re-negotiation of the social contract with the EU as a partner. However, enrolling the government representatives was only partially successful in that the processes of negotiating a ceasefire became increasingly formalized but it is questionable whether or not the government actors accepted the *telos* of the Union. At the same time, representatives of ethnic minority groups perceived the EU as influenced by Myanmar's government despite the delegation's efforts of supporting all conflict parties, which includes substantial funding of projects in ethnic areas. Whereas such views mirror the conflictual relationship between the government and ethnic minority groups, they also point to a more general pattern that is the EU's vulnerability or dependence on the conflict actors when engaging in mediation support. It is noteworthy that practices of international diplomacy and constraints of access to information of the EU delegation primarily cause this vulnerability of the Union. At first, the actor-network of the Union's officials in Yangon collaborates with the government of Myanmar and requires its approval for engaging in the country. These practices make the Union dependent on a key party to the conflict: the government. Second, the delegation's efforts to form associations in Myanmar in order to get access to information proved to be challenging. Both factors are contributing to the EU's vulnerability and difficulties with navigating in a conflict environment.

To substantiate this argument, the chapter begins with reviewing the narratives of both the violent conflict in Myanmar and the transition to a semi-civilian government. Following this, it traces how EU-Myanmar relations emerged as a response to the historical changes of 2011 from a regime of sanctions to full-fledged political support at record speed. Focusing on a controversy which preceded the adoption of the Comprehensive Framework by the Council of the European Union in summer 2013 helps to carve out the shift in the problematization of

what challenges were identified as requiring EU action and how mediation support came to be seen as the right policy tool. Next, moving on to the technical dimension of EU mediation practices, the chapter analyses how the EU employed the instruments of supporting and funding the mediation efforts of others through financing the operational costs of the MPC and engaging with civil society organizations. This is followed by assessing the accounts of EU actors pertaining to the political rationality, which is embodied in these practices, and the three other moments of translation: interessement devices, enrolment and mobilization. Tying in with the previous chapter, the practices of in-house mediation support, including conflict analysis workshops, coaching and training, and risk assessments, are assessed as regards the question of whether or not they matter in the day-to-day business of the delegation. Zooming out of the practices of supporting the MPC, the chapter assembles how the involved EU officials understand the conflict of the country and the knowledge claims on which they build when responding to the identified issues, thereby tracing the concept of peace of the Union's approach. However, just focusing on the accounts of EU officials would mean neglecting the fact that the assemblage of mediation also involves non-EU actors including the representatives of the conflict parties. Therefore, the final section of the chapter analyses the perspectives and views of implementing partners of the Union which allows for understanding how they perceive EU actions and in what ways they engage in these practices.

4.1. Reviewing narratives of conflict in Myanmar

Before assembling EU mediation practices in detail, it is necessary to sketch dominant narratives on Myanmar's ethnic conflict and political transition. Even though it is not a part of this research project to offer an in-depth analysis of Myanmar's conflict history, the following section does not solely serve the purpose of informing the reader but also aims at reviewing the perspectives on Myanmar's conflicts as put forward by scholars and leading experts in the field including consultants and members of think tanks. In doing so, it allows for tracing the ideas, controversies and stories which form the body of knowledge on Myanmar. Since it is impossible to take the entire available literature into consideration, criteria for selecting relevant material have to be established. Priority is given to studies of those authors who have conducted detailed studies on Myanmar itself and not just developed an interest in the country as a result of the transition. Among policy briefs and conflict assessments of think tanks and other experts, those analysts were chosen who had been mentioned by EU officials in interviews either as authors of specific articles, briefs and studies or as consultants to the delegation team in Yangon, but also included studies of institutions which have a long history

of working on and in Myanmar. Furthermore, it was crucial to continue with this mapping of studies and analyses until a saturation point was reached and narratives began to become repetitive. An incomplete portrayal of this literature does not pose a problem as the following section aspires to give a brief overview of the narratives of conflict which are part of the body of knowledge to which EU officials are exposed to. Accordingly, trying to detect sources of information of EU officials in Yangon was a key part of all semi-structured interviews and spurred the attempts to interview members of the group of conflict resolution professionals in Yangon with experience on working for the delegation as consultants.

The body of literature on Myanmar addresses a multitude of facets of violent conflict between the government and various ethnic armed organizations but can be grouped according to narratives which try to ascertain sources of the conflict and those that focus on explaining the transition. The strand of the literature on the sources or the nature of conflict also carves out the arguments that were heard in the policy world and became a part of the reasoning to justify sanctions against Myanmar. Research on understanding the transition does not only comprise the question of what the transition is about but also the task of accounting for the timing. Overall it should be noted that the narratives are not homogeneous but some of them illustrate the same one-sidedness and the same blind spots for which mostly European and American policy makers were accused during the 2000s.

4.1.1. Narratives explaining the violent conflict

A narrative of conflict over democracy and autonomy of ethnic groups

One narrative which appears to have strongly influenced European and American policy-making suggests a twofold perspective on the violent conflict in Myanmar by identifying a struggle of democratic and authoritarian forces and connected to it, the fight for the rights of ethnic groups. Historically, this view locates the sources of violent conflict in the era of British colonialism. In 1886, Burma was integrated into the Indian Empire of the British and was administered as a province of India until it became a self-governing colony in 1937. Britain had struggled with fierce resistance of the Burmans until they eventually defeated and dethroned the King Thibaw of the Konbuang dynasty in 1886. As a result, they evaded the Burmans in the new province of India and tasked the minorities with ensuring security. While the central plains or 'Ministerial Burma' were governed through a direct colonial administration, the mountain regions or 'Frontier Areas' of ethnic minorities mostly remained the responsibility of hereditary chiefs (ICG, 2011, p. 1). 'A decade after annexation, the

Burmans began to reassert Burman racial and cultural identity, which soon developed into an independent movement' (Len & Alvin, 2007, p. 9). Moreover, the tumultuous history of the independence movement of Burma, including the collaboration of the Burmese Independence Army (BIA) with the Japanese to defeat the British in 1941, fuelled a struggle of loyalties as some ethnic minority groups fought alongside the British. By the time Burma was on the verge of regaining its independence, the cleft between the Burmese majority and the ethnic minorities necessitated negotiations to agree on basic principles to ensure that the ethnic minorities would join the Union of Burma and not opt for independence. However, not all ethnic communities participated and hence, not all ethnic groups signed the Panglong agreement of 1947. In this agreement, General Aung San and the representatives of the Kachin, Chin and Shan agreed on the principle of 'full autonomy in internal administration for the Frontier Areas' (Panglong Agreement, 1947, paragraph 5). As of 1948, Burma had a parliamentary system with U Nu as the first Prime Minister. This period constitutes an important part of the account of Myanmar's democratic history. It was interrupted by a 'consensual coup' in 1958 when the Tatmadaw took over until a crisis in U Nu's party, the Anti-Fascist People's Freedom League (AFPFL), could be solved through holding new elections. Burma's democratic episode ended with the coup of General Ne Win in 1962 and was followed by three decades of military rule.

This narrative acknowledges the demand of autonomy and group rights of Myanmar's ethnic minorities but only within a democratic context and explains outbreaks of violence against the background of frustrated hopes of obtaining a democratic political system and group rights. By weaving the goal of a democratic state as a crucial aspect of the conflict into the fabric of the narrative, it eclipses the ethnic conflict. Applied to the second half of the 20th century, such an analysis of Myanmar's conflict history reads as follows:

Whenever hopes of ethnic and democratic movements are frustrated and the Government restores its strict centralist and/or military order, casualties rise. For example, after independence, this happened when the Government backtracked on its commitments to ensure relative ethnic autonomy. The casualty peak in the early 1960s might be attributed to the strengthening position of the armed forces and the eventual military takeover in 1962. In the second half of the 1980s, growing expectations of an end to military rule and hopes for democratisation, combined with heavy suppression of the opposition, possibly contributed to the spread of conflict activities in 1988. After the 1990 elections the Government backtracked on its promises of democratisation and refused to hand over power to the elected representatives, causing frustration and potentially explaining the peaks in armed conflict after 1990. (Kivimäki & Pasch, 2009, p. 22)

Moreover, this narrative also perceives the violent conflict in the 1960s and 1970s as primarily taking place between communist groups, who could rely on China's support, and the Burmese military government, although it acknowledges that the ideological struggle was blurred by a decisive ethnic component. In fact, '[…] many of the groups belonging to the communist movement were in fact ethnic, territorial movements, which were not only fighting for a change in governance, but also for a territory and ethnic rights' (Kivimäki & Pasch, 2009, p. 22). According to this narrative, dividing lines were either ethnically or politically drawn between democrats and the government only as of the 1990s (Kivimäki & Pasch, 2009, p. 22.). Similarly, another variant of this narrative stresses the student protests and the elections in 1990 as constituting elements of the democratic opposition in Myanmar and emphasizes the victory of the National League of Democracy (NLD) with Aung San Suu Kyi or 'the lady' as Secretary-General and Tin Oo as Chairperson (Len & Alvin, 2007, p. 20). It is countered by an account of the economic situation of Burma in 1988, thereby bringing forward the argument that the protest movement was about economic demands rather than democracy (Len & Alvin, 2007, p. 15).

The narrative of violent conflict over democracy and ethnic autonomy is often criticized for mainly two reasons: First, for downplaying or even neglecting Myanmar's ethnic conflict by conflating the struggle for democracy with the ethnic conflict in the country, thereby suggesting the latter is an aspect of the former. This criticism is also often directed against Aung San Suu Kyi and the NLD, by representatives of the ethnic minority groups who believe that the democratic aspirations of the lady and the NLD primarily envisage individual rights whereas what they demand are group rights (Kivimäki & Pasch, 2009, p. 29). Giving priority to the ethnic conflict of Myanmar or, more appropriately, of Burma, stems from a view which challenges the perspective on Burma's colonialization and the end of the Burman monarchy as the sources of conflict and refers to it as a Burmese reading of history (CSO-7, March 2015). The second criticism addresses the goal of a democratic state as an underlying theme of violent conflict and considers it as blown out of all proportions.

Before turning to what could be called a narrative of ethnicity, it is important to clarify the political connotation of the names Myanmar and Burma. Besides the fact that the military government changed the country's name from Burma to Myanmar in 1989, it has not been recognized by all states around the globe. What is more, many ethnic communities and opposition groups still refer to their country as Burma, thereby emphasizing that the military government did not have the right to legitimately re-name the country (Len & Alvin, 2007, p.

16). This study will refer to the country as Myanmar as this reflects the terminology of the interviewed EU officials.

A narrative of ethnicity

Seven 'national races' are recognized in Myanmar in addition to its ethnic Bamar majority; these are the Kachin, Shan, Mon, Karenni (Kayah), Karen (Kayin), Chin and Rakhine. In the Constitution of 1974, they were given their own states within Myanmar, whereas the central plains were divided into seven administrative divisions which were re-named into regions in the 2008 constitution. Yet, the 'Frontier Areas' were already mostly self-administered entities during colonial times and, even earlier, 'the kingdoms of central Burma exercised only nominal authority over the highlands' (Kipgen, 2015, p. 22).

Race as a dividing category entered the political discourse with the independence movement.[4] The declining importance of the Burmese elite during colonialism, to which the administrative practices of the central plains contributed, triggered a nationalist response in which ethnicity and religion played a key role. The economy of colonial Burma was dominated by Indians due to high levels of immigration from the neighbouring country which gave rise to a narrative of Indian domination or second colonization, feeding into a scepticism and possibly even demonization of all foreign influence (Taylor, 2015, p. 5). Foreign domination, the Christianization of minority groups such as the Karens, and the immigration of Hindus and Muslims as threats to Buddhism were the building blocks of a nationalist movement that conflated religion and race (Taylor, 2015, p. 5). By the time, an independent Burma became feasible; legacies of British colonial rule and anthropology were at the heart of the Panglong negotiations. Eventually ethnicity was politicized and a dominant theme of the struggles of Prime Minister U Nu's government. When General Ne Win seized power, ethnicity and religion were part of the argument to justify the coup. U Nu was accused of getting too close to the ethnic minority groups in the borderlands and as focusing too much on Buddhism in his politics:

[…] the Tatmadaw […] staged a coup on the grounds that U Nu's government was conducting negotiations with political leaders in the frontier regions, something which the Tatmadaw regarded as a threat to the unity of the country. The military coup leaders, which called themselves the Revolutionary Council, also believed that U Nu

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[4] The terms ethnicity and race are often conflated in Myanmar which frequently creates confusion. It can be explained by consulting a Burmese/Myanmar dictionary: In Burmese/Myanmar *lumyo* depicts both concepts: ethnicity and race. The *Myanmar-English Dictionary* (1994 as cited in Taylor, 2015, p. 3) translates it as first, race, nationality; second, nation; third, type of people and fourth, character. The notion of '"national races" is normally translated as taing: yin: tha:, defined by the same dictionary as "native of a country"' (Taylor, 2015, p. 3).

was abandoning the original socialist ideals of the newly independent state, and that he had made religion into a political issue, thus sowing discord which would lead to further conflict with the non-Buddhist population. (Len & Alvin, 2007, p. 12)

The Burma Socialist Programme Party maintained the discourse on ethnicity and rights of ethnic groups, enshrining the concept of the eight ethnic groups in the constitution of 1974 (Taylor, 2015, p. 7). In the 1990s, a list of 135 ethnic groups made its way into government circles and became a part of the 2014 population census. It is unclear where this list came from but it is assumed that its basis is the British census of 1931. 'Whatever the case, it would appear that in 2015, 67 years after independence, people are still discussing a nearly hundred year old list created by British colonial officials and amateur linguistics and ethnographers' (Taylor, 2015, p. 8). Another account on this matter was collected during the interviews. According to this perspective, the British census differentiated between ethnic groups based on the criteria of language. In the 1950s another group of anthropologists was commissioned to provide a categorization of Burma's ethnic groups. The anthropologists prepared more than 2000s questions, thereby hoping to achieve a categorization according to the people's own perceptions and tasked teachers with carrying out the survey. 56 ethnic groups were the result of the study. In the 1970s, this method was repeated but resulted into an estimate of 135 ethnic groups. Be this as it may, the government internalized the language of 135 ethnic groups and with the citizenship law of 1982, which was drafted by academics from Rahkine State, the 135 nationalities were legalized. Initially the study listed 144 ethnic groups but, except for one, all Muslim groups were excluded (CSO-7, March 2015). According to the interviewee, the citizenship law was an attempt at limiting the rights of the Rohingya in Rakhine State[5]. Against this background, it becomes obvious that the issue of ethnicity is complex and so highly politicized that it is difficult to refer to the minorities and armed groups in the border area without reinforcing the discourse.

What makes Myanmar's conflict even more complex is the fact that the ethnic minority communities were never a united front despite their common enemy, the central government. They have been divided as to their agendas, strategies and loyalties. Before the 1990s, it was

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[5] The Muslim Rohingya minority is not recognized as one of the 135 ethnic groups of Myanmar and, hence, does not hold citizenship rights. The term 'Rohingya', as the minority group refers to themselves, is contested as well as their historical roots. Whereas the government of the country addresses them as Bengali Muslims, who came to Myanmar from Bangladesh, others claim that the Rohingyas came to Myanmar centuries ago and 'are the descendants of Muslim Arabs, Moors, Persians, Turks, Mughals and Bengalis who came mostly as traders, warriors and saints through overland and sea-route' (see Kipgen, 2013, p. 300 for further information).

possible to differentiate between those ethnic communities who supported the Burmese Communist Party and a number of ethnic groups with an anti-communist agenda (see Fig. 4).

Fig. 4: Relationship of ethnic groups to Communism prior to 1990

Ethnic groups within the Burmese Communist Party, amongst others:	*Members of the National Democratic Front (NDF) with an anti-communist agenda, amongst others:*
United Wa State Army;	Karen National Union (KNU);
Kokang Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army (MNDAA);	Kachin Independence Organization (KIO);
National Democratic Alliance Army;	New Mon State Party (NMSP);
Mongla Group in Eastern Shan State (NDAA); and	Shan State Army, North (Shan SSA-N);
New Democratic Army of Kachin.	Pao National Organization (Pao PNO);
	Palaung State Liberation Party (Palaung PSLP)

(Kivimäki &Pasch, 2009, pp. 29-30)

From the 1990s onwards, ethnic groups developed goals and different ideas on how to achieve group rights along the lines of mainly two divisions; a debate which has not ended yet. The first point of contention revolves around the question of how ethnic group rights should materialize. Some ethnic groups are in favour of building on the eight historically recognized nationalities or national races, whereas others advocate the same rights for smaller ethnic groups who often live within the territory of one of the seven nationalities. The second dividing line concerns different ways of dealing with the central government. Whereas many ethnic groups negotiated ceasefire agreements with the government, others continue fighting it to this day (Kivimäki & Pasch, 2009, p. 30). Moreover, some of the groups fought from within Myanmar, others did so in exile. Table 6 in the annex gives an overview of the different ethnic armed organizations. Although it is not a complete list, it suffices to illustrate the diverse landscape and especially the discrepancies in strength of their armies in today's Myanmar.

The divisions, differences and struggles between ethnic minority groups are often highlighted by President Thein Sein's government as the most challenging issue resulting from Myanmar's ethnic conflict. Actors with links to ethnic minority groups view this perspective as an attempt of the government to divert attention from the conflict between the ethnic armed organizations and the government itself. In fact, clashes between the army and ethnic armed organizations have become a way of life. The ethnic conflict has been revived with the change from military rule to a semi-civilian government in 2011. A new violent conflict in Kokang for example erupted in February 2015. Moreover, the Rohingya issue as well as the 'Buddhist

Women's Special Marriage Bill', which restricts the right to marry outside of their religion for Buddhist women and was adopted by the parliament in July 2015, are all examples which illustrate the weight of a concept of ethnicity that was compounded with religion and nationalism many decades ago but is still informing the politics of today's Myanmar.

A narrative about the Tatmadaw

The post-independence history of the country cannot be understood without grasping the variety of perspectives on the Tatmadaw as an institution. The Tatmadaw is relatively marginalized in the current peace process although being one of the most powerful and critical actors pertaining to Myanmar's future. Being responsible for democide, the mass rape of women in ethnic minority areas and terror, the Tatmadaw has become the *persona non grata* (Kivimäki & Pasch, 2009, p. 23). This perspective, which singles out the Tatmadaw, is creating the impression of a transition from the military government of Senior General Than Shwe to two separate entities, namely President Thein Sein's government and the military. However, the situation is much more complex. The Tatmadaw's own portrayal of its role builds on Burma's liberation by the BIA under the command of General Aung San and sketches an interpretation of the last 60 years in which the army has been the guardian of national unity carrying on General Aung San's legacy after his assassination in 1947 (ICG, 2001, p. 3). Upon independence, Prime Minister U Nu and his ruling party, the AFPFL, was not only facing challenges of rebuilding the country after the end of the Second World War but was at war with the Burma Communist Party and the Karen National Union (Len & Alvin, 2007, p. 11). General Ne Win, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Defence, was in charge of oppressing what was considered to be an insurgency against the Union of Burma. In doing so, the Tatmadaw gained importance.

Moreover, fighting troops of the Chinese Nationalist *Kuomintang in Burma* in the Shan State, which were backed by the Central Intelligence Agency of the United States, as well as the experience of colonization, were the first steps toward a deep-rooted scepticism among the Tatmadaw against all forms of foreign influence. The split in the AFPFL in 1958 led to an 18-month-reign of the military. Although the Tatmadaw handed the power back to U Nu after he won the elections in 1960, they did not back the government any longer and eventually overthrew it in 1962, subsequently establishing the Burma Socialist Programme Party as the only political party, taking control of the media and centralizing the economy. Burma experienced more than a decade of direct military rule until a civilian government was formed

in 1972 with Ne Win, who resigned from his military position, as president. 'The Burmese Way to Socialism' of Ne Win, however, did not help the economy to recover but brought Burma to the verge of a humanitarian crisis. Mass protests, which came to be known as the '8888 uprising', sparked yet another intervention by the Tatmadaw with General Sein Lwin, also known as the 'butcher of Rangoon', taking over in September of the same year. He was soon replaced by Dr Maung Maung (Len & Alvin, 2007, pp. 15-16). The State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC) announced its intention of holding elections and preparing a new constitution which, once ratified through a referendum, would constitute the legal basis of the new government (Taylor, 2009, p. 211). After the victory of Aung San Suu Kyi's NLD in the elections of 1990, it was this argument which was brought forward to justify why the newly elected government could not take office immediately. Drafting a new constitution was announced to be the first out of seven steps to democracy; a plan which was introduced by the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC), the successor of SLORC.

Despite the recent reforms and the shift to a semi-civilian government, the Tatmadaw still is a crucial political and economic actor in Myanmar. Although its companies have lost their monopolies, the military still has its 25 per cent bloc of seats in the parliament and various provisions entitle the Tatmadaw to declare a state of emergency. The army also appoints five out of eleven members of the National Defence and Security Council and has absolute authority and decision-making power over matters of security and defence (ICG, 2014, pp. 8-9). All of these powers are enshrined in the 2008 constitution. As it appears, the Tatmadaw is less involved in day-to-day politics but nevertheless it would be too early to argue, with the words of Andrew Selth, that the Tatmadaw is no longer a virtual state in a state (Selth, 2002, p. 270). After all, post-independence Myanmar only knows state-building as inherently linked to war (Callahan, 2003). Furthermore, it is pivotal to keep in mind that the recent transition did not change this reality yet; the Tatmadaw with 'a force of about 400,000 (Army: 375,000; Navy: 16,000; Air Force: 15,000)' is still militarily engaged in many parts of the country (Nakanishi, 2013, p. 2). Consequently, this chapter addresses an on-going armed conflict and the Tatmadaw as one of the key actors engaged in it.

4.1.2. Narratives explaining the transition

What is today generally referred to as Myanmar's process of transition raises many questions regarding the motivations of political and military actors, drivers of change and the likelihood of witnessing a reversal of the reform process but most importantly, what the transition is all

about. Is it economics or politics which drives the transition (Robinson, 2014)? Some scholars welcome the changes as evidence that it is 'the process of political liberalization and democratization that has developed new momentum since 2010 in Myanmar (Burma)' (Aspinall & Farrelly, 2014, p. 163). But is it a process of democratization as Aung San Suu Kyi argues or rather a series of more limited reforms (Kingsbury, 2014; Callahan, 2012, p. 5)? Is it a strategy of the current government to maintain the balance of power (Kowalewski, 2014)? The one thing that is certain is that the ex-general, Thein Sein became the president of the first semi-civilian government on March 30, 2011 since 1988. He is a former member of the leadership of the military government and had been prime minister from 2007 to 2011 and the head of the military-backed Union Solidarity Development Party until 2010 (Callahan, 2012, p. 4). Shortly after his inauguration as president, he succeeded in ending the stalemate between the government and Aung San Suu Kyi, cleared the way for her to run in the by-elections in 2012 and loosened the tight grip on the media and non-governmental organizations. Moreover, President Thein Sein expressed his wish to end Myanmar's violent conflict between the government and the ethnic armed organizations and suggested a comprehensive peace process with negotiating a Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement as the first step.

Despite these initial changes, there is no consensus on how to interpret the transition yet, as the opinions range from celebrating Myanmar's return to the path of democratization on the one hand, to criticizing the shift to a semi-civilian government as being part of SPDC's seven-step roadmap on the other (Robinson, 2014, p. 9). Accounts of representatives of ethnic groups are more hesitant when trying to explain the transition. As one interviewee put it, the government of President Thein Sein invited the 'ethnics' to the negotiation table. The 'ethnics' did not expect sympathy but took it for what it is, namely that there had been changes which were previously unthinkable. To illustrate these changes, it is useful to recall the government's strategy of insisting that the ethnic armed organizations should lay down their weapons, transform into political parties, win the election, and then change the constitution; which was unacceptable to them. Nowadays, the government does no longer talk about this initial idea but the question of the future of the ethnic armed organizations is a part of the negotiations. According to the interviewee, the change in perspective of the government is a result of dialogue and raises hopes that it is possible to make a difference (CSO-6, March 2015). Leaving aside the assessments of the nature of the transition for the time being,

reviewing the analyses of factors that contributed to the transition will help to examine how the current state of Myanmar is understood by academic and non-academic observers.

A question which haunts scholars and policy analysts alike, concerns the Tatmadaw: why did the military leadership agree to pave the way for a semi-civilian government? Interviews with 'individuals closely connected to the reform process', which were conducted by the International Crisis Group (ICG), suggest two major factors as having fostered an inclination to reform among Myanmar's military-political elite: first, the neighbour China and second, the nexus between economy and security (ICG, 2014, p. 7). Apparently, Myanmar's dependence on China was a growing concern as well as its underdeveloped economy which was seen as posing a threat to the country's security as it was lagging behind all other countries in the region. Despite these thoughts, it is important to recall that it is the second time in Myanmar's history of military rule that the regime formed a semi-civilian government. In the 1970s, Senior General Ne Win resigned from his military posts to become the president of a semi-civilian government. What was claimed then is put forward today as well, namely that the changes to a semi-civilian government in 2011 were neatly prepared by the military leadership. There is certainly no evidence available to the public which supports the assertion that Than Shwe 'handpicked his successors in the government and the military in a way to ensure their inability to threaten his personal, familial and commercial interests' (ICG, 2014, p. 4). Regardless of whether it was fully planned or not, the old 'iron triumvirate', that is the military, the government and a circle of crony capitalists, are now facing changes as their networks and previous government monopolies are breaking up and new actors are emerging. According to Robinson, new players or, in her words, 'power centres' are the parliament, especially the lower house, opposition groups and parties, business groups and individuals, civil society organizations and unions, local government structures and advisory bodies (Robinson, 2014, pp. 16-17).

One account, which rejects popular arguments such as the dependence on China, 'regime maintenance' or fear of mass protests by arguing that these assertions do not explain the timing of transition, offers an alternative perspective by drawing on the literature on military regimes (Jones, 2014). Emphasizing the temporary dimension of military rule as a response to perceived threats, Jones provides a reading of Myanmar's history which portrays the military coups as a measure to prevent the dissolution of the country and situates the ethnic conflict or 'centre-periphery conflict and the threat of ethnic-minority separatism' at the core of military rule (Jones, 2014, p. 785). By arguing that the Tatmadaw intervened to protect the unity of the

country, it is assumed that the their plan was to only stay in power as long as it would take to resolve the threat. Jones refers to the elections of 1990, the National Convention which was tasked with drafting a new constitution, and the 'Roadmap to Democracy' of 2003 with the sequencing of first, preparing a new constitution; second, holding a referendum on the new constitution and, third, new elections, as three attempts at transition. According to his interpretation, the third attempt completed the plan by offering a new constitution which was ratified via a referendum in 2008. Elections were held in 2010 – albeit being boycotted by the NLD – and a new government was inaugurated in 2011, thereby allowing the military to withdraw from day-to-day politics (Jones, 2014, pp. 785-791). In this narrative, which appears to sketch another version of the Tatmadaw's perspective but comes to different conclusions than the ICG report, the resolution of the ethnic conflict is of vital importance, the basic reasoning being that the military would go back to the barracks once the conflict between Myanmar's Bamar majority and ethnic minorities would no longer pose a threat to the unity of the country. Although most ethnic armed organizations signed ceasefire agreements in the 1990s and 2000s, the transition revived some of the ethnic conflicts. Against the backdrop of Jones' research, efforts to pacify Myanmar and particularly the ongoing peace process appear in a different light as it is no longer solely the genuine offer of President Thein Sein but also the make-or-break question for Myanmar's transition to a civilian government. Moreover, nationalism along ethnic lines has led to movements such as the 969 Movement led by the Buddhist monk U Wirathu, 'and subsequently the monk-led Organization for the Protection of Race and Religion, or Ma Ba Tha. The latter has stimulated efforts to adopt legislation which make religious conversation difficult and highlighted other communally charged issues including birth control, polygamy, and inter-faith marriage' (Taylor, 2015, p. 5). These forms of nationalism can further challenge Myanmar's peace process.

In view of the variety of narratives on Myanmar's conflict and the recent transition, it can be concluded that the assembled perspectives are quite diverging with some being more popular than others. For instance, Myanmar's struggles of democratization as embodied by Aung San Suu Kyi and criticism of human rights abuses, or the current situation of the Rohingya in Rakhine State, are more dominant and attract much more attention in American and European media outlets when compared to the ongoing violent conflicts between the Tatmadaw and various ethnic armed organizations. In addition, it is possible to observe a tendency of US and EU representatives but also scholars 'to portray Myanmar in stark black and whites' (Khin

Zaw Win, 2013, p. 9). Compared to other conflict regions in the world, Myanmar is surely not the country most researched and the circle of experts that is scholars and practitioners for whom Myanmar has been a focal area already from before the transition, is relatively small. A conflict resolution professional, who is working and living in Myanmar, summarized the state of the art on Myanmar by noting that it is very difficult to find an expert who is not only knowledgeable of one or a selected number of ethnic states but can cover the country as a whole (CA-1, March 2015). This overview of narratives of conflict provides the basis for assembling the practices of EU mediation support in Myanmar. It facilitates understanding the accounts of interviewees and allows for situating their assessments against the background of dominant narratives of conflict. We now turn to examining how officials of the Union problematized the transition of the country so that the instrument of supporting mediation efforts of President Thein Sein's government came to be seen as necessary and eventually developed into a set of practices at the heart of the EU's policy approach towards Myanmar.

4.2. Translating EU-Myanmar relations: A shift in the problematization

Following the appointment of Thein Sein as the new president of Myanmar in 2011 by the Pyidaungsu Hluttaw, the parliament of Myanmar, a group of mostly European Commission officials began to form associations to agitate for mending fences with Myanmar and to support the lifting of sanctions. They called into question the previous problematization of the Union's policy approach towards the country which primarily criticized the military regime and human rights violations especially regarding Aung San Su Kyi but was oblivious to the more complex conflict realities. Consequently, it is not astounding that some of these EU officials with most of them having a history of working on Myanmar, concurred with the researchers, who argued that the history of the country had been misunderstood for a long time and various narratives ignored by most actors of the so-called international community. According to them, this led to simplified and false conclusions about main actors in Myanmar's conflicts such as the Tatmadaw and Aung San Su Kyi (EU-8, March 2015). Most European and American officials had been taking a tough stance on the military government as of the 1990s 'for which no credit could be given for any achievement' but to demand regime change (Taylor, 2009, pp. 210-11). Without a permanent representation in the country and corresponding difficulties of access to on-site information as well as a long period of military rule which did not welcome external engagement, there were little incentives for EU officials more generally to invest time on grappling with Myanmar's multifaceted history. The small group of EU actors, however, was lobbying for a different problematization which

understood the transition to a semi-civilian government as a historic opportunity. In doing so, they were trying to enrol the Council for it had to accept its role as envisioned by the problematization that is to adopt the new policy approach and lift the sanctions. This implied working towards a gradual change of perceptions among officials in the Council. Whereas the Union offered political support to President Thein Sein's government, several member state representatives were hesitant to give their consent to lift the sanctions but advocated suspending them. Their reluctance was overcome in the following year and the way of reasoning about Myanmar's challenges and most pressing problems, as outlined in the Council Conclusions, changed considerably. In fact, it is possible to detect a shift in how Myanmar's developments were problematized. From primarily criticizing the authoritarian government, its human rights violations as well as the flawed elections of 2010, the perspective of EU actors and member states representatives, who were involved in drafting the Council Conclusions, widened and began to embrace the transition as an opportunity to foster peace in the country as a precondition for building a democratic state and promoting sustainable development. So how did this shift in the problematization take place?

A closer look at the controversy among EU actors in spring 2011 on the question of how to respond to the transition to a semi-civilian government in Myanmar reveals that the small group of actors in favour of lifting the sanctions almost succeeded. This was due to the fact that their problematization was partially accepted by the Council for they agreed that the political developments in Myanmar could turn out to be a historical opportunity (Council of the European Union, 2011a). When the former head of state of Myanmar, Senior General Than Shwe, disappeared from the political scene, Thein Sein's succession was considered to be not only the beginning of the end of military rule but also the first move towards a civilian government although nothing changed about the EU's view regarding the elections of 2010 which were seen as deeply flawed (EU-8, March 2015). However, the question of how to respond to the transition caused disagreement. According to an EU official and member of the small group lobbying for a change in the Union's policies towards Myanmar, the momentum had to be seized by firstly, allowing the sanctions under the Common Position to expire, and secondly by offering political support as a means of building common ground (EU-8, March 2015). Regarding the direct sanctions, the Council had to approve them annually in April, thus, not approving them would have been a straightforward step towards a new chapter in EU-Myanmar relations. In the beginning, it looked promising that the sanctions would be lifted but shortly before the Council meeting in April 2011, one member state reversed its

position and another one followed suit, with the effect that the direct sanctions of the Council were only suspended. This reflects that the EU member states representatives, who rejected the lifting of sanctions, were acknowledging the political reform process but were still sceptical about what the transition would bring. The new government of Myanmar was acrimonious and explanations of the sanctions as still being in place but not applied anymore irritated more than they helped to ease the situation (EU-8, March 2015). It took another year until the member states eventually agreed on lifting the sanctions altogether.[6] Despite this controversy, the small group of mostly European Commission officials successfully advocated to strengthen relations with Myanmar. As a result, political support was offered to Thein Sein's government and the offer was accepted. In 2012 a field office was opened in Yangon which became the official delegation in 2013 with Roland Kobia as its first resident Ambassador. The number of EU staff responsible for Myanmar grew from a handful of people, who had been operating from the EU office in Bangkok during the time of Myanmar's foreclosure, to a full-fledged delegation with more than 40 people within merely three years.

As it becomes apparent, developing ideas on how to respond to the changes in Myanmar took place against the backdrop of how to comprehend what was happening in the country. It was a gradual process of scrutinizing the problematization although it did not alter the political rationality which had guided EU action in previous years. Its *telos* and at the same time solution to Myanmar's problems envisioned 'a peaceful transition to a democratic, civilian and inclusive system of government' through 'genuine dialogue between all stakeholders, including the ethnic groups and the opposition' (Council of the European Union, 2010, p. 1). As such, the military regime was problematized and the struggles of the opposition and the ethnic groups were seen as resolvable through dialogue and an inclusive and democratic state. This problematization fuses the ethnic conflict and the movement of what is often referred to as the democratic opposition. What is more, its *telos* builds on the knowledge claim that 'a democratic, civilian and inclusive system of government' is key to resolving the conflicts of the country, thereby viewing the civil war as a violent conflict over a specific regime type.

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[6] Direct sanctions of the Council, such as asset freezes and visa bans, are only one out of three different types of sanctions at the EU's disposal. The second type of sanctioning are sanctions under the General System of Preferences (GSP) which are prepared by the Commission and adopted by the Council and were also employed against Myanmar's military regime. For the sake of completeness, the third form of sanctioning relies on indirect mechanisms like withholding humanitarian aid and development cooperation; a policy tool, which Myanmar experienced in the aftermath of cyclone Nargis in 2008 when humanitarian aid of the EU fell short of the amount of envelopes of comparable natural disasters (EU-8, March 2015). While the Council could not agree on lifting the direct sanctions, the Commission was already preparing a new policy in 2011 which, once adopted by the Council, would abolish sanctions under GSP.

Also the government under President Thein Sein was mainly seen in the context of the contested elections of 2010 which were considered as not 'compatible with internationally accepted standards' and gave rise to 'continuing concerns about the respect of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the country' (Council of the European Union, 2010, p. 1). Thus, the Council renewed its sanctions in April 2011 but, guided by the idea of dialogue, suspended the restrictive measures for civilian members of the new government and allowed high-level bilateral meetings (Council of the European Union, 2011a). Even in January 2012, when the Council Conclusions took notice of 'the remarkable programme of political reform', the wording still gave priority to these processes by mentioning them first and addressing the country's ethnic conflict only as '[t]he Council *also* welcomes the Government's efforts to seek peace with ethnic groups' (Council of the European Union, 2012, p. 1; emphasis added by the author). This problematization stands in stark contrast to the view of an EU official, who worked in Myanmar, and perceives its ethnic conflict as the make-or-break question for the future of the country. By adding a much more cautious assessment of the political developments, this account builds on a different understanding of Myanmar's conflicts and history, and critically engages with the dominant position in Brussels at this time by referring to the similarities between the liberalization of the 1990s and the developments of 2011 which are deliberately overlooked, as just one example (EU-8, March 2015). Accordingly, the group of EU actors with experience in working on Myanmar tried to elucidate and broaden the knowledge on the country among EU officials and to pass the message to Brussels that the ethnic conflict could not be solved only through political reform and democratization but would have to be addressed in its own right. The conclusions of the Council did indeed gradually acknowledge the conflict between the government and the ethnic groups as a distinct problem. In fact, the 'Comprehensive Framework for the European Union's policy and support to Myanmar/Burma' adopted by the Council on July 22, 2013, addresses peace in a remarkably different way than the Council Conclusions of the previous years. It establishes four focal areas of EU support: peace, democracy, development and trade, and finally, Myanmar's engagement with the international community (Council of the European Union, 2013, pp. 2-5). This shift in the problematization is considered to be the result of the engagement of this group of EU officials with experience regarding the country, spanning Brussels and Yangon with some of them based at the EEAS and others engaged in establishing the Union's office in Myanmar (EU-38, March 2015). According to the collected assessments, they were involved in developing the framework which served as an informal guidance for EU officials in Myanmar already before it became the official approach (EU-38,

March 2015; EU-8: March 2015). Consequently, the content of the EU's Myanmar policy was drafted on the basis of engaging with actors in Myanmar and the documents which fed into the framework were, as an interviewee put it, produced at the local level (EU-38, March 2015). The time to set up an EU strategy for Myanmar was short, given that only in early 2012 a Head of Yangon Office was appointed to open the first diplomatic mission to the country. Moreover, by the time the Council adopted the Comprehensive Framework in 2013, the discussions about the EU contribution to the peace process in Myanmar were beyond the stages of planning. In fact, the Union was already supporting the MPC.

So how does the political rationality as embodied in the Comprehensive Framework sketch the understanding of conflict and peace? It notes that '[d]ealing with the legacy of conflict, poverty, oppression and weak institutions will be the work of decades' (Council of the European Union, 2013, p. 1) and reiterates the familiar notion of peace as 'a precondition for consolidating democracy, promoting development and protecting human rights' (Council of the European Union, 2013, p. 2). As such, the previous concern, which focused on the military regime, human rights violations and the flawed elections of 2010, is still present in the Comprehensive Framework but depicts peace as a necessary step towards achieving the *telos* of a democratic Myanmar. Moreover, the observation that it will take decades for the country to overcome conflict, poverty, oppression and weak institutions seems to reflect the rationale of the approach to conflict, as discussed in the previous chapter, which perceives the conundrum of political violence, bad governance and a weak economy as at the heart of violent conflict. To foster peace in Myanmar, the EU policy framework introduces a strategy which differentiates between the process of negotiating a nationwide ceasefire and peace agreement and addressing inter-communal violence. The former envisions the Union to support the ceasefire negotiations and to build the capacity of all stakeholders, to use its leverage to ensure unrestricted access for humanitarian assistance, to engage in rehabilitation and development in ethnic areas and ensure conflict sensitivity and inclusiveness of all actions. The objectives to address inter-communal violence span supporting the training of a trustworthy police force as well as leveraging the government to holding offenders accountable, to engage in reconciliation efforts, and to tackle the problems in Rakhine State, in particular, the situation of the Rohingya minority.

So far the chapter juxtaposed the political rationality prior and after the transition to a semi-civilian government by following the controversy over the prospects of the political developments in Myanmar which became visible in the struggle over the question of lifting

the sanctions. In doing so, it was possible to observe the efforts of a small group of actors, which advanced a different perspective on the changes the country was facing. However, the assessment only briefly touched on the associations between these and other actors enrolled in the emerging assemblage of mediation with the funding of the MPC, as the Comprehensive Framework indicates, being a measure of capacity building for the government (Council of the European Union, 2013, p. 2). Thus zooming in on the moments of translation which gave rise to these practices is the next task of the chapter. To do so, the dimension of *techne* and material traces of the practices of mediation support as embodied by the MPC and the actors involved in supporting, establishing, and maintaining this semi-governmental actor-network at the heart of Myanmar's peace process will be assembled. Answering the question of how EU and non-EU actors of the assemblage collaborate with each other will form the basis for uncovering the political rationality, interessement devices, enrolment, and mobilization through spokespersons, or in other words, the moments of translation.

4.3. The moments of translation of EU support to the Myanmar Peace Centre

Assembling the techne *of EU mediation support to the MPC*

The MPC is located in Yangon and is both the government secretariat and the platform for negotiating the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement. As such, it has been at the heart of the peace process in Myanmar. Mandated to facilitate the negotiations of the ceasefire, the planning of the Political Dialogue, which is a process envisioned to develop a comprehensive peace agreement, it has also been engaged in all other peace-related matters including peacebuilding, assisting with the monitoring of the ceasefire, and establishing a Public Outreach Programme as well as an affiliated Mine Action Centre and Land Centre (Ganesan, 2014, p. 133). In this respect, the ceasefire was envisioned to be the first step which would be followed by Political Dialogue. The time schedule of the peace process changed several times owing to the negotiations of the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement taking longer than expected. Indeed, nine rounds of negotiations took place between the opening of the peace centre and involved parties announcing the conclusion of the final draft in April 2012. In the following weeks, the ethnic armed organizations organized a conference for the leaders to decide on whether or not to accept the draft. Eventually eight out of fifteen of the ethnic armed organizations and the government signed the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement on 15 October 2015. The EU among a few other international actors attended the ceremony in the capacity of a 'witness'.

The MPC took form as an actor-network which brought together government actors, business men, researchers, and representatives of ethnic armed organizations including returnees from exile. Its 13 Board members were selected from different ministries and were nominated by President Thein Sein, who also appointed his chief negotiator and former Minister for Railways and Transportation, U Aung Min, as chair of the Board of Management. The actors with ties to the ethnic armed organizations and returnees were included to represent the perspectives of other conflict parties and the stakeholders in exile (Ganesan, 2014, p. 131). Finally, four special advisors were recruited: 'Tin Maung Than and Hla Maung Shwe from Myanmar Egress, Yin Yin Nwe (a former United Nations appointee), and Thant Myint U, whose grandfather was former UN Secretary General U Thant' (Ganesan, 2014, p. 131). Overall, the MPC comprised of 150 people as regular staff and 8 senior officials in early 2015 (EU-3, Feb 2015). As Figure 5 illustrates, the peace centre was integrated into the

Fig. 5: Structure of the MPC
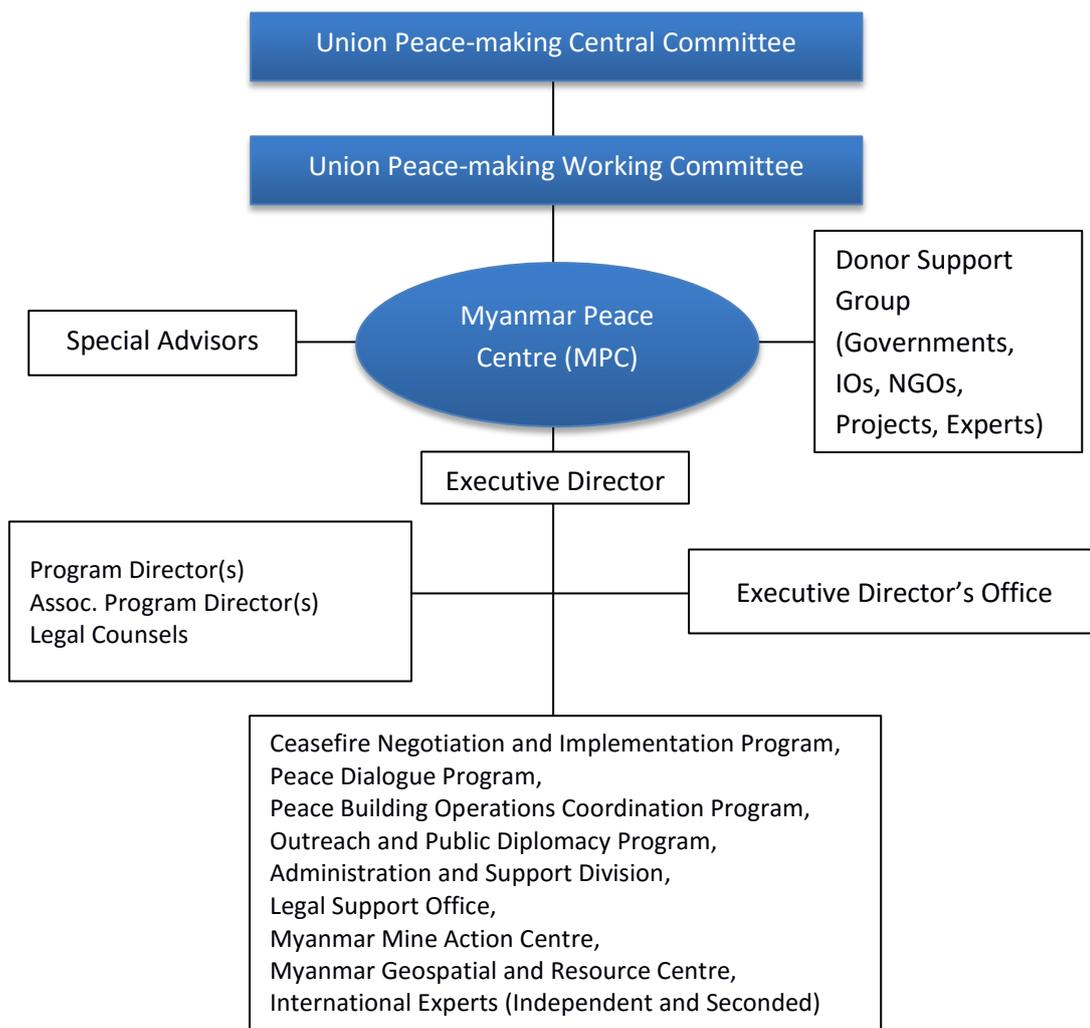
Source: Myanmar Peace Centre, 2016

government's peacebuilding mechanism through the selection of board members but also through the two government bodies, the Union Peace-making Central Committee (UPCC) and the Union Peace-making Working Committee (UPWC), which are at the top of the hierarchy and give rise to an asymmetry between staff of the government and ethnic minority groups. The MPC was officially established in October 2012.

So how did the MPC operate between 2012 and the end of 2015? On the one hand, it was assisting the Union Peace-making Central Committee and Union Peace-making Working Committee in its efforts to negotiate a Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement with another actor-network, the Nationwide Ceasefire Coordination Team (NCCT). The NCCT was founded in November 2013 as a representative for the 16 ethnic armed organizations. However, its mandate entailed negotiating the draft of the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement which, once ready, would have to be presented to the leaders of the ethnic armed organizations at a conference where the question of signing it would be determined. The NCCT did not represent all ethnic armed organizations and was in fact involved in a conflict with the United Nationalities Federal Conference (UNFC), an ethnic coalition which is the former Committee for the Emergence of a Federal Union, pertaining to 'who should own the process, the NCCT or the UNFC' or who should be the spokesperson of the ethnic armed organizations (Keenan, 2014, p. 2). Moreover, it should be noted that from the outset of the negotiations not all of Myanmar's ethnic armed organizations were represented by the NCCT either because they were not interested in the initiative of the government or they did not fulfil the requirement of concluding a bilateral ceasefire before joining the MPC-led process. The negotiations between the parties – the government and the NCCT – were facilitated by internal mediators with a business and civil society background. Together the group of actors was working on a draft of the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement written by representatives of the ethnic armed organizations which was accepted by the government as a basis for negotiations. As such, the peace process was facilitated by the MPC, which was subordinate to the Union Peace-making Central Committee and Union Peace-making Working Committee of the government, and formed associations with the NCCT in the ceasefire negotiations.

The EU was part of these networked relations through its practices of funding and providing political and technical support. Since the inception of the MPC, the EU has financed the operational costs of the MPC through the Instrument contributing to Stability and Peace until recently, when DEVCO took over and began to provide the funds for the MPC as part of bilateral support of the EU to Myanmar. DEVCO is supposed to bridge the gap until a Multi-

donor Trust Fund is able to secure the funding in the long run. Although the EU was often perceived as the only funder of the MPC, it should be noted that a number of businessmen from Myanmar invested in the centre, that Myanmar's government donated four buildings in Yangon, Japan financed another building, and the UN provided vehicles (EU-3, Feb 2015; EU-8, March 2015). Thus, the EU was the main albeit not the sole funder of the MPC and provided the funds for the salaries of the staff and all other required expenditures regarding the operational costs (CA-1, March 2015). In addition to the practices of funding, EU actors were also involved in supporting the creation of the centre. In fact, representatives of the Union and their local counterparts worked together towards conceptualizing the MPC. According to the view of an interviewed EU official, Myanmar's government was struggling to find adequate means to deliver on the promise of pursuing national reconciliation (EU-38, March 2015). At the same time, the EU was setting up its office in Yangon and only a small team was available to take on the numerous tasks. On request of Robert Cooper, the Mediation Support Team began to support EU staff in Yangon and carried out a needs assessment for the MPC in the summer of 2012. This practice of in-house mediation support was the entry point for the Mediation Support Team to form associations with the small group working in the EU office in Yangon. One EU official, who is well acquainted with the Mediation Support Team member who was responsible for Myanmar, described the collaboration with the group of people in Yangon as basically having another team member in Brussels (EU-5, Feb 2015). The needs assessment served the purpose of advising Myanmar officials on launching the peace centre. According to an EU official, who had access to the final document of the needs assessment, this mission also offered insights on two main issues: first, on how to support the MPC and second, it provided an assessment of risks for the Union of getting involved in this project (EU-38, March 2015). Regarding the first concern, the need for institutionalizing President Thein Sein's attempt at negotiating ceasefires was identified and direct funding through the EU suggested in addition to various measures on how to strengthen the role of the EU in the peace process such as aspiring to chair the Peace Donor Support Group and to consider appointing a senior advisor on peace processes to support the delegation in Yangon. The second concern, the risk assessment, emphasized the nature of the MPC as part of the government mechanism as a point of contention but acknowledged that an inclusive process would not be feasible at this stage of the process. Thus, it recommended EU support to other mediation and dialogue initiatives to prevent the formation of a monopoly.

Much has changed since the early days of the assemblage of mediation support. The member of the Mediation Support Team, who was responsible for Myanmar, no longer works for the EU. Roland Kobia has replaced the Head of Office in Yangon as the Union's Ambassador to Myanmar, and the staff of the delegation has considerably grown in number. At the time of the fieldwork in Yangon in March 2015, EU actors maintained relations with the MPC in primarily three ways. First, they provided technical support and funding; second, they engaged in dialogue with the executive director and senior level personnel of the peace centre and the stakeholders of the conflict including the government, the NCCT, and UNFC. Third, they seized the opportunity of these communication channels to clarify misunderstandings or repeat statements of a conflict party, which, according to an EU official, could be described as a form of shuttle diplomacy (EU-11, March 2015). Regarding technical support, one of the people interviewed explained that they offer advice to the MPC and share EU experiences but notice that only some MPC members listen, while others do not (EU-10, March 2015). Practices of engaging in dialogue with conflict parties and stakeholders revolved around the EU's membership in various formats such as the Peace Support Group, their role as the funder of the MPC, and other meetings. For instance, they were often invited to events of the MPC such as the cocktail reception after the first day of the 7th round of negotiations, which gave them the opportunity to be present and informed during the weeks of negotiations without attending them (EU-10, March 2015). Moreover, there were also more routinized practices of EU engagement with the conflict stakeholders. To give an example, after every round of negotiations, the delegation in its capacity as a member of the Peace Support Group would meet with the NCCT. While the UNFC was less involved in the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement negotiations, EU officials collaborated with them too, for instance, in regards to the planned Joint Peace Fund, which was envisioned to pool donors and to secure the funding of the peace centre in the future. However, it should be noted that platforms such as the meetings of the Peace Support Group with the NCCT were not EU-specific but included other members of the group as well. These platforms facilitated the exchange with those conflict parties and stakeholders who were engaged in the peace process. EU officials seemed to be less comfortable in talking about the Tatmadaw and it more often than not required a direct question during the interviews. They seemed to have difficulties with forming associations with the Tatmadaw. As it appeared, they talked to the representatives of the army but perceived them as harder to reach, both physically and as regards content. The impressions were on the one hand that representatives of the Tatmadaw would be more comfortable to talk to military personnel than to officials in suits. On the other, the narrative of the Tatmadaw

was considered to be very different from the one of the EU, although EU officials tried to explain their perspective (EU-9 & EU-11, March 2015). In other words, the Tatmadaw seemed to be a challenging actor for EU personnel and accordingly not someone they liaised with as regularly as with other stakeholders of the conflict. In sum, these practices highlight how loosely connected the members of the delegation and the MPC were and gives the impression of the EU as a rather distant actor pertaining to the actual work on the peace process of the centre. This allows for concluding that the representatives of the Union did not have unique access or forms of collaboration with the MPC and the conflict parties as a result of funding the MPC. Were these practices envisioned this way? To answer this question, it is necessary to trace the processes of translation in greater detail. What political rationality gave rise to the practices of supporting the MPC? What did they problematize, and which *telos* is underlying the strategy, of which funding the peace centre forms a part? How were interessement devices employed to make the relevant actors accept their roles? Were they successfully enrolled? And who were the spokespersons in the assemblage?

Moments of translation of EU support to the MPC

Tracing the first moment of translation that is how EU actors problematized the developments in Myanmar unfolding in 2011 and how they began to support the emerging MPC points, once again, to the small group of officials, who were involved in the early days of EU-Myanmar relations. They recollect the process of how the idea of the MPC took shape as follows: Already in 2011 while on mission in Yangon, Myanmar was still part of the portfolio of the Bangkok EU delegation, and later when they were establishing an office in the country, EU officials met with the government, political parties, Christian churches, and Buddhist monks amongst others to build a network and to offer their support. At the same time, President Thein Sein had to deliver on his promise on making the ethnic conflict a priority during his term in office. In the beginning of 2012, the idea of a peace fund circulated in Yangon but, according to an EU official, money was not the problem; it was dialogue which was needed (EU-8, March 2015). When the government suggested a peace centre, which would be both a government secretariat and an autonomous platform, it was welcomed by the Union and soon considered as a potential contribution. The thought behind the MPC, as an EU actor noted, was to pave the way for a formalized and long-term oriented peace process which would include the ethnic armed organizations and would eventually lead to a Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement and Political Dialogue (EU-38, March 2015; Ganesan, 2015, p. 131). In this regard, the assessment of the situation by EU officials was informed by

a twofold problematization. First, the attempts at resolving the conflicts were considered as too informal and at risk of losing momentum (EU-39, October 2015). Although EU officials welcomed the initiative of U Aung Min, who was mandated to negotiate bilateral ceasefires on behalf of President Thein Sein, they perceived his efforts in collaboration with a few business men and founders of Myanmar Egress, a non-profit organization, who played a crucial role in facilitating access to the leaders of ethnic armed organizations, as unlikely to lead to a comprehensive peace agreement. Furthermore, EU officials noted that the ethnic armed organizations could rely on a network of people with expertise in conflict resolution and peace process design, while the government actors seemed to pursue an ad-hoc approach. Accordingly, it was the government which was identified as in need of capacity building (EU-39, October 2015). A year later, in 2013 the Comprehensive Framework listed capacity building measures as a part of peace support and mentioned '[…] the ongoing support to the Myanmar Peace Centre' as such a measure for the government (Council of the European Union, 2013, p. 2). In other words, the EU actors, who were working on Myanmar, aimed at seizing the opportunity by pushing for a comprehensive peace agreement. Hence, the *telos* of the Union's peace support was to make sure that the ethnic conflict would be addressed and a structured and long-term oriented peace process was the first step towards achieving this goal. In this regard, the suggested peace centre, which President Thein Sein was committed to create with or without the help of external actors, was a suitable starting point for expanding the peacebuilding capacity of the government. The accounts of the involved EU officials diverge in retrospect pertaining to the rationale behind the MPC. According to one person, the idea, which was guiding their efforts during the planning of the peace centre, was to establish an institution akin to a ministry for peace similar to the experiences of Nepal (EU-39, October 2015). Another perspective on why they were willing to support an institute, which would combine the platform for negotiations and the government secretariat, was the notion of having a peace process which bridges track 1 and 2 (EU-8, March 2015). According to this account, they were trying to avoid a 1.5 process because an officially mandated process, which involves the government, was needed to restore peace (EU-8, March 2015). It is difficult to assess whether or not these differences reflect the perspectives of the interviewees in 2011 or developed rather in retrospect, hence, these accounts are complemented with the recollection of an interviewee on the needs assessment conducted in summer 2012. According to the interviewee, the needs assessment was in line with the aforementioned problematization and did not only refer to the envisioned peace institute as the *Government of Myanmar Peace Centre* but also emphasized the likely consequences and criticism of EU support by providing

a risk assessment. In doing so, it addressed the pitfalls of such an undertaking and gave advice on how to mitigate the negative effects. The needs assessment, as the interviewee explained, recommended various ways of supporting the staff of the office in Yangon and warned about centralizing all peacebuilding initiatives under the ambit of the peace centre as detrimental to the peace process due to its link to the government (EU-39, October 2015). In addition, it also gave advice on how to consolidate the supporting role of the EU in the peace process. In other words, the needs assessment advanced a problematization, *telos*, and strategy to establish the Union as the obligatory passage point of the assemblage of mediation for it would provide direct funding to the MPC and also be in charge of preventing the MPC from monopolizing the peace infrastructure in Myanmar.

Against this background it is important to note that the EU officials responsible for Myanmar in 2015 did neither mention the initial idea of supporting an institution akin to a ministry for peace nor it being a capacity building measure for the government. Instead they remarked that the MPC is not an example of pure mediation despite its task of providing the platform for negotiating a durable peace agreement which brings together multiple conflict stakeholders including the ethnic armed organizations. What is more, another EU actor argued that the MPC was originally supposed to be much more neutral than what it has become (EU-5, Feb 2015). It would seem that the initial ideas do not inform the current thinking of EU personnel involved in the practices of mediation support to the MPC itself. The same applies to the MPC which did not portray itself as a government institution but as a mediator between the government and the ethnic side. As a result, representatives of organizations with links to ethnic armed organizations considered it necessary to explain why the MPC is not an impartial actor but a supporting mechanism to the government's Union Peace-making Working Committee (e.g. CSO-7, March 2015). Yet the members of the centre were not necessarily representing the government. According to an interviewee, the participants often had to deal with misunderstandings during the rounds of negotiating the ceasefire in that it was not always clear whether the MPC was voicing the government's position or speaking on its own behalf (CSO-9, March 2015). The finding that neither EU officials working on Myanmar nor actors from Myanmar, who were involved in the peace process, remember the initial idea of a ministry for peace or, more generally, the notion of a peace centre of the government hints at potential struggles regarding the use of interessement devices to lock actors into their envisioned roles.

A closer look at the second and third moment of translation, how interessement devices were employed to make the actors accept their roles, reveals two key developments which shaped the processes of enrolment: the partial refusal of actors to accept the envisioned roles and changes of both staff and the interpretation of practices of mediation support on the part of the EU. The crucial interessement device were the practices of funding the MPC itself as they were meant to create a platform which would ensure that all relevant stakeholders of the conflict would be enrolled into a formal peace process as envisioned by the problematization of the needs assessment. Several leaders of ethnic armed organizations, however, refused to participate in the MPC-led process. The government insisted on signing a bilateral ceasefire with every ethnic armed organization before the respective group could join the negotiations of a nationwide ceasefire, thereby excluding those who were still fighting against the Tatmadaw. Moreover, the choice of combining the government secretariat and the platform for peace negotiations in one institution was met with refusal by the ethnic minority groups. Early on the question was raised whether or not the ethnic minority groups would need their own institute. According to an interviewee, EU officials were against two centres as they were advocating an institute which would be trustworthy to accommodate both the government and the ethnic groups (EU-8, March 2015). In this vein, the English name, Myanmar Peace Centre, was chosen as a measure to prevent new conflict issues from rising due to linguistic differences and meanings carried by different Burmese terms. Nevertheless, the ethnic armed organizations and civil society groups founded the *Pyidaungsu Institute for Peace and Dialogue* in August 2013 (CSO-7, March 2015). Its structure and tasks did not challenge the MPC as the platform for the negotiations of the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement. The Pyidaungsu Institute rather seems to fill gaps and, in doing so, points to a shortcoming of the MPC: namely that the link of the MPC to the government blurred the line between a platform for negotiations and being the supporting mechanism for the government negotiators since it was neither openly called a ministry for peace nor clearly stated how it would accommodate and support the ethnic armed organizations. This raised the question of who would lead the process of developing a shared approach among the different ethnic armed organizations as a basis for negotiating the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement. And that is precisely what the Pyidaungsu Institute offered. Its main function has been to provide research and analysis of relevant topics, to serve as a common space for knowledge exchange and to assist the stakeholders in advancing a shared political vision (CSO-7, March 2015). In doing so, the Pyidaungsu Institute carried out a supporting function to the representatives of ethnic armed organizations in that it assisted them in developing a common strategy as regards the

negotiations of the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement and the envisaged Political Dialogue. The idea of the institute was the result of a needs assessment and lessons learned which also involved an advisor of the Common Space Initiative, Hans Siebert, who had worked in South Africa and Yemen amongst other places (CSO-7, March 2015). The operational costs of the institute were financed by the Euro Burma Office, which has also been an implementing partner of the EU. The Common Space Initiative and a Finish non-governmental organization funded the costs of research (CSO-7, March 2015). As an EU delegation official put it in 2015, the institute has become an important organization for Myanmar's peace process (EU-10, March 2015).

In sum, the MPC with its dual structure of being the government secretariat and the platform for negotiating the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement was considered as not providing the forum for the ethnic armed organizations to develop a common position among themselves. The idea of the MPC did not facilitate this process for the ethnic minority groups but was perceived as only performing this task for the government, as Salai Lian Hmong Sakhong, who is a member of the Board of Directors of the Pyidaungsu Institute, explained. 'It seems the ethnics' institute is similar to the government-affiliated Myanmar Peace Centre, but they are distinctly different. While the MPC is the driving force for [only the] the government, this institute is not for just one group, we work for all different ethnic groups' (Nyein, 2014). As such, the creation of the Pyidaungsu Institute highlights that the problematization of the needs assessment was never successfully inscribed in the MPC. The interessement device of funding the peace centre did not manage to make the targeted actors accept their roles. The problematization of the needs assessment did not envision the MPC to be neutral but as a government mechanism. However, the peace centre did not develop in this way but became an actor-network which was subject to the government of Myanmar but not identical with it. Moreover, the needs assessment considered the MPC to be a capacity building measure for the government and did not identify the ethnic armed organizations as requiring additional support. At the same time, several leaders of said organizations refused to accept their role in the MPC-led process in that some of them did not participate, thereby rendering the notion of an inclusive process unlikely.

The second development which affected the processes of enrolment is connected to the changes of both EU staff and how the practices of supporting the MPC were interpreted. So far, the study worked with the conceptualization of mediation as it is outlined in the Concept of 2009. According to this, the EU engagement in Myanmar would qualify as a part of

mediation practices even without taking on a role as either the lead or co-mediator, if EU actors promoted, supported, leveraged, or funded mediation initiatives of other actors. Accordingly, speaking of the EU's contribution to Myanmar's transition as practices of mediation support reflects the nature of the Union's activities, which aim at building peace. However, how did the EU actors responsible for supporting the MPC perceive their work? Did they think of it as a type of mediation involvement or did they conceptualize it differently? Accordingly, it was important to let EU actors specify what it was they had been doing to support the peace process in Myanmar akin to Latour's reflection that '[t]he task of defining and ordering the social should be left to the actors themselves, not taken up by the analyst' (Latour, 2005, p. 23). The collected accounts answer these questions in two different ways: they detail how peace process support emerged as a part of the EU response and what these practices have become in the course of the three years.

The first set of answers refers to 2011 with the controversy in EU circles on whether to uphold, suspend or lift the sanctions, which was sparked by the change to a semi-civilian government, and focuses on the struggle of offering political support rather than the nature of EU involvement (e.g. EU-8, March 2015). Consequently, the EU's later role as one of the main supporters of the peace process in Myanmar did not develop smoothly. For instance, when the team in Yangon requested funding for the MPC, many actors in Brussels considered it as being too costly (EU-8, March 2015). In retrospect, the numbers are negligible compared to the funding which was granted more recently in the Multiannual Indicative Programme 2014-2020[7] with a total of 688 million Euro of which 103 million Euro were designated for peace support (European Union - Development Cooperation Instrument, 2014, p. 10). This set of answers also demonstrates why EU mediation and Myanmar were difficult to reconcile for most officials insofar as the peace process was home-grown and the absence of engagement of external actors a key characteristic (EU-8, March 2015). However, the team of the Union in Yangon benefited from the practices of in-house mediation support early on, although, as an EU official stressed, Myanmar posed a challenge to the newly established Mediation Support Team. In fact, the requests they received covered a broad range of topics from how to establish a trust fund to can the EU talk to armed groups, which raised the question of whether or not this was part of mediation support (EU-38, March 2015). However, the transition to a semi-civilian government was timely in that the in-house mediation support team took office

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[7] The document details the strategy and spending of the funds available through the Development Cooperation Instrument.

in late 2011 and was discussing potential areas of engagement when Robert Cooper requested the needs assessment. Once President Thein Sein asked the group of foreign donors to coordinate among themselves, the Mediation Support Team had its entry point and helped to carve out the EU's contribution to the peace process in Myanmar (EU-38, March 2015). Put differently, the Union's practices of supporting the MPC developed through associations between the officials responsible for Myanmar and a member of the Mediation Support Team. In this regard, the needs assessment of the Mediation Support Team was crucial for the practices of supporting the MPC to emerge. However, it is important to take note of the different perspectives with some EU officials referring to the MPC as peace support and others, including the Concept, as mediation support or a type of EU mediation involvement.

As to the second set of answers to the question of how EU officials who were responsible for the MPC in 2015 perceived their work, it is striking that most interviewed officials did not refer to the practices of supporting the MPC as related to mediation or facilitation but eagerly emphasized the suitability of the EU for supporting the peace centre and being the main supporter, politically and financially, of the peace process of the country (e.g. EU-11, March 2015). The suitability was established by highlighting that the Union was neither pursuing strong geo-political interests in the country nor a neighbour and generally perceived as relatively neutral which allowed them to be an altruistic and well-meaning partner (EU-11 & EU-8, March 2015). So mediation was not mentioned but what could be seen as mediator-like qualities was deemed necessary to support the peace process in Myanmar. Questions on how they supported the government in its commitment to reconcile the ethnic nationalities, however, revealed that the EU ambassador to Myanmar sometimes engaged in a form of shuttle diplomacy when talking to the government and the ethnic armed organizations, who participated in the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement negotiations (EU-11, March 2015). These situations were not actively sought after; rather they arose out of occasions like having a meeting with both sides on the same day and being able to reiterate and put forward the position of the actor who was not present, thereby clarifying and mitigating the debate on a contentious issue. EU ambassador Roland Kobia was mentioned as being very skilled when it comes to passing messages from one conflict party to another which was attributed to his previous experience in working in conflict-affected countries such as Somalia, South Sudan, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. These accounts illustrate that most of the EU officials conceptualized mediation primarily as being the lead or co-mediator of a process of conflict resolution. The Concept of 2009 and its various types of mediation involvement, that

is supporting, promoting, funding and leveraging of mediation of other actors, was not mentioned once by the interviewed delegation officials. Instead they embraced promoting, supporting and funding of mediation efforts of others as a part of political support of the EU to the MPC. This hints at a conceptualization of mediation in the narrow sense, namely as being the lead or co-mediator, and does not reflect the broad approach of the Mediation Support Team, which tried to pass the message to their colleagues in the delegation that supporting mediation efforts of others is part of mediation involvement and leads to challenges which appertain to processes of mediation more generally. Accordingly, EU delegation officials were not fully aware of how their support to the MPC strengthened the government as the actor who was leading the peace process and how this could aggravate their asymmetric relationship to the government and ethnic actors.

The principle of the practices of supporting the peace centre could be described as support and non-interference. This oxymoronic notion was conceptualized as political and technical support or, in Barroso's words, 'We commit to support the work of this Centre and to walk by your side in this quest. We want to be partners, not lecturers, we want to share our experience, advice and assistance, but the only actors are the citizens of Myanmar' (European Commission, 2012, p. 3). The interviewed EU officials did not grow tired of explaining why they did not interfere in the work of the MPC: the arguments ranged from the necessity of respecting the country's sovereignty, the organic and home-grown nature of the peace process, to the stance, which is similar to that of a mediator, that they could not impose anything but only advise and recommend (EU-10 & EU-11 & EU-5, Feb 2015). Moreover, they differentiated between technical and political support to the peace centre. For instance, one interviewee noted that from a technical point of view, the collaboration with the MPC was good; albeit from a political perspective, the MPC was a difficult environment to operate in (EU-10, March 2015). The last point refers to difficulties of collaborating with senior staff of the MPC but also to the view of many civil society groups and ethnic organizations, which saw the funding of the MPC as direct support to the government. Hence, EU officials often faced criticism of being biased towards the government and decisions of the MPC were often considered to be in line with the position of the Union. For instance, NGOs voiced their concern that the salaries of senior staff members of the MPC were too high at a civil society dialogue meeting – a view, which EU officials did not share (EU-3, Feb 2015) – and Aung Min, chairman of the MPC, was confronted with the same criticism by NLD Member of Parliament, Win Htein (Myanmar Eleven, 2014). EU officials were aware of how the funding

of the MPC had an impact on how they were perceived. In response, they were trying to inform civil society groups and stakeholders about EU support to other actors, including ethnic groups and areas, thereby highlighting that only a small share of the financial envelope had been dedicated to the funding of the MPC (EU-11, March 2015). One EU official summarized this situation as a lesson learned and concluded that the more an external actor engages in resolving conflict, the more criticism he or she must anticipate (EU-11, March 2015). From the perspective of the processes of translation, the criticism the EU was facing in Myanmar reveals a more profound threefold pattern of a tension between the problematization of the peace process of the group of EU actors involved in the early days of EU-Myanmar relations and the problematization and practices of the fully developed delegation in 2015. At first, the current officials working on Myanmar did not advocate the same problematization and the idea of a ministry for peace. Also the recommendations of the risk assessment had been forgotten. Second, the processes of enrolling the stakeholders of the peace process by making them accept their roles as defined by the problematization failed. Third, being a delegation of the Union to Myanmar subjects its staff to certain practices which establish and maintain associations between them and the government. This produces a form of dependence on a key party to the conflict. This becomes apparent when examining the struggles EU officials faced when implementing certain project ideas. Of course EU actors had their own ideas regarding the peace process which informed their decisions. After emphasizing that it is the responsibility of the government and the NCCT to draft the programme of the peace process, the interviewed officials were willing to comment on how they envision the process with the dominant version being, first, finalize the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement; second, provide support to the Political Dialogue; third, establish ceasefire monitoring and observation mechanisms; and fourth, promote security sector reform (SSR) and disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (DDR). To coordinate support for implementing the sequencing of the process, the EU delegation advocated the objectives of setting up a Joint Peace Fund of the Peace Support Group to finance the Political Dialogue, the Ceasefire Monitoring Mechanism, and a Joint Peacebuilding Needs Assessment (EU-10, March 2015; EU-3, Feb 2015). The idea of the Joint Peacebuilding Needs Assessment, which envisioned the involvement of all stakeholders of the conflict including the government, ethnic armed organizations, civil society, and international actors, was an attempt to take the perspectives of everyone involved in the peace process into consideration. However, the government informed the EU that it is moving too fast; hence, the project had to be put on hold (EU-10, March 2015). This illustrates that even though EU officials tried to employ the financial

instruments to promote and address the shortcomings of the peace process, they were to an extent dependent on the approval of Myanmar's government as a result of being a delegation. This sheds a different light on the Union's practices of supporting the MPC and, more generally, peace support, and raises the question: how much room for manoeuvre did EU actors actually have? Against this background, the EU's supportive standpoint, which emphasized Myanmar's organic and home-grown process, as well as the importance of local ownership, has to be revisited by asking, whom did this statement of a home-grown process and its implications serve? The scepticism against external engagement in Myanmar goes back to the time when external actors supported ethnic armed organizations and imposed sanctions against Myanmar's military regime. Not long ago, Minister Aung Min and chairman of the MPC stated that '[t]hirty foreign countries provide aid through NGOs. Mainly due to this support, the armed conflicts live on', however, he added, '[n]ow [foreign governments] have turned their attention to the [Union] government to give us support as they trust us' (Myanmar Eleven, 2014). This statement reflects that Aung Min perceived the external actors to be on the government side. Whereas the EU had been funding non-governmental organizations in ethnic areas, the practices of supporting the MPC in combination with being dependent on Myanmar's government, helped to establish the peace centre as the obligatory passage point of the peace infrastructure of Myanmar. The practices of EU support to the MPC contributed to this emerging monopoly. Whereas it might be true that, as an interviewee put it, the Tatmadaw would not have agreed to a mechanism without a certain degree of control (EU-4, Feb 2015), the point here is not to prove false what this interviewee said but to allude to the implications of the MPC regarding the infrastructure of peacebuilding initiatives. It became the obligatory passage point for every peace-related initiative and, at the same time, part of the government mechanism, that is to say, it was closely linked to one of the most essential parties to the ethnic conflict: the government of Myanmar. Hence, practices of EU mediation support in this form replicated and enrolled the Union in a basic dynamic of the ethnic conflict, namely the attempted domination of the government over the ethnic armed organizations.

In sum, assembling the processes of translation of EU support to the MPC as to the political rationality, interessement devices, and failing enrolment allows for drawing the following conclusion. The struggles of supporting the MPC rendered visible that the relevant EU and non-EU actors never fully accepted the problematization of the group of EU officials in the early days of EU-Myanmar relations. At first, the rotation of officials of the Union was not

conducive to upholding the hypotheses of the problematization as most of them were forgotten, including the recommendations of the risk assessment. Second, what turned out to be practices of political and technical support could neither establish the EU delegation as an obligatory passage point nor prevent the emerging monopoly of the MPC. Instead the government-associated centre became the obligatory passage point and enrolled the EU as the provider of funds. The Union accepted this role in the home-grown peace process. As a conflict resolution professional in Yangon explained, if the Union was to decide against extending its support to the MPC, he could think of a number of other external actors who would be happy to fill in (CA-1, March 2015). This constitutes a challenge, which EU actors should have addressed, according to the findings of the previous chapter, with the help of a number of instruments and tools of in-house mediation support, which facilitate assessing the conflict, calculating risks, and ensuring conflict-sensitive programming. So how do EU officials reflect on the use of these tools which were part of the one-week training in October 2014?

Assembling practices of in-house mediation support

In October 2014 the delegation staff had a one-week training which the Mediation Support Team and Conflict Analysis Team of K2 facilitated in cooperation with external consultants including the Folke Bernadotte Foundation and a conflict resolution professional, who is based in Yangon. The training schedule covered conflict analysis, which was explored through role plays and concrete examples from Myanmar, and individual coaching sessions for key personnel of the delegation (EU-38, March 2015). The interviewed officials considered the training as helpful but as unable to tap into its full potential due to the different levels of knowledge on Myanmar among delegation staff (EU-11, March 2015). Having to accommodate these differences resulted in the training being more useful to some actors and less so for others. As a follow-up after the training, delegation staff requested advice on topics such as local monitoring of ceasefires, the salient question of whether and how they should talk to all parties, how to coordinate supporters and donors of the peace process, and how to establish a multi-donor trust fund (EU-5, Feb 2015).[8] When taking the time from 2012 to 2015 into consideration, it seems that with the growing office in Yangon, the role of the Mediation Support Team increasingly became that of an advisor, whereas it was directly engaged in the early days of EU-Myanmar relations. In 2015 the practices of the Union's

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[8] It should be added that collecting this information always meant being referred to examples which had been carefully selected so as to not reveal weaknesses of EU delegation staff.

mediation in-house support took the form of training and coaching, making use of the rooster of external experts, and of promoting knowledge exchange in response to requests. As such, the delegation only formed very loose associations with the Mediation Support Team, which highlights that in the case of Myanmar, the team was not able to establish itself as the obligatory passage point for mediation expertise in the assemblage of mediation.

Nevertheless, K2 did engage the staff of the delegation in its practices of in-house support. Hence, zooming in on the tool of conflict analysis allows for comparing the accounts of delegation officials on the relevance of conflict assessment in their work to an official *Brief Issue* on this aspect of EU engagement in Myanmar. The interviewees differentiated between the importance of conflict analysis for the technical and political section of the delegation. They considered conflict assessments as necessary for development cooperation owing to the funding timeframes of several years, which require them to plan ahead, as well as for identifying projects for short-term funding through the Instrument contributing to Stability and Peace. As a delegation official of the technical section explained, meetings with the political section of the delegation, member states, local non-governmental organizations, and Myanmar's government would be a typical starting point for a conflict assessment. If necessary, the interviewee continued, the meetings could be followed-up with an external expert, arranged by the Mediation Support Team, who would go on a mission to do a mapping in the area of the potential next project. Furthermore, available data for consultation was composed of internal reports from the International Management Group, the MPC, and member states, which went hand in hand with the option of meeting with the authors to discuss ideas (EU-9, March 2015). For the political section, the response was different as conflict analysis was considered to be important but less relevant in the daily routine (EU-11, March 2015). That this tool could inform the processes of responding to the events unfolding, as envisioned by the respective factsheet, was not mentioned. The *Brief Issue* on the EU in Myanmar published in 2014 offers the following explanation of how conflict analysis has been essential to the Union's engagement:

Experience has taught that good context analysis, providing a clear understanding of the local political, cultural and economic environment, must underpin any preventive diplomacy efforts. Three factors have contributed to the EU's well-informed analysis of the conflict dynamics in Myanmar. First, the Union has gained a solid understanding of the situation in the country through its long-term field presence in humanitarian and development programmes in conflict-affected areas. This was reinforced when an EU delegation was opened in Yangon in April 2012 and additional political and peacebuilding advisers recruited. Second, high-level political engagement granted the EU unique access and insight. Third, support was provided by the EEAS Mediation

Support Team which mobilised internal and external expertise to identify potential scenarios for the peace process." (Banim, 2014, p. 2)

This summary emphasizes the EU's access to information and understanding of the country through its field presence, the opening of the EU delegation and support by the Mediation Support Team, and insight due to high-level engagement. It invites the researcher to critically engage with these assumptions. At first, assessing the reasoning about Myanmar's conflict dynamics of EU actors and tracing the concept of how to build peace, helps to assess whether or not these actors have a 'solid understanding of the situation in the country'. Second, assembling the accounts of non-EU actors of the assemblage puts the Union's self-assessment into perspective.

4.4. The vulnerability of the EU in Myanmar

Through tracing how peace became a priority of EU action in Myanmar and following the practices of political and technical support to the MPC, the assemblage of mediation became visible. On the part of the EU, this involved people from the political and the technical section of the delegation, the counterparts of the financial instruments and the geographical desk in Brussels, the Mediation Support Team, external consultants, and a number of current and former EU staff who had left traces through their work which influenced subsequent actors and processes. As regards the MPC, the enrolled actors were the government's negotiator and chairman of the MPC, U Aung Min, and the Union Peace-making Working Committee, the NCCT, the UNFC, members of the Tatmadaw although less visible, a number of special advisors, and mediators or facilitators with a business or non-governmental organization background. The challenges and difficulties which EU officials were encountering within this group were addressed but little time invested in exploring their accounts in detail as the analysis focused on assembling the practices of supporting the MPC. What were the different standpoints taken by the interviewed EU officials when identifying problems? What ideas and sources of information did they draw from? Mapping the understanding of the conflict dynamics in Myanmar of relevant EU actors uncovers that they promoted a concept of peacebuilding which established a link between peace, democracy and development. At the same time, they were aware of the multitude of interests among groups in Myanmar, which made the signing of the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement more challenging and pointed to a number of actors who might not aspire to a democratic transition of the country. Furthermore,

several constraints regarding access to information and ways of engaging, reveal another layer of dependency on actors from Myanmar.

Tracing the concept of peace in the Union's approach to Myanmar

Comparing the accounts of EU officials responsible for supporting the MPC begins with a puzzle of two strands of reasoning. On the one hand, all interviewees were aware of the complexity of Myanmar's conflict and history and their limits of understanding it due to the short amount of time most delegation officials had spent in the country ranging from about two years to less than six months at the time of the interviews. As one actor put it, a year is not sufficient to grasp the multiple dimensions of the conflict of Myanmar (EU-11, March 2015). On the other hand, EU officials worked from within the assumptions of a particular concept of peace which did not reflect the aforementioned uncertainties. In this regard, their assessments had a common theme in that they problematized the prospects of the transition pertaining to the motivations of the involved actors. According to them, the government-driven process of transition aimed at economic development and getting rid of the pariah status in the international community; an argument which resonates in most of the literature of the policy world and academia. Hence, the interviewed officials considered the *telos* of EU policies, namely to promote the democratic transition of the country with peace as the precondition, as not in line with the agenda of the government of Myanmar. As an interviewee put it, the Union and the government were hoping for different things, as the former had a more democratic system in mind similar to that of the Philippines or Indonesia, whereas the goals of Myanmar's government were seen as economically motivated (EU-9, March 2015). Democracy was envisioned as the ultimate goal throughout the struggle of Indonesia; however, this was not the case for Myanmar. According to this perspective, the various groups within Myanmar did not pursue a shared goal. Only the NLD and the democratic opposition bloc were considered to have a similar agenda like the EU (EU-9, March 2015). Another delegation official summarized the situation of the Union as working towards democracy and believing that there is a real interest in transition in Myanmar although it is uncertain where this process would lead to (EU-10, March 2015). The EU response to this uncertainty was to promote reforms which, once in place, could not be rolled back (EU-9, March 2015). In other words, EU officials perceived peace and democracy as integrated or as José Manuel Barroso, at that time president of the European Commission, put it in his speech at the opening of the MPC, '[p]eace, democracy and inclusive development are all part of the same equation and one will always be incomplete without the other two' (Barroso, 2012).

This equation and a similar notion, namely that peace is a precondition for development (EU-3, Feb 2015), are knowledge claims of a concept of peace which is at the heart of the four policy priorities of the EU approach to Myanmar: peace, democracy, development and trade, as well as integrating Myanmar into the international community. This conceptualization of peace envisions federalism and democracy as the solution to the conflict in the country; the Political Dialogue was expected to provide the platform for advancing this goal. What is more, this concept reflects the narrative of the EU's history as discussed in chapter three. It considers the Union's economic and political development as intimately linked to a peaceful Europe. The experience of war and of being a peace project has also been employed to legitimize the EU's involvement in peace support in Myanmar. Or in the words of EU ambassador Roland Kobia:

The peace process should be a priority in a country where there is one of the oldest ongoing conflicts in the world, and if democracy and socio-economic development are to be given a chance. Across the globe, the EU actively promotes peace and we did so also early on in Myanmar, even if the issue was sensitive.
We have acted in two ways. The first is political support, through public statements and working on the ground to accompany the efforts that have been made over the years on the peace process.
We have tried to share a number of experiences we ourselves have had in Europe. Europe has been built on the ashes of war and Myanmar is still in conflict, so Europeans can maybe understand a bit better what is happening in Myanmar than other countries because we have lived through war on our own territory not that long ago. (Kobia as cited in Slow & Nyan Hlaing Lynn, n.d.)

Moreover, when comparing the accounts of interviewed EU officials, it is possible to observe certain mechanisms of simplifying the complexity of violent conflict in Myanmar. Whereas different levels of knowledge, imprecise ways of communicating, and a number of difficulties regarding sources of information are common challenges, they acquire a different meaning since realities in Myanmar are shaped by decades of violent conflict and military rule. For instance, many interviewees spoke of the Tatmadaw and President Thein Sein's government as two different actors, thereby neglecting that these lines are sometimes difficult to draw. Similarly, the focus on the Tatmadaw as the perpetrator of countless atrocities had an adverse effect, namely to eclipse that President Thein Sein's administration was a semi-civilian government whose civilian officials often had a military past, including the President himself, and that the Tatmadaw still had a 25 percent representation in the parliament. This applies, to an extent, also to political parties such as the NLD, which has among its members a number of retired military personnel. Interestingly, a challenge which was not particularly problematized by the interviewed EU officials was the fact that the violent conflict in

Myanmar is ongoing and not all warring factions were represented in the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement negotiations. By way of example, the Peace Monitoring Dashboard counted 12 peace talks, 31 armed clashes and more than 2,000 new IDPs for the month of July 2015. Whereas the fighting did not have a direct impact on the everyday practices in Yangon but seemed to be part of a system, it is essential to keep in mind that assessing the situation of the peace process was subject to numerous impediments which resulted from the realities of ongoing violent conflict. Under these circumstances, not only EU officials but also external and internal researchers and experts alike face challenges of access to certain areas and insight into the dynamics between non-state armed groups and the Tatmadaw, to name but a few. However, international experts and meetings with various local organizations and stakeholders constituted one source of information, if not the most important, for EU officials. As one of the people interviewed explained, they relied on the available international and local literature, informal reports of implementing organizations, and meetings with organizations that work in Myanmar (EU-10, March 2015). They also request studies, when necessary. According to the interviewee, issues such as how the ethnic armed organizations had been funding themselves, what was going on in some regions of Myanmar and the fact that no one was expecting the conflict in Kokang, illustrated that there are many aspects of the conflict dynamics which have not been sufficiently studied and understood (EU-10, March 2015). Moreover, many of the experts are external owing to a lack of local experts, who are trained to provide information in a specific way (EU-10, March 2015). This reflects the notion of a bubble comprising of external experts and relatively few experts from Myanmar. These locals, moreover, were often educated in Europe, Canada or the United States, and have to accommodate requests of various representatives of states, regional and international organizations in Yangon. Having said this, the uncertainties as to where the transition of Myanmar was heading and the problems of access to information constituted the basis on which EU officials had to take a stand, develop a policy response and position the EU as an actor in Myanmar. In contrast to the analysis of the author of the Policy Issue, the EU appears to have been much more vulnerable and easily influenced by the local actors they work with, in particular the MPC, as an interviewee, who was involved in the negotiation of the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement, put it (CSO-9, March 2015). This raises the last question of this chapter: how were the practices of supporting the MPC perceived in Myanmar? It is time to assess the accounts of non-EU actors who were enrolled in the assemblage of EU peace support as implementing partners of the Union, external experts, who occasionally work for

the delegation, as well as conflict advisors of other actors in Myanmar with whom the Union cooperates.

How were EU practices of peace process support perceived in Myanmar?

EU practices of peace process support can be looked at from a variety of angles. Assembling the problematization of the interviewed non-EU actors pertaining to the following four aspects is the task of this chapter: first, the MPC; second, views on collaborating with the EU; third, challenges facing the EU in supporting the peace process and finally, assessments of the peace process itself. To begin with, the MPC was the most controversial peace initiative in Myanmar and so were the EU's practices of funding it. Especially organizations with links to ethnic armed organizations problematized it as a government-controlled body and were very critical of its current institutional form and funding structure. Representatives who did not have ties to the MPC and were not directly involved in the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement negotiations either raised the question whether the initial intention of the EU was a more neutral peace centre or argued that the MPC was at least driven by the idea of being a mediator between the government and the ethnic armed organizations. Those who were more actively engaged in the MPC-led peace process clearly said that the MPC was a quasi-government institution right from the beginning. Either way, all of them perceived it as belonging to the government (CSO-5 & CSO-9 & CSO-7, March 2015). However, according to the accounts of the representatives of civil society organizations, MPC actors perceived themselves as mediators, which caused confusion during the negotiations of the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement. For instance, at some point negotiations focused on a particular paragraph of the draft which was highlighted in green. When the MPC representatives were asked if the Union Peace-making Working Committee agreed to this section, their answer was yes but in the course of negotiations many aspects of it were changed as the Committee had not approved the paragraph (CSO-9, March 2015). Despite being the obligatory passage point of the peace infrastructure in Myanmar, the MPC did not manage to establish itself as the spokesperson of the peace process for its link to the government blurred the boundaries and raised the question of who is speaking for whom. Nevertheless, the interviewed non-EU actors perceived the MPC as largely promoting the problematization put forward by the government. To illustrate this point, a researcher from Myanmar referred to one of the most sensitive issues between the government and ethnic groups, namely that the ethnic armed organizations collect taxes in the areas which they control. The government position depicted this as a threat to the sovereignty of the country, thus, it framed it as a sovereignty issue. The

MPC put forward the exact same reasoning (CSO-7, March 2015). At the same time, the peace centre was neither identical nor fully integrated into the government network despite the associations between them which made it subordinate to it. This difficult situation had its ramifications in that many actors tried to resist being enrolled in the peace process of the MPC as they rejected its problematization and relations to the government. To begin with, one interviewee mentioned that most local groups and community-based organizations in the ethnic areas, who will be involved in the ceasefire monitoring mechanism and early warning, do not want to work with the MPC as they equate it with the government (CSO-7, March 2015). Apart from criticizing the relations between the MPC and the government, a third point was raised, which is directed towards the EU. It is the view that by financing the operational costs of the MPC, the EU has been directly funding the government, thereby increasing the financial leverage of an already powerful conflict party, while, at the same time, sustaining a peace infrastructure which ensures that everything peace-related needs to go through the MPC (CSO-7, March 2015). In sum, the MPC was considered to be a part of the government mechanism and as such not a neutral or impartial body. The interviewees did not only highlight current challenges which result from this bias, they anticipated more serious problems for the near future. For instance, they mentioned that community-based organizations would soon have to collaborate with the MPC regarding ceasefire monitoring. Also the Political Dialogue and follow-up measures could be used by the government as instruments to direct the peace process, if not, control it.

Second, how did practices of EU support look like from the perspective of the implementing actors? An EU-funded project about establishing a civilian ceasefire monitoring mechanism in two states, Chin and Mon State, implemented by Shalom and the Nonviolent Peaceforce (NP) serves as an example to dig deeper into how the EU delegation collaborated with implementing organizations. According to both implementing partners, the idea of working on ceasefire monitoring developed gradually after organizations from Myanmar's borderland visited Indonesia and Mindanao and established relations with NP. In response, NP conducted a number of field visits. The idea of collaboration between a local and an international NGO was welcomed by the EU and eventually Shalom became the lead grantee of the EU-funded project. Being the recipient of EU funds meant having to engage in a set of practices which includes certain obligations such as financial reporting, regular telephone calls and submitting monthly reports (CSO-8, March 2015). As an interviewee noted, the bureaucratic burden of administering an EU-funded project can be quite taxing on an organization especially during

stages of implementation. Only a small number of organizations in Myanmar have the necessary capacities to be eligible for an EU grant. The Union is an assemblage of multiple actor-networks and functions as a system of practices. As a recipient of EU funds, one has to work within this system (CSO-9, March 2015). Submitting monthly reports, even if these consist of only one page with bullet points, telephone calls and meetings take time. Against this background, the opening of the EU's permanent representation in Yangon was welcomed as a positive development since urgent matters could be directly discussed and collaborating became easier although this also implied more regular exchanges (CSO-9 & CSO-8, March 2015). All of this raises the question of what is meant by civil society organizations in Myanmar? Civil society only started developing in Yangon rather recently due to a number of laws prohibiting NGOs earlier. In the aftermath of the cyclone Nargis in 2008, some organizations emerged to provide humanitarian assistance which could be seen as the beginning of most civil society organizations in Myanmar. As an EU official observed, in 2012 these organizations were still rather courageous individuals than full-blown organizations (EU-8, March 2015). Nowadays, some of the Yangon-based civil society organizations also have offices in the local areas but the organizational structure is often still geared to a charismatic leader and not necessarily equipped to deal with the bureaucratic practices that come with EU funds (CSO-8, March 2015).

Whereas the interviewed actors agreed that the bureaucratic practices which go hand in hand with receiving EU funds are challenging, their perspectives diverged pertaining to how they perceived the delegation as a partner and funder of projects of peace support. Some of the interviewees considered the EU to be the more flexible actor when compared to, for instance, USAID. Especially the options for short- and long-term funding were highlighted as taking into account the reality of what it entails to implement a project (CSO-8, March 2015). Others made the exact opposite point (CSO-9 & CSO-6, March 2015). EU officials were seen as open to new ideas, innovative and less constrained than other actors, who often could not support certain stakeholders due to their practices of black-listing (CSO-8, March 2015). For instance, one of the responsible persons for the ceasefire monitoring project considered the EU's decision to invest in building these capacities as foresightedness. According to the experience of the interviewee, who had previously worked on similar projects in other conflict regions, ceasefire monitoring was often forgotten or postponed which turned out to be a serious problem once the ceasefire agreement was signed and the structures were needed (CSO-8, March 2015). More generally, the delegation's approach was considered to be hands-

on as well as a process of learning together since many scenarios were not covered by any guideline (CSO-9, March 2015). EU officials did not shy away from giving advice. For instance, they encouraged the implementing organizations of the ceasefire monitoring project to collaborate more closely with the MPC. The latter understood this as an attempt to mitigate risks and to prevent the development of two parallel ongoing processes, one led by the MPC and the other by Shalom (CSO-9, March 2015). Although this suggestion was not met with refusal and there was clear agreement in regard to the need of Shalom and the MPC to work alongside each other, the suggestion of the EU did not changed anything and Shalom and the MPC continued to cooperate in a very informal manner (CSO-9, March 2015).

Third, a number of implementing organizations of the EU concluded that the Union was still a very new actor in Myanmar in 2015. Many of them shared the view that the network of the delegation was relatively small with only a few partners on the ground. As a result, the EU already had a relatively long working relationship with some of the implementing partners. By way of example, looking into the history of collaboration between the EU and Shalom reveals that the ceasefire monitoring project was not their first encounter. Shalom was already the recipient of EU funds in 2010 for a project on creating a platform for democratization, which was a very sensitive issue at that time, with Shalom as the main applicant and the British Council as the technical partner (CSO-9, March 2015). Against this background, many interviewees concluded that a part of the practices of collaborating with the EU delegation consists of briefing EU personnel and informing them about important actors, for example, in ethnic areas where the EU does not have a field presence (CSO-9, March 2015). Only one staff member of the delegation was identified as being aware of influential figures outside of Yangon (CSO-9, March 2015). The interviewees stressed the short amount of time most delegation officials had spent in Myanmar which, according to their accounts, could explain why EU staff but also other external actors tended to take what the MPC said at face value (CSO-7, March 2015). This was aggravated by the fact that the Union's external consultants and researchers are usually not from Myanmar and briefings with local actors, which the EU requests from time to time, were considered insufficient to fill this gap (CSO-6 & CSO-7 & CSO-9, March 2015). The small network of the EU and limited knowledge of the country could be explained, according to one interviewee, by comparing the EU's ways of engaging with local actors to those of other embassies. For instance, the British embassy works at different levels, engages with a diverse group of people and stakeholders and makes an effort to create the space for them to meet and exchange ideas by hosting receptions and other

events. The EU delegation, in contrast, seems to focus much more on high-level actors (CSO-9, March 2015).

Another concern of small local NGOs was their impression that delegation officials in charge of the financial instruments were still very much overworked despite the considerable increase in the number of delegation staff. Hence, they depicted the attempt to establish a multi-donor trust fund as a consequence of delegation officials being overwhelmed with managing the financial envelope for Myanmar. The problem of multi-donor trust funds is, according to one interviewee, that they can backfire (CSO-8, March 2015). This funding structure usually comes into existence once a peace agreement has been signed and is often channelled through the government, thereby strengthening the influence of the latter, and, at the same time, making it more difficult for small NGOs to compete with more established organizations for big grants (CSO-8, March 2015). Therefore, it was considered as quite likely that the small initiatives in Myanmar, which the EU had been successfully supporting, would disappear (CSO-8, March 2015). It should be noted that most of the interviewed people represent organizations with links to ethnic armed organizations and less so to the government. Since the common denominator of their accounts is that the EU was influenced by the MPC's problematization which they equate with that of the government, the fourth and last section of this chapter is dedicated to their views on the conflict and the peace process.

According to the interviewed representatives of civil society organizations the objectives of changing the constitution and of implementing genuine federalism should be the main purpose of the peace process (CSO-7 & CSO-5, March 2015). To this end, the key stakeholders, the ethnic armed organizations, political parties, NGOs and the government, would have to work together to gradually build a genuine Federal Union of Myanmar (CSO-5, March 2015). But what does a genuine federal union entail? According to an interviewee, it means equality, full self-determination, democracy, and control over natural resources, land, legislative bodies and judiciary, finance, education and language (CSO-6, March 2015). The account continued that the government spoke of disciplined democracy in previous years and then began to argue that the 2008 Constitution already includes a federal structure, even though this Constitution limits the power of the legislative bodies and the judiciary in the ethnic minority areas (CSO-6, March 2015). In other words, the federal structure would come with many challenges but the ethnic armed organizations appeared to speak with one voice regarding the broader meaning of the Political Dialogue. It was seen as a platform for discussing the root causes of the conflict, that is to say, the ethnic issue. Since this could not

be addressed in parliament, given the fact that not all ethnic groups were represented in it, the Political Dialogue was needed to achieve as its result the amendment of the constitution.

Against this background, interviewees focused extensively on how different groups and stakeholders perceived the peace process and its primary objectives; a topic which EU officials did not mention. Civil society organizations without ties to ethnic groups were seen as concentrating on the elections in November 2015 and the constitutional process in order for Aung San Suu Kyi to be able to become president, while not being sufficiently aware of the ethnic issues (CSO-7, March 2015). Furthermore, many Burmese actors were perceived as prioritizing democracy over the ethnic affairs, including the NLD. One interviewee reiterated the order of the priorities of those actors as first, democracy; secondly, human rights and women's rights; then gay rights, and finally, ethnic issues, to underline that the ethnic conflict only comes at the very end (CSO-7, March 2015). According to this account, the peace process is a process of change and the sequencing of what steps it would entail naturally a big issue. Most people in the peace process saw it as covering all areas and issues and as overlapping and crosscutting with others, whereas mainstream political forces only looked at NLD politics and did not perceive the peace process as including more areas than the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement and, thus, did not consider it to be about democracy too (CSO-7, March 2015). However, the moment this was acknowledged and the issue of Political Dialogue was included in the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement negotiations, the peace process stalled and the number of problems increased steadily, including the fighting in the North.

The focus of the people interviewed was directed towards an understanding or concept of peace which requires more than a Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement, namely a platform to address the sources of conflicts together with building the foundation of a Federal Union of Myanmar and to ensure that the peace process embraces the citizens of Myanmar and not only a relatively small group of elites. Reconciling the conflict parties in the long run, an interviewee explained, will entail that stakeholders start to reflect on their perceptions more generally (CSO-7, March 2015). The problem goes as far as the historical imagination of a peaceful coexistence of all groups during the time of the Burman empire which was founded around 1044 and interrupted by British colonial rule. The ethnic claims and their history were erased from this picture, giving room to the question of why the ethnic groups demand more autonomy as they are seen to be living on Burmese land. Even the Burmese word which is still being used to refer to the ethnic armed organizations carries a meaning which refutes

their claims as illegitimate (CSO-7, March 2015). In view of this, many interviewees agreed that it would be best to allow the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement negotiations to take time but to begin with the Political Dialogue. They saw the situation against the background of more than 60 years of fighting and argued accordingly that a few more months without having a Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement in place would not matter as long as the peace process did not die (CSO-6 & CSO-5, March 2015). Broadening the focus to include the wider public, the interviewees added that the peace process has been taking place at the highest level and involves stakeholders that do not necessarily represent the different groups within the population. Moreover, the peace process appears to lack public support. A possible explanation for this could be misinformation. To illustrate this with an example, one person who is deeply involved in party politics, for instance, was convinced that the Nationwide Ceasefire Negotiation process was about the government issuing car permits for ethnic armed organizations (CSO-7, March 2015).

In sum, assessing how the EU officials understood the dynamics of the peace process in Myanmar revealed a few patterns, which simplify the violent conflict, including a specific concept of peace and views on central actors like the government and the Tatmadaw. The practices of supporting the MPC and of peace support more generally were informed by the knowledge claim that democracy, sustainable economic development, and a peaceful future are all part of the same equation. This *telos*, which sees peace and a particular form of state as integrated, is based on the problematization of weak government institutions, the lack of adhering to human rights, poverty and the legacies of decades of violent conflict. The corresponding strategy, which identifies peace, democracy, trade and development, and integrating Myanmar into the international community as policy priorities, gave rise to the practices of supporting the MPC in that the peace process despite all of its shortcomings was aiming at Political Dialogue, which could serve as a platform for negotiating a more comprehensive peace agreement and anchor Myanmar's democratization in the process. At the same time, EU officials were aware of the complexity of the violent conflict and constraints to information but did not question the political rationality of their practices of peace support which seemed to prioritize democracy at the expense of addressing the ethnic conflict in its own right. As such, the problematization advanced by EU officials working on Myanmar in 2015 seems to reverse the shift the small group of actors of the Union fought for in the early days of EU-Myanmar relations. Representatives of civil society organizations, many of them having links to ethnic minority groups, perceived the negotiations of the

Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement and eventually Political Dialogue as an opportunity to address the ethnic conflict. Whereas they considered the ethnic conflict as integrated with the goal of a democratic and federal Myanmar, their concern was that this view is not shared by major opposition parties, including the NLD, which, according to the interviewees, advocate democracy but neglect the ethnic conflict. In addition, they problematized the elite-level focus as requiring a solution as it would otherwise impede the peace process. This perspective addresses two central aspects of which EU officials did not seem to be aware. First of all, the looming struggles over what the Political Dialogue mainly is about and second, the elite-focus of the process which excludes not only the majority of citizens but also several stakeholders of the conflict. Against this background, the perception of the EU being influenced by the MPC and the concern as to how well EU delegation officials understand the conflict dynamics can be also understood as representatives of ethnic minority groups being afraid that the Union might not realize that it is potentially curtailing small peace initiatives through the Joint Peace Fund and weakening the position of the ethnic armed organizations due to their support to the MPC.

4.5. Summary

The journey of assembling practices of mediation support of the Union has rendered visible a group of actors which were engaged in what EU actors predominantly referred to as peace support and – regarding the practices of funding the MPC – political support. At the heart of this chapter was the task of tracing the moments of translation which brought the practices of supporting the MPC into existence pertaining to their political rationality, interessement devices, and failed attempts at enrolment. Regarding the political rationality, it became apparent that EU officials working on Myanmar problematize the violent conflict in light of the legacies of the military regime and armed conflict, weak state institutions, poverty, abuses of human rights and a political system which marginalizes several groups of Myanmar's society. They draw on the knowledge claims which presuppose a causal link between peace, democracy and sustainable development and build on the notion of the security-development nexus. As a result, the Union's concept of what causes conflict and how to build peace is state-centred in that it assigns the state a crucial role in resolving conflict. Regarding Myanmar this meant to pin the hopes on the efforts of the president to reconcile the conflict parties and his ability to transform the state which has been controlled by the Bamar majority and constituted the common enemy of the ethnic armed organizations for decades. Following the transition to a semi-civilian government in 2011, a group of EU actors emerged which

advocated a change of perceptions in that it criticized the previous problematization as being oblivious to the ethnic conflict. According to them, they rejected the conflated view on the ethnic conflict and the struggle for democracy for they considered it pivotal to address the ethnic conflict in its own right. This slight change or supplement to the dominant problematization added another layer to the *telos* of the Union's policies. They did not only promote the goal of a democratic, federal and economically prosperous country but also the need for a formalized peace process which would lead to a comprehensive peace agreement. Supporting the MPC was part of the strategy to achieve both. As an interessement device, the practices of funding the MPC were envisioned to enrol the stakeholders of the conflict into negotiating a ceasefire and holding a Political Dialogue, which would enshrine democracy and federalism into the peace agreement and the constitution of Myanmar. However, these processes of translation partially failed. Not only did the leaders of a few ethnic armed organizations refuse to participate in the peace process whilst those who did founded their own institute, which would support them during the negotiations, but also the government of Myanmar might not have accepted the role assigned to it by the problematization of the EU. Instead it embraced the narrative of a home-grown process to enrol the Union as the funder of the MPC but without giving it a say on the peace process. In doing so, the actor-network became the obligatory passage point for all peace-related initiatives and external actors in Myanmar. Whereas the MPC was not identical with the government, its practices gave rise to the selection of staff and an internal structure which was subordinate to President Thein Sein's administration. This complex situation can explain why it remained a point of contention whether the MPC was the spokesperson of the assemblage of mediation or rather the mouthpiece of the government. Many organizations with ties to ethnic minority groups perceived the MPC as an attempt of the government to represent the peace process. Hence, they contested this move and some of them refused to cooperate.

These partially failed processes of translation curtailed the immediate peacebuilding efforts of the EU, mainly because supporting the government actors in taking on the lead role in the peace process had the adverse effect on the Union in that it inadvertently helped to sustain authoritarian legacies and blurred the lines between the standpoint of the EU as an impartial external third party and taking sides with the government. This perception of bias is aggravated by what this study called the vulnerability of the EU as an external actor. It is linked to both constraints on access to information and the practices of being and maintaining a delegation. First, the dependence on Myanmar actors for grasping the situation in the

country was evident and acknowledged by a few EU officials although they added that they know Myanmar experts and local actors, whom they can trust, which helped them make sense of the diverging information which they received (EU-11 & EU-9, March 2015). Second, the delegation is bound by the protocol of engaging with and requiring the approval of projects of the government, the messy nature of conflict dynamics vis-à-vis its rotating staff, and the considerable workload and multiple responsibilities with peace support being just one among many. Nonetheless, it is this actor-network which was in charge of the practices of EU mediation support. Accordingly, the finding that the delegation officials did not think of the practices of assisting the MPC as mediation support but as political and technical support sheds light on why they did not problematize the developing monopoly of the MPC in the peace infrastructure of Myanmar as a problem they would have to respond to but considered the MPC to be a difficult but much needed creature. Moreover, the results of the needs assessment, which a member of the Mediation Support Team conducted during the summer of 2012, had been forgotten. In this assessment the MPC was envisioned to be a government-led body which should be supported by the EU but in connection with promoting other mediation-related projects to prevent the government actors from establishing the MPC as an obligatory passage point of the mediation process. Examining the practices of in-house mediation support for the delegation in 2014 and 2015 uncovered loosely formed associations in which the actors of the delegation assigned the Mediation Support Team the role of an advisor but excluded it from the processes of decision-making.

Taking the non-EU actors of the assemblage into consideration uncovered a different problematization of the peace process and two main concerns regarding the efforts of the EU. Particularly actors with ties to ethnic armed organizations perceived resolving the ethnic conflict as the key objective of the peace process but identified a number of other actors who might not share their view. As such, they emphasized that democratizing Myanmar is not equal to addressing the long-standing ethnic conflict. In this regard, they were concerned about the level of knowledge on the conflict dynamics, the elite-focus and the small network of the delegation in Myanmar. Accordingly, mapping the actors to whom delegation officials talked to on a more regular basis, showed a diverse group in which many conflict parties and stakeholders were represented but who were mostly high-level actors. Moreover, EU officials in Myanmar were not aware of the lack of public support of the current peace process and the potential problems which might be caused as a result of the government-led MPC. In sum, assembling the practices of EU mediation support in Myanmar revealed that the concept of

how to build peace of the Union's approach to conflict and crisis helped the delegation to deal with the uncertainties of the conflict dynamics but, at the same time, undermined its efforts of promoting peace. This raises the question: how do practices of mediation develop if an actor-network is engaging as a third party on behalf of the Union, whose primary responsibility and expertise is conflict resolution, such as the EUSR for the South Caucasus and the Crisis in Georgia and his team?

5. Assembling practices of EU mediation in Georgia

'On the night of 7 to 8 August 2008, a sustained Georgian artillery attack struck the town of Tskhinvali. Other movements of the Georgian armed forces targeting Tskhinvali and the surrounding areas were under way, and soon the fighting involved Russian, South Ossetian and Abkhaz military units and armed elements. It did not take long, however, before the Georgian advance into South Ossetia was stopped. In a counter-movement, Russian armed forces, covered by air strikes and by elements of its Black Sea fleet, penetrated deep into Georgia, cutting across the country's main east-west road, reaching the port of Poti and stopping short of Georgia's capital city, Tbilisi. The confrontation developed into a combined inter-state and intra-state conflict, opposing Georgian and Russian forces at one level of confrontation as well as South Ossetians together with Abkhaz fighters and the Georgians at another. Such a combination of conflicts going on at different levels is particularly prone to violations of International Humanitarian Law and Human Rights Law. This is indeed what happened, and many of these instances were due to the action of irregular armed groups on the South Ossetian side that would not or could not be adequately controlled by regular Russian armed forces. Then another theatre of hostility opened on the western flank, where Abkhaz forces supported by Russian forces took the upper Kodori Valley, meeting with little Georgian resistance. After five days of fighting, a ceasefire agreement was negotiated on 12 August 2008 between Russian President Dmitry Medvedev, Georgian President Mikheil Saakashvili and French President Nicolas Sarkozy, the latter acting on behalf of the European Union. An implementation agreement followed on 8 September 2008, again largely due to the persistent efforts of the French President. This successful political action stood in contrast to the failure of the international community, including the UN Security Council, to act swiftly and resolutely enough in order to control the ever-mounting tensions prior the outbreak of armed conflict. Since then, however, with the exception of the establishment of an EU Monitoring Mission (EUMM) and the Geneva talks, almost no progress has been made in the difficult process of establishing peace and stability in the region. The situation remains tense and volatile and there are many who fear a resumption of hostilities.' (Tagliavini, 2009, pp. 10-11)

This is how the *Independent International Fact-finding Mission on the Conflict in Georgia* (IIFFMCG) summarized the events of the most recent armed conflict in Georgia, Abkhazia and South Ossetia. The report does not only aim at identifying the sources and course of the violent encounter which marks the beginning of the Union's direct intervention as mediator and civilian peacekeeper but is a trace or instrument of EU action itself. The Council of the European Union refrained from taking a position on what happened and who was the aggressor in the aftermath of the August war but commissioned an independent fact-finding mission in December 2008 instead (Council of the European Union, 2008a). At this time, the Union had already developed a response by employing the practices of mediation including appointing a new EUSR to take on the task of establishing the Geneva talks, as well as launching a monitoring mission. So while the fact-finding mission on behalf of the EU was trying to uncover the chain of events which led to the war, other actors of the assemblage of

EU mediation were working towards crafting an approach to the situation which would make them capable of leading the conflict resolution efforts.

This chapter addresses the research question of how the understanding of conflicts by EU officials is reflected in their ways of responding to them by assembling the practices of mediation in Georgia with the EUSR and his team as opposed to the delegation, as in the case study on Myanmar, as the actor-network in charge of the Union's efforts. In doing so, it constitutes the third building block to support the main argument of the dissertation, which asserts that the seemingly incoherent and to an extent diverging practices of mediation are in fact organized around a reasoning on violent conflict which draws on a concept that problematizes conflict as a security threat. This concept is slightly challenged by a transformative rationale which is put forward by the Mediation Support Team. However, their common denominator is an understanding of what constitutes peace which perceives peace, stability and security to be inseparable from sustainable economic development, the eradication of poverty, strong and democratic state institutions and an effective system of multilateralism. Taken together, this reasoning gives rise to a state-centred approach to violent conflict which often plays out at the expense of a detailed conflict assessment as it simplifies the multiple realities and narratives of violent conflict. In this regard, this chapter examines the puzzle of the EUSR as the spokesperson of the assemblage, who is representing the EU as a mediator but is bound by the political rationality regarding the events in Georgia of the Council of the European Union. Studying the assemblage of mediation through the lens of the political rationality, interessement devices, enrolment and mobilization through spokespersons reveals how an inherent ambiguity between the commitment to the statehood of Georgia and the stabilization of the region characterizes the reasoning behind the EU response. This political rationality, which the Council agreed on, weaves together the notion of Georgia's territorial integrity and non-recognition and engagement in Abkhazia and South Ossetia. It states reintegration of the *de facto* states into Georgia as the *telos* of EU policies despite the contradictory nature of both elements. In fact, the stance of defining Georgia's borders as embracing Abkhazia and South Ossetia makes it difficult for the Union to engage in the *de facto* states as it is perceived as biased towards the position of the Georgian government at the expense of granting legitimacy to the demands and interests of the territories that seceded from Georgia in 1999. The most important interessement device to enrol non-EU actors and particularly representatives of the conflict parties, the Geneva talks, reflects the inherent ambiguity and partiality of the Union's political rationality. Hence, it is

only partially successful in enrolling the actors in that they participate in the talks but refuse to cooperate regarding the core conflict issues on the agenda. Moreover, this political rationality engenders differences pertaining to how the various actor-networks of the Union, which are enrolled in the assemblage of EU mediation, interpret the policies towards the conflict in Georgia up to the point that they work against each other. For instance, the EU delegation is taking care of the bilateral relations with Georgia which includes bringing Georgia closer to the Union, while its policy of upholding the country's territorial integrity is creating a rift between the EU and Abkhazia and South Ossetia, thereby deepening the isolation of the *de facto* states. The Association Agreement signed between Georgia and the EU in 2014 and the bilateral envelope, which addresses the needs of Georgia proper rather than of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, are both seen as putting a strain on the EUSR's efforts. However, the European Commission funding instruments also finance confidence building measures to support the EUSR. In doing so, the delegation staff argue that they aim at resolving the conflicts in the long run although this is not their only policy objective. As a result, the puzzle of the EU approach towards Georgia consists of providing the mechanisms for managing the 2008-war-realities as a state of relative stability through the Geneva talks, the EUMM and several EU-funded projects but the commitment to the Soviet narrative of Georgia's borders curtails any attempt at resolving the conflicts. Hence, the political rationality of the assemblage of EU mediation confines the EUSR to managing the immediate consequences of the five-day-war. Ironically, the approach of the Union drives Georgia, Abkhazia and South Ossetia further apart, thereby consolidating the emerging statehood of the breakaway territories, and illustrates how EU policies claim to aspire to conflict resolution, while actively preventing it.

To substantiate this argument it is necessary to comprehend the political rationality or logic of engagement, which the EU actors of the assemblage of mediation engendered that is how they problematized the situation in Georgia after the war and tried to render it manageable by employing a range of instruments. As such, it is important to account for, at first, the changes brought about by the war in light of the history of the region and second, for the processes of translation which form the assemblage of mediation. Accordingly, the first section of this chapter is tracing the narratives of conflicts in Georgia to facilitate understanding the different conflict realities before and after the war in 2008. The second step sheds light on the practices which gave rise to EU-Georgia relations. The third section assesses how the assemblage of EU mediation in Georgia developed by differentiating between two phases. The first period

starts in the early 2000s and ends with the war in 2008. The second phase assesses the EU response to the war spanning the negotiations of the six-point agreement, the launching of the monitoring mission and the beginning of the Geneva process, and traces these practices over time until 2015.

5.2. Reviewing the narratives of conflict

Tracing the narratives of conflict in Georgia can shed light on why the format of the Geneva talks has to do without consensus on the conflict issues and why it is informal in the sense that its participants attend in a personal capacity and not as representatives of a conflict party. Identifying the sources and drivers of conflict but also naming the disputants and stakeholders is in itself disputed and as such a part of the conflict. To disentangle the various positions this study suggests to review Georgia's conflicts with the two contested regions, Abkhazia and South Ossetia, consecutively; and then turn to the developments in Georgia proper pertaining to its relations with Russia and the EU. Finally, assessing the various attempts at resolving the conflicts completes this section of the chapter. In doing so, the analysis of the dimensions of the current conflict is guided by the attempt to embrace the historical context. This is pursued in order to trace the diverging historical accounts of what influenced and informed the developments of the 1990s and 2000s and eventually led to the war in 2008.

Abkhazia - Georgia

In assembling various perspectives on the question of what the conflict in Abkhazia is about, this thesis builds on Bruno Coppieters attempt at analysing the roots of conflict (Coppieters, 1999). He distinguishes between four dimensions: the consequences of the Soviet nationalities policy, the Georgian and Abkhaz concepts of nationhood, the geopolitical perspective, and the issue of legitimate rule. During Soviet times, the nationalities were recognized and acknowledged in a hierarchical system under the Soviet nationalities policy. Although the policy differentiated between three ranks from union republics as the highest unit to autonomous republics and autonomous regions respectively, each category granted the status of a titular nation to the respective nationality (Coppieters, 1999, p. 14). Accordingly, the Soviet system recognized the Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic of Abkhazia as well as the Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic of Georgia but in contrast to Georgia, which was a union republic, the said autonomous republic did neither formally enjoy sovereignty nor the right to secede (Coppieters, 2004). Before the dissolution of the Soviet Union, Abkhazia was

preparing its application for the rank of a union republic but the breakup of the Soviet Union ended this attempt and left Georgia and Abkhazia struggling with the realities created by this system. Whereas the Georgian government perceived Abkhazia as an integral part of their country although with an autonomous status (Nodia, 1999, p. 20), the Abkhaz authorities rejected Georgian supremacy and some groups envisioned independence (Coppieters, 1999, p. 16). The conflict escalated into a civil war in 1992 when Georgian troops entered Abkhazia but were eventually defeated by the Abkhaz with the help of armed elements from the North Caucasus and Russia. By the time a ceasefire, the Moscow Agreement, was negotiated, the Abkhaz troops had dislodged many Georgians living in Abkhazia, thereby adding another source of grievances to the conflict. 'This fighting left 8,000 dead, 18,000 injured and about 240,000 displaced from their homes' (Frichova, 2009, p. 14). To prevent another violent escalation, peacekeeping forces, which consisted of Russian soldiers only, were deployed to the region until the UN Observation Mission (UNOMIG) took over as the peacekeeping force of the Commonwealth of Independent States (Frichova, 2009, p. 14).

Another perspective on these developments stresses the understanding of nationhood among Georgians and Abkhaz as inherently rooted in the preservation of language, religion and common descent (Coppieters, 1999, p. 17). Against this background, the Abkhaz view depicts the Georgian population in Abkhazia as the result of Tsarist and Soviet settlement policies and emphasized that Abkhazia had been a state for more than thousand years, while the Georgian account declares Abkhazia as an integral part of Georgian territory in which the Abkhaz took up residence only a few centuries ago (Coppieters, 1999, p. 17). The Abkhaz felt threatened by what they perceived as Georgian colonization which was embodied in cultural policies and the immigration of Georgian, Russian and Armenian people during Soviet rule (Coppieters, 2004). This account perceives Georgia as using the breakup of the Soviet Union to tighten its influence and control over Abkhazia. As much as the Abkhaz feared losing their cultural identity, Georgia feared losing a part of its territory and potentially setting a precedent for other minorities in the country. Moreover, according to the Georgian perspective, the Soviet Union was to be blamed for the discriminatory policies against the culture of the Abkhaz in the 1930s and not Georgia. In fact, the Georgian side also used to consider Abkhazia to be Russia's puppet which was used to advance the russification of Georgia during Soviet times (Coppieters, 2004). The civil war of 1992-1993 was driven by Georgia's attempt to intervene militarily so as to gain control over Abkhazia. When Georgia's military, mainly paramilitary groups, did not succeed, the Abkhaz troops seized the opportunity of

changing the demographic balance, thereby ending what they perceived as the threat of being a minority in Abkhazia[9], and displaced thousands of Georgians, and, as a result, were facing allegations of ethnic cleansing (Coppieters, 2004).

Others explain the conflict differently by pointing to the geopolitical factors driving it. This perspective highlights first Tsarist, then Soviet and later on Russian hegemonic interests in the South Caucasus which were pursued through divide and rule policies. According to this view, Russia benefitted from the conflict between Georgia and Abkhazia in more than one way after the dissolution of the Soviet Union (Coppieters, 1999, p. 17). At first, the insecure environment in Georgia made the region less attractive to investors, especially from the oil sector, thereby decreasing the value of the western route, a pipeline which goes through Georgia, and drawing the attention to the northern route. Second, the conflict destabilizes the region and makes it prone to Russian influence which might help to keep the Westernization of the region in check. As Coppieters points out, this narrative which focuses almost exclusively on Russia's agenda in the Caucasus plays into the hands of the Georgian government. It did not only contribute to mobilizing support of Western countries but also nurtures the assumption of good relations between Georgians and Abkhaz which were interrupted and eventually destroyed as a consequence of Russian intervention (Coppieters, 1999, p. 18).

The last perspective on the conflict refers to the grievances which, according to Coppieters, revolve around the notion of legitimate rule (Coppieters, 1999, p. 19). As regards the Abkhaz side, their history of being controlled by external powers, in particular by their neighbours, and of being violently oppressed and deported after attempts of revolt such as in the 19th century, still matters in the conflict dynamics to this day. Along the same lines, the Abkhaz representatives were never fond of being dependent on Russia, which was rather seen as a situation that resulted from the conflict with Georgia, since they have not experienced a time of peaceful relations on equal footing with either of their neighbours. To illustrate this point, the Abkhaz population only has the choice between a Russian and a Georgian passport and hence a high number of people do not have a passport at all. However, the passport is needed, for instance, if medical treatment is required, which is provided by hospitals in Russia or Georgia (for further information on this matter see: Elbakidze & Pirtskhalava, 2012, p. 13). Concerning the Georgian account, the Georgian Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) and their

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[9] According to the 1989 census, the Abkhaz constituted 18% of the total population in Abkhazia, whereas the Georgians made up 45% of the total population (Coppieters 2004).

return to Abkhazia is a central issue which dates back to the struggles between the Georgian population of Abkhazia, who supported President Zviad Gamsakhurdia, and the Abkhaz authorities. All parties failed to reach an agreement on how to ensure the political representation of the Georgians in Abkhazia and made the issue of the demographic balance as impeding the Abkhaz agenda more salient in the eyes of the Abkhaz authorities (Coppieters, 1999, p. 19). The fear of a demographic imbalance, which might constitute a disadvantage for the Abkhaz population, has hindered the return of the Georgian IDPs to Abkhazia. In the mid-90s, the IDPs from the Gali region in Abkhazia gradually returned but fled again after violent clashes in 1998. The *de facto* authorities allowed the return of these IDPs after 1999, but the broader issue of IDPs has not been resolved (Coppieters, 1999, p. 16). In the same year, Abkhazia declared its independence although this unilateral move was not recognized by the states of the 'international community'. Since then, a few countries recognized Abkhazia and South Ossetia, thereby following Russia's lead after the war in August 2008. During the five days of armed conflict, Russian troops also entered Abkhazia and Georgia proper and Abkhaz troops took advantage of the situation and seized the region Kodori Gorge that has been still under Georgian control.

South Ossetia - Georgia

Within the system of the Soviet Union South Ossetia was the 'South Ossetian Autonomous Oblast' since 1922, a status of lower rank than an 'autonomous republic'. In 1989, it was aspiring to gain the status of a union republic (Tuathail, 2008, p. 676). With the dissolution of the Soviet Union, however, the authorities of South Ossetia did neither aim at independence nor at becoming a member of a federation with Georgia in which both enjoy equal rights, but expressed the goal of uniting with North Ossetia and, thus, were aiming at joining Russia. In doing so, they did try to free themselves from being a part of Georgia despite the status as an autonomous republic. This has to be understood in connection to South Ossetia's history of the 20th century. Shortly before the Bolshevik revolution, the peasant population in South Ossetia especially sympathized with the Bolsheviks rather than the Mensheviks, who formed the government in Tbilisi at the time. This reflected their relations to North Ossetia and the Bolshevik party in Vladikavkaz, North Ossetia's capital city. However, Tbilisi's land policies, favouring the owners, were also not conducive to improving the relationship between South Ossetia and Georgia proper (Tuathail, 2008, p. 673). After 1918, Tbilisi 'saw the Bolshevik-dominated National Council of Ossetians as a threat' and the People's Guards of the newly independent state of Georgia violently oppressed the revolts in South Ossetia which led them

to align more and more with the Bolsheviks and North Ossetia, thereby deepening the divide between South Ossetians and Georgia (Frichova, 2009, pp. 8-9). In retrospect, South Ossetians accuse the Georgians of genocide, while the Georgian interpretation of the events identifies Russian involvement in instrumentalizing South Ossetian Bolsheviks to weaken Georgia (Frichova, 2009, pp. 8-9). The first declaration of joining Russia followed in 1920 with an uprising of South Ossetians in the Roki region. The brutal response from Tbilisi to end the rebellion added another source of grievances but did not prevent relatively peaceful relations between Georgians and South Ossetians during the time of the 'South Ossetian Autonomous Oblast'. In fact, people spoke Russian and Georgian, were interconnected through seasonal migration to other regions and intermarriage between both groups was common (Tuathail, 2008, p. 674). When the Soviet Union began to disintegrate, nationalist militias inflicted fear and persecution upon ethnic minorities and many South Ossetians, who had lived in Tbilisi and other areas of Georgia proper, fled to South and North Ossetia. As a response the nationalist movement, 'Ademon Nykhaz', People's Word or Parliament, emerged in South Ossetia. The situation escalated after South Ossetia decided on 10 November 1989 to begin the process of becoming an autonomous republic with the formal right to secession. The parliament of Georgia annulled this decision the day after it was proposed, organized protests in Tskhinvali, South Ossetia's capital city, and excluded regional parties to participate in the parliamentary elections. Abolishing South Ossetia's autonomy in December 1990 was the first of a series of events which led to the war between South Ossetia and Georgia (Tuathail, 2008, p. 676). The first invasion of South Ossetia by Georgian forces took place in January 1991. The war continued until 1992 when the future president of Georgia, Eduard Shevardnadze, signed an agreement with Russia's president, Boris Yeltsin, on June 24 after 'a thousand people died, a hundred more were missing, and tens of thousands on both sides were displaced internally and to Russia's North Ossetia' (Frichova, 2009, p. 14). *The Principles of the Settlement of the Georgian-Ossetian Conflict* or Sochi Agreement paved the way for a time of relative stability until the early 2000s, when Eduard Kokoity won elections in South Ossetia and Mikhail Saakashvili became the president of Georgia. The attempts of the latter to resolve the conflict with South Ossetia, the creation of the Ministry for Reunification and several efforts to destroy the routes of smugglers from Russia via South Ossetia to Georgia, had the effect of reigniting the conflict (Tuathail, 2008, pp. 679-680). Not only led the campaign against the smugglers to resistance among South Ossetians but also to the framing of closed streets, new police check points within South Ossetia and issues with a water pipeline, which were a result of the fight against smugglers, as an act of aggression

against the South Ossetians (Tuathail, 2008, pp. 679-680; King, 2008, p. 4). Eduard Kokoity rejected a new peace plan from Tbilisi and declared South Ossetia's wish to become independent which was reaffirmed by a referendum (Tuathail, 2008, p. 680). At the same time, Georgia was moving closer to the EU under the Saakashvili-government and expressed its interest to join NATO. Russia responded by boycotting Georgian products, especially key export goods like mineral water and wine, and increased visa restrictions for Georgians (MacFarlane, 2008, p. 27). To reconstruct the developments of the summer 2008 is difficult even today. Russian military forces were present at the northern border of South Ossetia and Georgian military at the southern border. The current view on the chronology of events of the 5-day war begins with a series of violent encounters between South Ossetians and Georgian military forces during the summer of 2008. Despite declaring a unilateral ceasefire on August 7, 2008, Georgian troops responded with an attack on the same evening, including the capture of Tskhinvali. Russian forces engaged in the war with the Russian government emphasizing the threat of ethnic cleansing, its responsibility as a peacekeeper in the region and to protect Russian citizens. The Georgian army was defeated within a few days (MacFarlane, 2008, p. 30). Russian troops also entered Abkhazia and Georgia proper. After bombing Gori and targeting military bases, their tanks eventually stopped short of Tbilisi. The war ended with the EU-mediated six-point agreement and paved the way for the EU Monitoring Mission and the Geneva talks but this shall be addressed at a later stage.

The newly independent state of Georgia between statebuilding, Russia and the 'West'

It is important to also take into account the history of Georgia proper and especially the developments in the early 1990s. The Caucasian kingdom had been occupied by foreign rulers such as the Mongolians, Ottomans and Persians most of the time between the 13th and 20th century. Accordingly, Georgians perceive the time before the 13th century as the most prosperous of the kingdom. Joining Russia at the eve of the 19th century went hand in hand with high hopes to gain a degree of protection from the powerful neighbour but led to full annexation, the end of the monarchy and the independent orthodox church (Frichova, 2009, p. 8). Georgia's short-lived independence between 1918 and 1921 under a Menshevik government is key to understanding the narrative put forward by many Georgians which viewed Soviet rule as a form of oppression and colonization of Georgia despite Joseph Stalin being Georgian himself. In the beginning, the country was part of the Transcaucasian Soviet Federated Socialist Republic. In 1936 it gained the status of a union republic. Although resistance formed rather quickly after the Soviet invasion in 1921, all uprisings in the 1920s

were violently oppressed; an experience which was relived on 9 April 1989 when the protests in Tbilisi turned violent after Russian troops intervened. The turbulent path towards the declaration of Georgia's independence on 9 April 1991 and the election of Gamsakhurdia as the first president did not pacify the country. Following a coup d'état at the end of the year, Gamsakhurdia's forces were fighting the leaders of the coup. Hence, Georgia was enmeshed in a civil war, at the same time, as its troops were fighting in South Ossetia and later in Abkhazia. When Shevardnadze was elected president in 1995, the country finally entered a quieter period in its history but was facing the legacies of the Soviet era. Shevardnadze's rule ended with the Rose Revolution in 2003. Georgia saw many political and economic reforms under the government of President Saakashvili, who was elected in 2004, but also an increase in its spending on defence. Saakashvili's tough stance on restoring Georgia's territorial integrity led to the integration of Ajaria by regaining control over this autonomous republic of Georgia. In fact, '[t]he restoration of territorial integrity was seen as a precondition to building a strong functional state that could withstand external pressures and fully democratize' (Frichova, 2009, p. 12).

Throughout the time between Georgia's struggle for independence and the war in 2008, relations between Georgia and Russia were tense. They were shaped by the conflicts with Abkhazia and South Ossetia and the Georgian secession in the 1990s and further deteriorated as a result of Georgia turning to NATO and expressing its interest in joining it under Saakashvili. Accordingly, scholars acknowledge a Georgian-Russian dimension of the conflict and a Russian-'Western' one. As regards the former, Russia's involvement in Abkhazia and South Ossetia during the wars was decisive for defeating Georgian forces. Therefore, Russian efforts as facilitator and peacekeeper were suspiciously eyed by Tbilisi but also because of the political and economic ties between the breakaway regions and Russia. At the same time, the political direction of the Saakashvili-government was a growing concern to Moscow since Georgia's Atlantic aspirations were complemented by an increase in the defence budget and a tough stance towards resolving the conflicts with Abkhazia and South Ossetia. Russia responded to this potential threat by increasing 'its budgetary and military support to both regions, and Russian security and military personnel were 'seconded' to the *de facto* authorities in Tskhinvali and, to a lesser degree, Sukhumi' in 2004 (Frichova, 2009, p. 15) and trying 'to pressurize Georgia by imposing a trade embargo and closing land, air and postal links' (Grono, 2010, p. 10). The war of 2008, including Russian troops entering

Georgia proper and war crimes being committed by all sides, left the region yet even more trapped in its intractable conflict.

So how do relations between Russia and the EU and US matter in the Georgian conflicts? Some scholars grasp this dimension from a geopolitical angle according to which the US and EU compete with Russia over influence in the Caucasus (Grono, 2010, p. 11; Frichova, 2009). In this regard, Russia was displeased with NATO's plans, as agreed at the summit in Bucharest in 2008, to support Georgia and Ukraine to apply for the Membership Action Plan as it condemned Georgia's rapprochement with NATO. On top of this, many EU member states and the US recognized Kosovo's independence despite Russia's objections. The economic importance of the Caucasus, in particular for the EU countries, becomes apparent when taking into consideration that it offers the only route 'for Caspian oil and gas to reach Europe circumventing Russia' (Grono, 2010, p. 11). Whereas the economic interests tend to divide the EU internally, the war in 2008 and Russia's recognition of Abkhazia and South Ossetia as independent states changed the situation insofar as Georgia's territorial integrity was seen as in need of protection against Russian interference. Most recently, the annexation of Crimea and the war in Ukraine weigh on the relations between Russia on one side and the EU and US on the other. To which extent this is affecting the conflict resolution efforts of the EU, Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), and UN will be assessed at a later stage.

To conclude this section, a survey conducted in autumn 2011 by Conciliation Resources nicely summarizes the perceptions and beliefs of various groups of Georgian society pertaining to the conflict and prospects of resolving the differences (Elbakidze & Pirtskhalava, 2012). The ways of reasoning are very similar to responses of interviewees in summer 2015. The conflicts are either seen as playing out between Georgia and Russia only or are assessed along two dimensions involving Georgia-Russia-Abkhazia and Georgia-Russia-South Ossetia. Others viewed the conflictual history through the lens of conflict between Georgia and South Ossetia and Abkhazia, Georgia and Russia, and Russia and the US and EU or the 'West' (Elbakidze & Pirtskhalava, 2012, p. 2). However, the interviewees agreed that the official and government-associated narrative prevalent in Georgian society is to perceive the root causes of conflict as deeply connected to Russia's political interests in Georgia. As a result, this narrative denies any conflict between Abkhazia and Georgia and invokes the notion of brotherhood to underline this stance. In fact, as a Georgian civil society representative explained, the idea of considering the Abkhaz as the brothers of the Georgians

is still a part of the traditional Georgian feasts during which the Tamada, the toastmaster, also raises the glass in a toast to the Abkhaz brothers (CSO-14, September 2015). In contrast to these perceptions on the Abkhaz, the South Ossetians are perceived as more distant and more closely aligned with Russia. Several interviewees explained why the official narrative is as strong as it was a few years ago. According to their perspectives, the Georgian government does not face a lot of pressure from international actors or the EU, for that matter, and actions or statements that inflict harm on the conflict resolution process do not have serious consequences (e.g. CSO-13, September 2015). This is reflected in a much more extreme manner in the media (CSO-14, September 2015).

Attempts at resolving Georgia's conflicts

To this day there have been several efforts to resolve Georgia's conflicts. To begin with the conflict between Georgia and South Ossetia, Russia played an important role in negotiating the peace agreement to cease fighting between the two parties in 1991. The institutional structure to resolve the conflict, which was foreseen by the agreement, includes the Joint Control Commission and the Joint Peacekeeping Forces. The former combined Russian, North and South Ossetian and Georgian representatives as well as officials of the OSCE. They formed the body responsible for resolving the conflict. However, the Joint Control Commission fell short of fulfilling this task because it was neither able to initiate processes of transitional justice nor to fully address the question of return of IDPs, nor could it overcome the divide between villages with close ties to North Ossetia and a few others with relations to the Georgian government (Tuathail, 2008, p. 677-679). Although the 'formal negotiations in the second half of the 1990s made some progress on issues of return, demilitarisation and reconstruction' and '[i]nformal channels, including vigorous trade and commerce in the large Ergneti market on the administrative border of South Ossetia, helped build confidence between the societies and improve inter-ethnic relations', the diverging positions on how to tackle the status question prevented any real steps towards a solution and regularly stalled the processes of conflict resolution (Frichova, 2009, p. 14). A year before the 2008-war the situation became even more complex when the Georgian government created the 'Provisional Administration of South Ossetia' with an ethnic Ossetian and former prime minister of the *de facto* state as its representative, thereby establishing a competitor for the *de facto* authority of the region (Tuathail, 2008, p. 680).

The conflict resolution efforts concerning Abkhazia were equally difficult if not even more intractable. To end the war between Abkhazia and the Georgian government, Russia engaged as a facilitator and later on provided peacekeepers. The UN Special Envoy sent military observers in 1993 and eventually changed the position of the Special Envoy to 'Special Representative of the Secretary-General' (Frichova, 2009, p. 14). President Shevardnadze proposed an asymmetric federation as a means to grant Abkhazia and South Ossetia considerably more rights than other regions of Georgia. However, the sequencing had to be such that reunification would come first and forming a federation second (Coppieters, 2004). The Abkhaz *de facto* authorities on the other hand rejected any solution which would not respect and guarantee their sovereignty. With the referendum of 1999, which was followed by a unilateral declaration of independence, the Abkhaz position became less flexible and, as Coppieters observes, for several groups all questions of determining the modalities of reunification with Georgia ceased to exist. In 2006, the *de facto* authorities of Abkhazia presented a plan called 'Key to the Future' in which they suggested a model for reconciling the differences between Abkhazia and Georgia based on an integration of Abkhazia into Europe and Georgia's recognition of Abkhazia's independence (Zakareishvili, 2009, p. 7). Since recognizing Abkhazia's independence was not acceptable to Tbilisi, there was no follow up and the plan was a lost opportunity of finding common ground as regards Abkhazia's and Georgia's aspirations towards Europe. International recognition was now the primary concern of Abkhazia and was guiding the thinking on how to resolve the conflict and consolidate the position of the *de facto* state. To this end, forming a confederal relationship with Russia was also considered to be an option (Coppieters, 2004). In the same year, the Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General initiated a new attempt at addressing the status question by involving the Group of Friends of the UN Secretary-General on Georgia to reach a compromise between Russia, the US and a few European countries. The 'Boden document' of 2001 situated Abkhazia as a sovereign entity into the sovereign state of Georgia without subordinating the Abkhaz to the Georgian government; a basis which the Abkhaz authorities did not accept for starting negotiations (Coppieters, 2004). Against this background, it is not surprising that Abkhazia was not a bystander in the 5-day war of 2008, but seized the opportunity to strengthen its control over the territory of Abkhazia.

The Boden document reveals two additional dimensions of this conflict. First, it is seen as an example of two actors competing for the role of the lead mediator, namely the UN and Russia. Although the Russian government eventually agreed to the basic principles outlined in the

document, it made it clear that it would refrain from pressuring the Abkhaz authorities to accept it (Coppieters, 2004). Second, the request of the UN Special Representative was directed at a forum, which does not include Georgia, Abkhazia and South Ossetia as conflict parties and exemplifies why members of the Georgian, Abkhaz and South Ossetian society, as a survey of 2011 points out, depict one dimension of the conflict as playing out between Russia and the 'West', here defined as the supporters of Georgia's territorial integrity: the US and Europe (Elbakidze & Pirtskhalava, 2012, p. 2). The latest effort at resolving Georgia's conflicts dates back to the war in 2008. President Nicolas Sarkozy brokered the six-point agreement in the name of the EU and paved the way for the Geneva talks, which commenced as a relatively open and undefined mechanism already in 2008, but became increasingly formalized as regards its scope and procedures in the subsequent years.

Despite none of the conflict resolution efforts by external actors managed to settle the conflicts, the survey of 2011 by Conciliation Resources reveals that Georgian society still tends to support mediation of external actors, but also shows a cleavage between respondents who demanded more involvement of external actors, in particular the EU due to good relations between several member states and Russia, and others, who cautioned the proponents of a stronger role for the EU by highlighting the questionable importance of Georgia to the agendas of member states and perceived the ties to Russia rather as an obstacle than an advantage (Elbakidze & Pirtskhalava, 2012, pp. 14-16). In light of these views, civil society representatives from Georgia also attached great importance to the efforts of international actors and pointed to the considerable leverage of the EU as the main donor and trade partner of Georgia (CSO-13, September 2015). Also, despite perceiving the Geneva talks as in a stalemate, they agreed that it is pivotal to maintain this platform. However, as an interviewee explained, the EU and member state diplomats would not capitalize on their leverage over the Georgian government and not even dare to speak their mind (CSO-13, September 2015). Whereas this concerns the conflicts between Georgia and Russia and Georgia and the two *de facto* states, an interviewee noted the escalation of conflict between the US and the EU on one side and Russia on the other (CSO-13, September 2015).

The structure of this brief sketch of the many facets of the conflict between the Georgian government and the *de facto* states of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, Georgia and Russia and Russia and Europe and the US as well as the initiatives and attempts to resolve them, in fact reflects the approach of the EUSR team to analysing the conflicts in Georgia. This review also sketched the state of the art of research in this field. As such, it facilitates assembling the

practices of EU mediation in Georgia for it allows for situating the analysis of interviewed actors and complements our understanding of their accounts by highlighting the diverging interpretations of the history of the conflicts. The review also illustrated how the interpretations of events and the conflict dynamics directed the processes, which were designed to overcome them. What is more, it showed how these mechanisms could neither prevent the violent escalation of disputes between Georgia and the *de facto* states nor another war in 2008. Hence, it is important to acknowledge that conflict resolution mechanisms have been and to some extent still form a part of the conflict dynamics. To facilitate the understanding of the interconnected dimensions of the conflict, the analysis differentiated between the conflict between Georgia and Abkhazia, Georgia and South Ossetia, Georgia and Russia, and Russia and the EU and US. In doing so, it was possible to locate the diverging interpretations of history of Georgia, Abkhazia and South Ossetia as a pivotal impediment towards any attempt at resolving their conflicts (Frichova, 2009, p. 8). In addition, it elucidated how the Georgian-Russian conflict escalated largely unaddressed in the 1990s and during most of the 2000s which was further complicated by the fact that Russia was acting as facilitator and peacekeeper in the conflict resolution formats for Georgia and the respective *de facto* state. Finally, it was possible to touch upon the relationship between Russia and the EU and US and to briefly observe how events, which were not related to the conflicts in Georgia, had an impact on its dynamics. Hence, it is essential to trace the practices which brought about EU-Georgia relations and enrolled the Union in the conflict, before turning to the task of assembling and analysing the mediation practices of the EU, for they form the background against which the EU's mediation role developed.

5.3. EU-Georgia relations or how Georgia became known to the Union

The relations between the EU and Georgia developed considerably during the last two decades. From engaging primarily through practices of technical and economic support after the declaration of independence and the opening of a delegation in 1995, the cooperation intensified with incorporating Georgia into the Eastern Neighbourhood Policy and the Eastern Partnership, but also through expanding the practices of conflict management and peace support and the signing of the Association Agreement between Georgia and the EU in 2014. Lili di Puppo differentiates between two phases in EU-Georgia relations before the 2008-war, namely the time before and after the Rose Revolution in 2003 (Di Puppo, 2010). In her analysis of both periods of time, she comes to the conclusion that the first phase was

characterized by the EU lacking a clear strategy towards Georgia and refraining from a proactive and visible role in engaging in Georgia's political and security matters (Di Puppo, 2010, p. 9). The Partnership and Cooperation Agreement of 1996, the legal framework of EU-Georgia relations, has as its objectives to establish political dialogue, provide support to Georgia's democratic consolidation, promote sustainable development through trade and investment, and to create a 'a basis for legislative, economic, social, financial, civil scientific, technological and cultural cooperation' (European Union, 1999, Art. 1). Between 2001 and 2003, according to Di Puppo, the EU approach to Georgia changed in that the country became known to the Union in a different way (Di Puppo, 2010, pp. 11-12). At first, the South Caucasus with its multiple violent conflicts was perceived as a concern of the Union and added to the agenda of the Swedish presidency of 2001. Second, the revised Country Strategy Paper of 2002 highlighted the need of resolving Georgia's conflicts as a precondition for making the practices of development cooperation effective and sustainable. Finally, the European Security Strategy of 2003 problematized the 'frozen conflicts' in Georgia as a security threat to Europe and an EU Special Representative for the South Caucasus was appointed in the same year. It seems EU officials and member state representatives perceived Georgia to be closer to EU borders and assigned its political struggle a different weight than they did previously. Finally, the Council decided to include Georgia in the European Neighbourhood Policy in the aftermath of the Rose Revolution and, as Di Puppo argues, opened up a new chapter in EU-Georgia relations. The European Neighbourhood Policy builds on the commitment to European values – democracy, the rule of law, human rights and sustainable economic development – and aspires 'to achieve the closest possible political association and the greatest possible degree of economic integration' by offering financial support, market access, visa liberalization, as well as policy and technical support to the respective countries (EEAS ENP, n.d.). It is based on the principle of 'joint ownership' or, in the words of the European Commission, 'The operational tool of the policy – the Action Plan – is fully negotiated and mutually agreed at political level' (European Commission, 2006, p. 3). Although the Union is perceived as utilizing its resources as leverage during the practices of negotiating the Action Plan for the respective country, thereby establishing an asymmetric relationship, the review of the European Neighbourhood Policy of 2015 presupposes joint ownership and shared values when stating that the practices of this policy form

[…] a long-term engagement with partner countries – in particular with partners, such as Georgia, wishing to pursue deeper relations with the EU based on shared values. Differentiation and joint ownership being the

hallmarks of the new ENP, the policy will continue to build ties and encourage Georgia's objective of further approximation with European structures. (EEAS, 2015, p. 1)

However, as Delcour and Gaenzle point out, Georgia does not have a prospect of accession to the EU. Hence, the process of norm convergence is more or less voluntary, which increases the Eastern Neighbourhood Policy countries' room to manoeuvre in crafting the outcomes of this policy compared to countries with membership prospects (Delcour, 2013, p. 346; Gaenzle, 2009, p. 1729).

At the EU Prague Summit in 2009, the Eastern Partnership was established between the EU and Georgia, Armenia, Belarus, Azerbaijan, the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine. It is designed to promote development of the Eastern European countries as a region but also allows for bilateral relations in order to prevent 'any state being held back by the slow progress of another' (Fean, 2009, p. 8). Complementing the European Neighbourhood Policy, this initiative promotes reform and cooperation in key sectors such as institution-building, trade and investment, mobility, and legislative approximation to the EU to name but a few and focuses specifically on projects to ensure timely implementation. As Laure Delcour notes, it goes hand in hand with two changes as regards the policy instruments it draws from: first, it provides an incentive to deliver on the part of the Eastern Partnership countries by aspiring to the signing of Association Agreements/ Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area (DCFTA), both of which are binding (Delcour, 2013, p. 347). And second, the multilateral track approach of introducing several platforms for the EU and the six Eastern Partnership countries to meet is an instrument which promotes the relations between the countries but is not legally binding (Delcour, 2013, p. 347; Korosteleva, 2012, p. 7). Whereas it is 'governed by the principles of differentiation and conditionality' (Council of the European Union, 2009b, p. 4), the fact that there is still no formal prospect of membership should be mentioned as this affects the leverage of the EU and its policy towards Georgia as leading to 'Neighbourhood Europeanisation' rather than 'Accession Europeanisation' (Fean, 2009, pp. 7-8; Franke et al., 2010, p. 150). Nevertheless, conditionality and persuasion seem to characterize EU-Georgia relations as far as the Eastern Partnership framework is concerned although scholars point to the limits of this approach. For instance, Delcour observes that the EU managed to deepen its influence in Georgia and to promote its norms but only in a superficial manner due to a lack of accounting for the specific needs of Georgia (Delcour, 2013, p. 352). Börzel and Pamuk argue that the practices of EU engagement stabilized the political regime in Georgia as opposed to transforming it (Börzel & Pamuk, 2012). What is more, the government of

Georgia was able to engage in these practices such as 'domestic institutional reforms precisely to strengthen their statehood' (Börzel & Risse, 2012, p. 202).

Finally signing the Association Agreement in 2014 was a result of the European Neighbourhood Policy and the Eastern Partnership initiative. It provides the new legal basis for EU-Georgia relations and, thus, replaces the Cooperation and Partnership Agreement of 1996. Understanding the Association Agreement is essential as regards its political weight and implications for practices of EU mediation to which the chapter will turn shortly. The Agreement has a political and an economic component. Politically, Georgia is tasked with reforming multiple policy fields, 'including security policy, economic recovery and growth, governance and sector cooperation in areas such as energy, transport, environmental protection, industrial cooperation, social development and protection, equal rights, consumer protection education, and youth and cultural cooperation' (EEAS, 2013). By establishing a DCFTA, Georgia's economy will be integrated into the internal market of the EU. As a part of which, Georgia is required to undertake the necessary steps of 'a far-reaching legal approximation process that many in Georgia considered risky for the country's economic performance' and as against the idea of the reform agenda of 2004, namely liberalizing the economy akin to the Singapore model (Delcour, 2013, p. 348). EU actors, however, kept insisting on a DCFTA in 2008 and the developments between Georgia, the two *de facto* states and Russia did not only make Georgia's economy more vulnerable but also reduced the options and partners it could turn to (Delcour, 2013, p. 349). Against this background, the question arises of why the EU approach towards Georgia's conflicts did change from hesitating to get involved to a much more visible and active stance? Although Georgia attracted more attention with the Rose Revolution and the EU enlargement of 2004 might have influenced the concern for Europe's Eastern countries more generally, Di Puppo argues that the central factor in changing the role of the Union in Georgia was the war in 2008 (Di Puppo, 2010, p. 34). According to her,

The war showed the dangers and difficulties of engaging in a zero-sum game in the Eastern neighborhood, but it has also illustrated the inadequacy of a timid and reluctant EU engagement that rejects the concept of spheres of influence yet fails to provide a tangible alternative. At the same time as it has demonstrated the gaps between both visions, the war has also had the inverse effect of bringing the EU and Georgia closer. Indeed, the EU has been prompted to endorse a more visible security role and upgrade its policies towards the Eastern neighborhood with the launch of the Eastern Partnership. On the other side, Georgia has realized that it needs the EU and must show more readiness to embrace the process of European integration. (Di Puppo, 2010, p. 34)

In sum, EU-Georgia relations are much more developed today than in the 1990s as embodied by the European Neighbourhood Policy, the Eastern Partnership, and as of late, the Association Agreement. Whereas the European Neighbourhood Policy relied on practices that were not legally binding, the Eastern Partnership included the necessary mechanisms to provide the EU with more leverage over Georgia. However, it was not only the envisioned codified practices of the Association Agreement/DCFTA which gave the EU a more powerful position but also the war of 2008. Despite the EU being able to assert its interest in negotiating and eventually signing the Association Agreement, several scholars accentuate the bargaining approach of the Georgian government and highlight the only minimal norm convergence to substantiate the argument that Georgia effectively uses the EU to its own advantage including strengthening its statehood against the backdrop of the breakaway regions Abkhazia and South Ossetia (Delcour, 2013; Börzel & Risse, 2012). This sheds light on an interesting puzzle which can serve as a starting point for assembling the EU's practices of resolving the conflicts in Georgia and, more specifically, the practices of mediation. On the one hand, it was possible to take note of an increasing role of the EU as an external actor and partner of Georgia, which goes hand in hand with promoting the 'European political and economic model', as well as a process during which the Union has stepped up its efforts as a peacemaker in the region after acknowledging the need of resolving the 'frozen conflicts'. On the other hand, scholars highlighted the reluctance of the Georgian government to follow the European economic model after the Rose Revolution despite the enthusiastic claim to implement the action plan of the European Neighbourhood Policy not within five but three years. And so it seems, that after 2008 Georgia capitalizes on the EU, thereby corroborating its standpoint of territorial integrity as a basis for resolving the conflicts with Abkhazia, South Ossetia and Russia.

5.4. *Assembling the practices of EU mediation in Georgia*

How is the understanding of conflicts in Georgia by EU actors reflected in their ways of dealing with them through practices of mediation? What political rationality informs these practices from the early 2000s to 2015 and did it change as a response to the war in 2008? Sketching the policies from the early 2000s to the war in 2008 is the first step towards approaching the political rationality of mediation practices as the first moment of the process of translation. This is complemented by assessing the tools and instruments or interessement devices at the disposal of EU actors, in particular the EUSR and his team, including the task

of overseeing the rule of law mission and the Border Support Team. The approach of the Union was different before 2008 and is only briefly assessed in order to illustrate the differences before and after the war. The focal point of this chapter is to assemble how the current assemblage of EU mediation emerged. Hence, the second step consists of addressing the period of time between 2008 and 2015 to analyse in what ways the war altered the practices of EU mediation. Beginning with the six-point agreement and then turning to the EU's efforts in the Geneva talks and the work of the EUMM, provides the basis for the third step and final examination of the assemblage of EU mediation as to the dimensions of political rationality, interessement devices, enrolment and mobilization through spokespersons by assessing the enrolled actor-networks of the Union consecutively. Thus, at first the EUSR as an actor-network and a set of practices or instrument of the Council of the European Union will be assembled, before turning to the EUMM to trace the practices of monitoring the Administrative Boundary Line or borders, and finally address how the delegation engages in practices of maintaining bilateral relations with the Georgian government, representing the EU, and funding of confidence building measures.

5.4.1. *The moments of translation of EU mediation practices: 2000-2008*

Tracing the political rationality of EU efforts in resolving the conflicts

When reviewing the views of scholars and analysts to assemble the moments of translation which engendered EU mediation practices in the form of supporting the UN and OSCE before 2008, different assessments of the EU's approach to solve the conflicts in Georgia become visible. Some argue that the Union' practices in conflict resolution evolved through different phases. Esmira Jafarova, for instance, demonstrates how the EU stepped up its efforts as of 2003, and suggests assessing the two phases before and after this year (Jafarova, 2011). Prior to 2003, the EU had been rather passive by focussing on supporting the OSCE and UN in the region and by providing financial assistance to Georgia, Abkhazia and South Ossetia through funding instruments of the European Commission. This approach reflects that, in the words of Jafarova, the EU was feeling 'more comfortable with a post-conflict rehabilitation and peace-building role' and remained 'cautious to undertake a deeper involvement in conflict resolution' (Jafarova, 2011, p. 67). Although the Georgian government was calling for a direct role of the EU in the negotiation mechanisms (Government of Georgia, 2006, as in ICG, 2007, p. 5), the Union only gradually increased its efforts through appointing an EUSR for the South Caucasus in 2003, and deploying a rule of law mission in 2004 and a Border Support

Team in 2005. As a result, the only presence of the EU at a negotiation table so far was at the Joint Control Commission meetings in connection to the South Ossetian conflict, in which the EU acquired an observer status in 2001 (Jafarova, 2011, p. 60). Along similar lines, others take note of the EU strengthening its focus on Georgia between 2003 and 2005 but emphasize its new role as a mediator in the Geneva talks post-2008 (e.g. Grono, 2010). Coppieters proposes an alternative analysis which does not differentiate between phases but between objectives of EU policies towards Georgia. He argued in 2007 that the EU approach to conflict resolution was driven by the following four objectives: conflict prevention, conflict transformation, international conflict management and conflict settlement (Coppieters, 2007, pp. 5-6). First, with conflict prevention, the EU was trying to overcome sources for violent escalation, for instance, by trying to convince Georgia to refrain from actions that might provoke other conflict parties but also through seizing the EU-Russia dialogue as an opportunity to discuss Georgia's conflicts (Coppieters, 2007, p. 13). Second, by aiming to transform the conflict, the EU worked towards finding common ground, thereby trying to change the mutually exclusive nature of the positions of the disputants. Despite being the largest donor to Abkhazia and South Ossetia before the war in 2008, the EU's conflict transformation agenda was facing several problems of which being dependent on Georgia's government is the most severe one (Coppieters, 2007, p. 17). Since the EU did not recognize the *de facto* authorities of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, it was required to cooperate and coordinate its rehabilitation programmes and other efforts in these regions with the Georgian government, an important party to the conflicts. Third, international conflict management refers to creating the conditions for international actors to meet and engage so as to develop the basis for a settlement of the conflict. Here the EU was challenged because of its goal of resolving the conflicts on the one hand and the delicate relationship of some of its member states with Russia either in connection to economic interests or a similar conflictual history (Coppieters, 2007, p. 21). Conflict settlement in Georgia means finding an answer to the status question of South Ossetia and Abkhazia. This is especially complicated owing to the mutually exclusive positions of the disputants and stakeholders of the conflict, the precedent of the negotiations on the status of Kosovo, as well as the question of who are the legitimate parties to the conflict that should be represented at the negotiation table. Particularly the latter is a disputed issue for the conflict parties have different views on what the conflict is about and who is involved (Coppieters, 2007, pp. 23-24). As such, Coppieters' analysis illustrates the multiple layers of the EU approach and accounts for the group of actors such as the European Commission, the EUSR, the European Parliament, who engaged in conflict

resolution in different ways but all of them on behalf of the EU. Differentiating between conflict prevention, conflict transformation, international conflict management and conflict settlement, is conceptually challenging due to a lack of a consensus about conceptual definitions of these terms, as Coppieters acknowledges. Whereas it is sufficient for him to define them in the beginning of his analysis, it would be problematic for this study in light of the EU putting forward its own concepts of conflict prevention, transformation, management and settlement. Therefore, this study will build on Coppieters insights on the consequences of a multi-layered conflict resolution approach which involves several actor-networks, albeit under the umbrella of the EU, but depart from his conceptual approach and turn to tracing the first moment of translation, the political rationality of EU mediation practices by assembling its problematization, *telos* and strategy, instead.

From the brief review of assessments of the EU's efforts it can be concluded that it was eschewing to get directly involved as a mediator before 2008 and put forward the argument that the EU did take up a stance on the question of the conflicts between Georgia and the *de facto* states. This problematization informed the Union's approach and can be summarized as to three dimensions: the significance of Georgia to the EU, the principle of sovereignty and territorial integrity, and the role of the broader conflict context in the form of the regional and international environment. Pertaining to the first dimension, EU actors increasingly problematized Georgia as a security concern. For instance, the European Security Strategy of 2003 mentions the South Caucasus in connection to the strategic objective of 'extending the zone of security around Europe' by asserting that '[w]e should take a stronger interest in the problems of the Southern Caucasus, which will in due course also be a neighbouring region' (European Council, 2003, pp. 7-8). The Report on the Implementation of the European Security Strategy takes note of the 2008-war in a similar manner:

New concerns have arisen over the so-called "frozen conflicts" in our eastern neighbourhood. The situation in Georgia, concerning Abkhazia and South Ossetia, has escalated, leading to an armed conflict between Russia and Georgia in August 2008. The EU led the international response, through mediation between the parties, humanitarian assistance, a civilian monitoring mission, and substantial financial support. Our engagement will continue, with the EU leading the Geneva Process. (European Council, 2008, p. 6)

The second dimension refers to the EU position on the status question which adheres to the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Georgia. By problematizing the conflicts in Georgia as a threat to the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the country, EU actors chose a particular reading of the history of the South Caucasus over another. In fact, they took the former Soviet

policy, which integrated Abkhazia and South Ossetia as autonomous republics into the union republic of Georgia, as reference. This choice has provided the basis for all conflict resolution efforts and peace plans since the 1990s and prevented the debate on the notion of statehood although it is this concept which is contested by the conflict parties. As a result, the EU's stance has been perceived as partial and as conforming to the position of the Georgian government at the expense of the demands of the *de facto* states. This further complicated the situation EU actors were facing because they had to strike a balance between blunt bias, which can be understood as questioning the legitimacy of the Abkhaz and South Ossetian demands, and acknowledging the concerns of the *de facto* states albeit rejecting their secession. For instance, the wording of the Country Strategy for 2007 to 2013, which details the spending of the European Commission's financial assistance to Georgia, illustrates the dangers of partiality when it elaborates on the potential use of the Instrument for Stability[10]: 'In the case of Georgia this [Instrument for Stability] is particularly relevant to the conflicts in Abkhazia and South Ossetia, *which continue to call into question Georgia's territorial integrity and challenge Georgia's security* (European Commission, 2007, p. 26, emphasis added). This assessment of why the Instrument for Stability is relevant to the Georgian conflicts problematizes Abkhazia and South Ossetia as undermining Georgia's security, thereby denying the legitimacy of the grievances and interests of both regions. At the same time, the European Parliament demonstrated an awareness of the tension resulting from the EU position in its resolution which demands an EU strategy for the South Caucasus, when it

'Stresses the need to address the Georgian-Abkhaz and Georgian-South Ossetian dimension of the conflicts and ensure that the rights and concerns of all populations involved are equally taken into account; stresses the fact that the isolation of Abkhazia and South Ossetia is counterproductive to conflict resolution' (European Parliament, 2010, Art. 16).

The third dimension of the problematization is linked to the EU's understanding of conflict. Whereas advocating the territorial integrity of Georgia denoted the central problem of the conflict between Georgia and the breakaway regions, the incompatible positions on this matter was not seen as the sole reason for why the conflict resolution mechanisms had not achieved any substantial results according to the Union's perspective. In this regard, the Country Strategy for 2007 to 2013 asserts that 'a negative regional and international context has not allowed significant progress to be made yet and the political/security situation remains

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[10] The name of the Instrument for Stability was changed in 2014 to Instrument contributing to Stability and Peace.

very tense' (European Commission, 2007, p. 9). By identifying the broader conflict context as constituting an impediment to a constructive approach to conflict resolution, the EU position took note of the role of regional and international actors in Georgia's conflicts. This might shed light on the demand of the European Parliament in its response to the war of 2008, in which it not only reiterated the territorial integrity of Georgia but also advocated the internationalization of the conflict resolution process (European Parliament, 2008a, A(25)). On all accounts, the firm commitment to the principle of upholding Georgia's territorial integrity within the internationally recognized borders explains why 'the EU has made only a very partial historical and moral assessment of the secessionist conflicts in Georgia. It has never engaged in a dialogue with the parties on the origins of the wars, on their respective responsibilities or on the war crimes committed by all sides' (Coppieters, 2007, p. 13). This is aggravated by the decision of the majority of EU member states to recognize the independence of Kosovo and to reject a solution of this kind for settling Georgia's conflicts.

In view of these three dimensions, the EU's problematization of the conflicts between Georgia, Abkhazia and South Ossetia can be grasped as playing out between its own security and regional interests, a perceived threat to the territorial integrity of the country, and the involvement of a number of regional and international actors as stakeholders of the conflicts which was considered as challenging any attempt at resolving them. Consequently, at the heart of this problematization is the notion of Georgia's statehood, the result of a consensus between member state representatives who were determined to uphold the principle of territorial integrity. This problematization raises the question of what idea of causes of conflict did EU actors work with? European Commission officials regarded 'bad governance, economic underdevelopment, human misery and images of the "other"' as root causes (Merlingen & Ostrauskaite, 2009, p. 16). As a result, the strategy of the EU before 2008 was driven by the belief that transforming the situation on the ground through rehabilitation and confidence building, on the one hand, and political and economic reform, on the other, would eventually create the environment in which the two *de facto* states could agree to a plan of reintegration into Georgia. This is in accordance with the *telos* of EU policies towards the South Caucasus including the European Neighbourhood Policy, that is, 'to encourage the development of the South Caucasus countries into open, peaceful, secure and stable states' (European Parliament, 2008b, p. 4). Moreover, the Union's approach of making Georgia attractive to Abkhazia and South Ossetia by supporting the reform of its political structure and fighting poverty happened to be in line with the position of the Georgian government and

informed the specific actions of priority area six of the Action Plan of the European Neighbourhood Policy of 2006. This Action Plan was the result of negotiations between the EU and Georgia. Priority area six represents the point of intersection between EU neighbourhood policies and conflict resolution efforts. That is to say, the Union aims at bringing Georgia closer to the EU, strengthens the ties between both sides, and offers another platform for Georgian and EU officials to negotiate their respective positions on the conflicts with Abkhazia and South Ossetia, thereby increasing the asymmetry between the EU's relations to Georgia and its engagement with the two *de facto* states. After affirming the commitment to 'support the settlement of Georgia's internal conflicts, drawing on the instruments at the EU's disposal, and in close consultation with the UN and OSCE' (European Commission, 2006), this section of the Action Plan details a number of steps of the EU strategy towards resolving the conflicts, 'based on respect of the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Georgia within its internationally recognised borders' (European Commission, 2006). These include confidence building and offering incentives such as additional economic assistance to Abkhazia and South Ossetia as a means of rewarding progress of the conflict settlement process. The document also establishes the Peace Plan of 2005, in which the Saakashvili government proposes a roadmap towards reintegrating South Ossetia into Georgia, which was endorsed by the OSCE ministerial Council in Ljubljana, as a point of reference for the peace process. Furthermore, '[t]he EU stresses the need for a constructive cooperation between interested international actors in the region, including the EU and OSCE member states, on additional efforts contributing to peaceful settlement mechanisms in Tskinvali Region/S. Ossetia and Abhkazia' and plans to include 'the issue of territorial integrity of Georgia and settlement of Georgia's internal conflicts in EU-Russia political dialogue meetings' (European Commission, 2006). Additional measures under the heading of 'Cooperation for the settlement of Georgia's internal conflicts' view the EU-Georgia Dialogue as another platform for advancing conflict resolution between Georgia and the two regions, suggest to increase EU support to the UN in Abkhazia and the OSCE in South Ossetia and emphasize the active role of civil society in resolving the conflicts which should be further supported. In other words, the Action Plan of the European Neighbourhood Policy reflects the three aspects of the problematization of Georgia's conflicts introduced above and advocates reintegrating Abkhazia and South Ossetia as a solution to the status question at a time, when the *de facto* authorities of both regions tended to reject a federal solution. It illustrates the reasoning behind the EU strategy before 2008 which promised to reward progress in resolving the conflicts with additional economic assistance and

demonstrated the belief that it is a matter of the right incentives for Abkhazia and South Ossetia to reintegrate into Georgia. This problematization of Georgia's conflicts and the corresponding approach towards resolving them renders the lack of the Abkhaz and South Ossetian perspectives in the account of the Union visible. This bias of the EU approach turned a blind eye to the grievances and interests of the two *de facto* states. For them, it was not a matter of a politically and economically attractive Georgia which determined their views on conflict settlement. Nevertheless, the EU approach of changing the conflict context through confidence building, rehabilitation programmes and other economic incentives, on the one hand, and political reform, on the other, was envisioned to create an environment conducive to conflict resolution. Accordingly, a number of instruments were employed to implement this strategy including the EUSR, the rule of law mission, the Border Support Team as well as various funding instruments of the European Commission. In view of these instruments being used to support the mediation practices of the UN and OSCE, it is important to note that the problematization of Georgia's conflicts by the EU did not entail establishing the Union as an obligatory passage point of the assemblage of mediation. It rather defines the EU role as supporting the lead of the UN and OSCE and refrains from getting more directly involved.

Interessement devices and struggles of enrolment

The political rationality which aimed at gradually transforming the situation on the ground through rehabilitation and economic and political reform is also prevalent in the objectives and mandate of the EUSR for the South Caucasus. In this regard, the EUSR is an instrument in facilitating the implementation of the EU's approach to the country and provides the mechanism for coordinating and overseeing other policy tools such as the rule of law mission and the Border Support Team. As such, the set of practices of the EUSR constitutes an interessement device, which tries to enrol non-EU actors in the assemblage of mediation, which is represented by the UN and OSCE respectively, and make them accept the problematization of the Union which is in support of the conflict resolution efforts of the mediating organizations. The Finish diplomat, Heikki Talvitie, was the first to be appointed for the newly created position in 2003, in order to ensure a more active role of the EU and 'to contribute to the implementation of the policy objectives of the European Union in the South Caucasus' (Council of the European Union, 2003, Art. 2). The objectives were to support Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan in the realm of political and economic reform, contribute to conflict prevention and resolution in line with the established mechanisms, engage with national actors, foster regional cooperation, and, last but not least, to strengthen the

effectiveness and visibility of the EU in the South Caucasus (Council of the European Union, 2003, Art. 2). In other words, the EUSR was responsible for engaging in practices which strengthened the statehood of the conflict-affected countries, supported the mechanisms for addressing the conflicts, and contributed to enhancing the Union's profile as an external actor in the region. Accordingly, the mandate spanned the tasks of developing a network on the ground, promoting regional cooperation, conflict prevention and resolution, dialogue with the key actors interested in the region, as well as contributing to the Council's task of drafting a comprehensive policy towards the South Caucasus (Council of the European Union, 2003, Art. 3). Concerning Georgia, the work of the EUSR in the field of conflict prevention and resolution was carried out within the scope of the EU's aspiration to support the UN and the OSCE, hence the interessement devices were designed to create a conducive environment for the practices of mediation of the two organizations but refrained from establishing the EUSR as an obligatory passage point nor as a spokesperson of the assemblage. However, as several amendments of the EUSR's mandate show, the tasks initially focused more on improving Georgia's state capacities but increasingly zoomed in on rather direct support to the conflict resolution mechanisms of the UN and OSCE.

In the course of the years, the EUSR mandate was amended three times: at first in 2004, to add the responsibility of having the oversight over the rule of law mission EUJUST THEMIS (Council of the European Union, 2004, Art. 2), and second in 2005, by mandating the EUSR to monitor the implementation of the reform of the criminal justice system in Georgia as well as to oversee the Border Support Team, which was established in the same year after Russia vetoed the continuation of the OSCE Border Monitoring Mission (Council of the European Union, 2005, Art. 2). The rule of law mission EUJUST THEMIS, which the EUSR had to oversee, was carried out by eight experts who were mandated to work with Georgian authorities towards devising a plan for the reform of the criminal justice system. Although the mission could be vaguely interpreted as contributing to creating a judicial environment conducive to the reintegration of the two breakaway territories, it did not have a clear reference to conflict resolution in its mandate and did not bear fruit pertaining to this broadly interpreted peacebuilding task (Merlingen & Ostrauskaite, 2009, p. 22). However, it demonstrates that the EUSR was responsible for a project which was essentially a statebuilding measure for Georgia and tried to enrol the targeted actors in a system of governance that the EU promoted and was meant to also make the country attractive to Abkhazia and South Ossetia. The Border Support Team was a direct result of the EUSR's

work (Grono 2010: 11). The Council of the European Union discussed the Border Support Team as one option among several to respond to the end of the OSCE monitoring mission. Eventually it was chosen over the suggestion of launching an ESDP mission with 200, 100 or 50 people and, thus, did not include a monitoring component (EU-19, September 2015). Instead the Border Support Team was mandated to assist the Georgian Border Police as regards advancing the security sector reform (Merlingen & Ostrauskaite, 2009, p. 21). Its tasks were ranging from direct advice to Georgian authorities and taking care of practical matters of the Border Police units to helping with developing a border management strategy. The team did not have access to Abkhazia and South Ossetia (Merlingen & Ostrauskaite, 2009, p. 21).

The mandate was amended for the third time in 2006, when the Swedish diplomat, Peter Semneby, took over (Council of the European Union, 2006). In addition to contributing to the prevention of conflicts, the EUSR was no longer tasked to generally prepare the return of peace to the region but 'to assist in creating the conditions for progress on settlement of conflicts' and to 'assist in conflict resolution, in particular to enable the EU better to support the United Nations Secretary General and his Special Representative for Georgia, the Group of Friends of the United Nations Secretary General for Georgia, the OSCE Minsk Group, and the conflict resolution mechanism for South Ossetia under the aegis of the OSCE'. In short, the 2006-mandate paved the way for a more active role by asking the EUSR to contribute 'to the settlement of conflicts and to facilitate the implementation of such settlement in close coordination with' the above-mentioned actors (Council of the European Union, 2003, Art. 3; Council of the European Union, 2006, Art. 3). Whereas the mandate still did not allow for engaging directly as mediator, it asked the EUSR to aim his efforts at enrolling the conflict parties in the initiatives of the UN and OSCE and contribute to the settlement of conflicts. EUSR Semneby utilized the limited resources within the scope he had been given by initiating small projects. 'For instance, together with the EU Institute for Security Studies, EUSR Semneby launched a series of seminars/round tables on conflict resolution in Georgia, with participation of independent experts and civil society actors from Georgia, Abkhazia and South Ossetia' (Merlingen & Ostrauskaite, 2009, p. 20). These practices addressed the issues at stake in the conflicts and constituted attempts at rallying for support from the parties and stakeholders of the conflicts.

In a nutshell, EU actors problematized the conflict dynamics in Georgia, South Ossetia and Abkhazia as to their relevance to EU interests, the threat to the country's territorial integrity

and the involvement of regional actors which they considered to be detrimental to any conflict resolution process. This view was informed by the notion of bad governance, the lack of economic development and deeply rooted enemy images as the sources and drivers of conflict. Against this background, the belief was formed that Georgia had to be strengthened in these areas in order to provide incentives to Abkhazia and South Ossetia to reintegrate and to achieve the *telos* of the Union, namely to build a strong and democratic state which could accommodate the ethnic groups including the Abkhaz and South Ossetians. Examples of how this idea was translated into a strategy are the section on conflict resolution in the Action Plan of the European Neighbourhood Policy as well as the broad mandate of the EUSR which included democracy promotion, overseeing the rule of law mission, monitoring the Border Support Team and initiating projects to support the settlement of conflicts but did not allow for directly engaging as mediator. This changed with the war of 2008 and gave rise to a new set of practices. Thus, leaving aside the interessement devices and processes of enrolling actors in the UN- and OSCE-led assemblage, since a more detailed assessment would be beyond the scope of this study, the chapter now turns to assessing the assemblage of mediation between 2008 and 2015.

5.4.2. *The moments of translation of EU mediation practices: 2008 to 2015*

Brokering a ceasefire: failed attempts at upholding the Union's political rationality

Following the armed conflict in August 2008, the EU stepped up its involvement in the conflict resolution mechanisms. The Union's efforts to facilitate negotiations of a ceasefire took shape in two rounds with two draft proposals being presented in the first round and an additional agreement detailing implementation mechanisms in the second round. On August 9, 2008, the Foreign Minister of France, Bernard Kouchner, and the chairman of the OSCE, Alexander Stubb, flew to Tbilisi with a draft proposal. The document focused on 'cessation of hostilities, recognition of Georgia's territorial integrity, as well as rapid re-establishment of the *status quo ante*' and was accepted by the Georgian side (Forsberg & Seppo, 2010, p. 4). Then President Sarkozy took the initiative, rejected the existing draft in order not to upset the Russian representatives and met with President Dmitri Medvedev on August 12 to discuss another draft proposal which was more or less similar to that of his Foreign Minister and served as a basis for the final six-point agreement. It included launching international discussions on matters of security and stability for Abkhazia and South Ossetia, apart from revoking the further use of force, the cessation of hostilities, access for humanitarian aid

organizations, and requesting Georgian troops to return to the barracks and the Russian army to withdraw to their pre-war positions. Since Russia did not withdraw its troops as agreed upon but recognized the independence of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, representatives of EU member states decided at an extraordinary summit in Avignon to suspend the negotiations of a new cooperation agreement with Russia until it would fulfil its obligations as outlined in the ceasefire. On September 8, the Russian representatives, President Sarkozy, Javier Solana, the EU High Representative, and José Manuel Barroso, Head of the European Commission, agreed on yet another plan for the Russian military's return to the pre-war positions (Forsberg & Seppo, 2010, p. 5). To accommodate the implementation of the second ceasefire agreement, the Council of the European Union authorized the EUMM on September 15.

All these efforts took place in a short period of time which suggests relative agreement among member state representatives in the Council on how to respond to what they referred to as the crisis in Georgia. President Sarkozy's approach did not seek consensus on sensitive matters among member states but problematized the fighting as such and aimed at the end of hostilities and a return to the *status quo ante*. Opposing views on how to deal with Russia or the South Ossetian and Abkhaz dimension of the conflict, which mark the divide between member states favouring 'soft containment' and those advocating a 'creeping integration' (Parmentier, 2009) on the one hand and a varying degree of awareness of the interests and grievances of the two *de facto* states on the other (Grono, 2010, pp. 16-17), did not hamper developing a unified position. In light of the unfolding events, EU actors problematized the armed conflict as threatening Georgia's territorial integrity in that they responded to its inter-state dimension and neglected the South Ossetian and Abkhaz dimension for the time being. Put differently, the war challenged the political rationality of the Union's previous engagement and questioned the effectiveness of trying to provide the necessary incentives for Abkhazia and South Ossetia to reintegrate into Georgia. As a result, the efforts of brokering a ceasefire can also be looked at as attempts at upholding the EU's political rationality with the main goal being the return to the *status quo ante*. In this regard, the practices of mediating a ceasefire reveal a significant pattern of accommodating the interests of the disputants, while, at the same time, repeatedly failing to influence and alter those positions which were against the Union's interests. The following five moments or attempts at enrolling the conflict parties in the EU approach illustrate this point. First, early on EU officials refrained from advancing a view on who of the warring parties acted as the aggressor and even agreed to skip the reference to Georgia's territorial integrity in the ceasefire document. Interrogating the

outbreak of war was postponed to a later stage and addressed on 2 December 2008, when the Council established the fact-finding mission IIFFMCG to examine the causes and drivers of the war. Second, the status question also did not form a part of the document. In fact, the final ceasefire agreement does not reflect the EU position, apart from the priority of ending the war but represent the common denominator between Tbilisi and Moscow. Third, the EU was not able to procure swift implementation with Russia prolonging the withdrawal of troops and eventually necessitating a second agreement. Even then, Moscow only honoured parts of the commitment and kept a military presence in the secessionist regions. Fourth, Russia's recognition of Abkhazia and South Ossetia on 26 August 2008 was a step towards deepening the disintegration of Georgia at a vulnerable moment in time which EU mediators could not prevent and reduced their goal of restoring the *status quo ante* to the point of absurdity. The symbolic move of suspending negotiations on a cooperation agreement with Russia did not deter Moscow from establishing formal military relations with Sukhumi and Tskhinvali which culminated in signing agreements on the joint protection of their respective state borders (Merlingen & Ostrauskaite, 2009, p. 9). Fifth, the EU could not persuade Russia to agree to extend the UN and OSCE mandate in Abkhazia and South Ossetia. Instead it bore witness to both missions being closed down making the Union the only international presence at the administrative boundary line albeit without access to both secessionist regions.

In other words, the EU tried to craft a response by employing all the instruments which were deemed necessary to terminate the fighting, prevent Russian occupation of Georgia proper and prepare the ground for establishing much needed mechanisms for deescalating violent incidents in the future. The political rationality of the previous practices was seen as dispensable until a framework had been established to address the armed conflict. For this to materialize, direct mediation was seen as inevitable as well as the prospect of EU engagement as a peacekeeper. In view of an international mechanism to restore security and stability, the Council of the European Union appointed an EUSR for the Crisis in Georgia on 25 September 2008 to assist the parties in negotiating 'arrangements for security and stability in the region' and humanitarian questions such as the return of IDPs which were envisioned to commence in November (Council of the European Union, 2008c, Art. 3). His mandate was to assist with implementing point six of the six-point agreement that is to prepare for the international talks, to help with developing the EU position on the matter and to represent the EU in the talks (Council of the European Union, 2008c, Art. 3). The Council Joint Action also reiterates what the international talks are meant to address:

- arrangements for security and stability in the region,
- the issue of refugees and displaced persons, on the basis of internationally recognised principles,
- any other subject, by mutual agreement between the parties (Council of the European Union, 2008c, Art. 3).

The goals of the Geneva talks do not refer to any idea or concept for resolving the conflicts but is concerned with the immediate consequences of the five-day-war and a return to a state of relative stability and security. Moreover, the civilian EUMM was suggested, accepted and deployed to monitor, analyse and report, and engage in confidence building between the parties (Council of the European Union, 2008b).

Although the instruments of the EU, such as launching the EUMM and appointing an EUSR, played an increasingly important role, many scholars and analysts still stress the importance of France as the lead actor in brokering a ceasefire in August 2008 as opposed to perceiving it as an EU achievement. They also highlight the willingness of Russia, the UN and OSCE to support the French efforts and later on the EU in taking the lead (Forsberg & Seppo, 2010, p. 8; Grono, 2010, p. 13). Especially in light of the above mentioned failures of the EU to secure Russia's continuous commitment to the process, several scholars noted the difficulties mediators were facing and often unable to tackle without unintended side effects (Whitman & Wolff, 2010). Nevertheless, member states were resolutely backing the French mediation efforts on behalf of the Union and acted in a swift manner pertaining to its decision-making and implementation of Joint Actions. This said the EU emerged as the lead mediator and guarantor of the six-point agreement as a result of the war in 2008. As a mediator, it was facing the challenge of advocating Georgia's sovereignty and territorial integrity and being perceived as both having a predominantly Russo-Georgian lens to the conflict and a record of focusing more on good governance, democracy and economic development rather than on direct forms of conflict resolution. Moreover, the war contributed to strengthening the *de facto* independence of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. This situation was the point of departure for the Geneva talks which is the set of practices that would soon enrol the actors in the assemblage of EU mediation and increasingly formalize their ways of forming associations. To trace these practices from 2008 to 2015, it is essential to assess the *techne* that is the instruments, tools and material traces of the Geneva talks. Then the chapter will turn to assembling the moments of translation pertaining to which political rationality is driving the actor-network of EU mediators, what interessement devices they have used to enrol other EU and non-EU actors, and which spokespersons they have tried to establish.

The EUSR for the Crisis in Georgia, Pierre Morel, with the mandate to both represent the EU and mediate between the conflict parties, already launched the Geneva talks, a set of practices which engendered the process of mediation, in autumn 2008. This platform was novel pertaining to the EU as the lead mediator and format but was situated in the context of over a decade of conflict resolution practices in the region. The EUSR's initial decisions aimed at capitalizing on both delicate aspects in a way so as to create momentum. He envisioned a process which would bring all conflict parties to the table and convinced the Georgians of the need of having not only Russians but also Abkhaz and South Ossetians in the room (Forsberg & Seppo, 2010, p. 8). By inviting the UN Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Georgia and the Special Envoy of the OSCE Chairman-in-Office as co-chairs of the talks, he ensured inclusivity as regards the international actors with a record in Georgia's conflict resolution history. After some initial struggles, EUSR Morel gave up on the idea of having plenary sessions and suggested the format of two working groups (WG) instead with WG 1 focusing on security and WG 2 on humanitarian issues (Merlingen & Ostrauskaite, 2009, p. 27). This way the process could develop based on a 'constructive ambiguity' concerning the nature of the conflict and mutual agreement of all participants on not agreeing on the conflict issues (EU-14, July 2015). Consequently, the Geneva talks were never meant to solve the status question but to contribute to devise security arrangements and address the humanitarian issues, in particular the situation of IDPs. The conflict management approach of this format could only be changed if all parties gave their consent to include another subject, as outlined in Article 3 of the EUSR mandate, thereby leaving a backdoor for the status question (Council of the European Union, 2008c, Art. 3). With this set-up, the talks were still difficult but eventually managed to deliver first results. In February 2009, the participants of WG 1 agreed to the Incident Prevention and Response Mechanism (IPRM) for the administrative boundary line of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. This instrument comprises monthly meetings between representatives of the respective *de facto* authority, Georgian border police and Russian military which are co-facilitated by the Head of the EUMM and the Special Representative of the OSCE Chairperson-in-Office for the South Caucasus. While these meetings allow for discussing security-related incidents and for coordinating all matters concerning the administrative boundary line, the IPRM also offers a hotline to quickly respond to bigger incidents (Merlingen & Ostrauskaite, 2009, p. 27). The WG 2 was struggling with opposing views and demands considerably but managed to initiate some form of collaboration between

the parties to tackle challenges regarding water and gas supply (Merlingen & Ostrauskaite, 2009, p. 28).

In the course of time, the practices of the Geneva process were increasingly formalized from the general structure of the talks to the agenda of each working group. For instance, although the talks itself are very informal, participants attend in a personal capacity in that they do not officially represent a conflict party and there is still no agreement on what the conflict is about, the process format is set in stone. To this day the rounds of the Geneva talks take place every three months for two days. The morning of the first day is reserved for an information session, which is convened on a needs-basis, and offers a platform to invite external experts to give a presentation on topics of relevance to the current state of the talks. In the past such topics have been the notion of occupation and freedom of movement (EU-14, July 2015). This session, if it takes place, is followed by bilateral meetings with Georgia, South Ossetia, Russia, Abkhazia and the United States. WG 1 and 2 meet on the second day with WG 1 being co-chaired by the EUSR, UN Special Representative and the Special Envoy of the OSCE Chairman and WG 2 is run by co-moderators of the respective three institutions. Between the rounds of talks, delegations of the EU, UN and OSCE prepare the next session which includes a 10-day-trip to Georgia, South Ossetia, Abkhazia and Russia and is reserved for direct consultations. These meetings are very formal but, if necessary, it is possible to accommodate additional meetings and consultations except for South Ossetia where the delegation is more constrained and not allowed to walk freely due to the region being closed off (EU-14, July 2015). With this framework in place, WG 1 is currently working on a draft joint statement by all participants on the non-use of force; an undertaking which is hoped to yield a tangible result in the near future (OSCE, 2015). WG 2 is discussing the humanitarian situation in the *de facto* states and areas near the administrative boundary line including 'issues relating to multilingual education and languages of instruction in Gali schools, freedom of movement and mobility, missing persons, environmental and cultural heritage' but the participants are at loggerheads with each other when it comes to the issue of return of the IDPs. The South Ossetians, Abkhaz and Russian participants refuse to discuss this subject as long as Georgia insists on pursuing it at the UN. The attempt of the co-moderators to bring an Abkhaz and South Ossetian delegation to New York, for them to realize that their voice can be heard, did not succeed in changing their position of not discussing the issue in the WG 2 format (EU-14, July 2015).

The actor-network of the mediator team also underwent some changes. In 2011 the position of the EUSR for the Crisis in Georgia was merged with the one of the EUSR for the South Caucasus after discussions among member state representatives about abolishing the position of the EUSR for the South Caucasus (EU-19, September 2015). The mandate of EUSR Semneby expired in February 2011. The French diplomat, Philippe Lefort, was the first to hold the post of the EUSR for the South Caucasus and the Crisis in Georgia as of September 2011. He was followed by the German diplomat, Herbert Salber, in 2014. The mandate was adapted in 2011 by differentiating between the general mandate and specific provisions for the crisis in Georgia (Council of the European Union, 2011b, Art. 3). Compared to the former mandate of the EUSR for the South Caucasus, the new Council decision no longer requires the EUSR to focus on democracy promotion or the rule of law but mandates Herbert Salber to develop contacts, promote regional cooperation between the countries, contribute to conflict settlement and the implementation of the Union's human rights policy, and to facilitate confidence building measures as well as to assist with developing EU policies for the region (Council of the European Union, 2011b, Art. 3a-c; e-i). The special provisions for the crisis in Georgia reflect the tasks pertaining to the Geneva talks as outlined in the previous mandate of the EUSR for the Crisis of Georgia and comprise of preparing the talks, helping to establish the EU's position and represent the Union in the talks and of facilitating the implementation of the six-point agreement and the implementing measures (Council of the European Union, 2011b, Art. 3d).

The team of the EUSR for the South Caucasus and the Crisis in Georgia assists Herbert Salber in his work. In its current from the team consists of about 20 people who have either contract positions or are on secondment from member states. As the title of the post indicates, they deal with the crisis in Georgia and the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and have their headquarters in Brussels and a field office in Tbilisi for their in-country team in Georgia. The division of work as regards Georgia is structured accordingly with the leadership coming from Brussels, since the EUSR is not permanently stationed in the conflict region, and the colleagues in Tbilisi are taking care of the responsibilities on the ground. Hence, the EUSR and chief of cabinet coordinate and manage the efforts and are supported by two conflict advisors on Georgia. The team in Tbilisi deals with the tasks relevant to the Geneva talks and engages with *de facto* authorities. Their work also includes maintaining contacts with ministries and diplomats in Georgia and assisting with preparing the field trips of the troika (EU-20, September 2015; EU-21, September 2015; EU-23, November 2015). Pertaining to the Geneva

talks, the EUSR leads the troika of the EU, OSCE and UN, and is the co-chair of WG 1. He is supported by a co-moderator of WG 2 who is not a member of the EUSR team but holds a position at the European Commission's *Directorate General for Neighbourhood and Enlargement Negotiations* and previously worked for the International Crisis Group and various NGOs including Conciliation Resources and International Alert. Like the co-moderator of WG 2, all members of the EUSR team for Georgia already obtained conflict expertise in previous positions and have experience of working in the South Caucasus. Furthermore, it is noteworthy that most of them also worked for the OSCE or another EU institution, for instance the EUMM, at some point in their career. Some of them can also draw from experiences with working for NGOs and think tanks (EU-20, September 2015; EU-14, July 2015). However, it is not only the EUSR and his team, who are involved in the practices of mediation, which bring about the Geneva talks. As regards the Union, the EU Delegation to Georgia, the EUMM, member state representatives, and the Mediation Support Team of the EEAS either form a part of the assemblage or can easily enrol in it. What are the practices which enrol these actor-networks?

Tracing the associations between the EUSR and other actor-networks of the Union

The EU delegation is enrolled mainly through practices of supporting the Geneva talks. The mandate of the EU delegation embraces Georgia and the two territories, which is in line with the position of supporting the territorial integrity of the country. As an EU official asserted, the mandate of the delegation and the EUSR respectively are partly overlapping (EU-17, September 2015); a view which was not shared by a member of the EUSR team who perceives the delegation as being much more controlled by the Georgian government (e.g. EU-20, September 2015). Despite these differences, both actor-networks work together since the delegation is administering the financial instruments which are needed to implement the project ideas developed during the Geneva talks. Hence, the delegation is participating in the talks as an observer. Guided by the commitment to Georgia's territorial integrity, the delegation supports direct engagement and confidence building between Georgia and the *de facto* authorities but does not entertain relations with the latter. Unlike the EUSR, the delegation staff is not allowed to enter the territories (EU-17, September 2015). Whereas conflict resolution is stated to be a long-term goal, supporting the Geneva talks constitutes also only a part of the practices of the delegation. Moreover, as a delegation official added, they are aware of the ramifications of their work, for instance, how the relations between the

EU and Russia more generally affect how Russia behaves in the Geneva talks (EU-17, September 2015).

The member states matter in a different way in the assemblage of mediation. On the one hand, they support the EUSR team with secondments and, if requested, assist with finding experts for the Geneva talks and might also be approached for financial support. On the other, a few member states have increasingly called on the EUSR team to caution them about their engagement with the *de facto* authorities but they have not directly influenced the work of the team yet (EU-23, November 2015). The EUSR reports to the Council, the Political and Security Committee and the member states representatives in Tbilisi and briefs the European Parliament on a regular basis. In fact, these relations are maintained through formalized and informal practices. There are the regular briefings in Brussels but also the meetings with member state representatives after every trip to the regions and a monthly meeting which is hosted by the EU delegation (EU-20, September 2015). An example of a less formalized practice is a request of member state diplomats to the EUSR team in Tbilisi for assistance in preparing a visit to Abkhazia or South Ossetia.

Last but not least, the EUSR team can request support from the Mediation Support Team. There was agreement among the EUSR team that their work and the area of responsibility of the Mediation Support Team are not overlapping but complementary instead; although they added that their cooperation is still in the early stages and could be further expanded (EU-23, November 2015; EU-21, September 2015; EU-20, September 2015). Practices of in-house mediation support regarding Georgia have involved deploying experts to the Geneva talks, technical support to the Geneva process, coaching and advising. The Mediation Support Team has deployed experts and moderated two rounds of discussions among the co-chairs on the question of what could be changed to advance the Geneva process (EU-23, November 2015). Following up on the discussions, the Mediation Support Team assisted with technical expertise and helped to implement the agreed changes. In its function of an advisor the situation was slightly more difficult since the EUSR has multiple advisors and it is a question of its own who of his advisors he is going to agree with (EU-12; July 2015). It should be noted that the Mediation Support Team took office in 2011 and did not work with the EUSR and his team from the very beginning of the Geneva rounds which commenced in 2008.

In sum, this is how the EU took on the lead of the mediation practices and was represented on the ground by three actor-networks: the delegation with its mandate for Georgia including the

two *de facto* states, the EUMM as a civilian peacekeeping mission and the EUSR through its field office. The actors of the assemblage of EU mediation, including the representative of the OSCE and UN respectively, crafted a platform with a set agenda and clearly defined practices of engaging with one another. With time, they secured agreement of the participants and the Geneva talks were eventually formalized as a format. But how did this happen, what realities did it create for the EUSR and his team, and in what ways did they deal with it in summer 2015? Answering these questions by following the members of the EUSR team is the task of the next section of the chapter.

Translating the political rationality of the assemblage of mediation: the EUSR

With what problematizations did the participants of the talks confront the EUSR and what understanding of the conflict dynamics and context does the EUSR and his team work with? The beginning of the Geneva talks was severely hampered by the status question, according to the advisors of the current EUSR team (e.g. EU-14, July 2015). It was haunting every aspect of the mechanism from questions of format to finding an agreement on what the process is meant to achieve. For the Georgian participants, Russia was the only conflict party and the central concern of the Geneva talks had to be what they perceived as Russia's illegal actions during the war in 2008. In contrast to this almost legal discourse, Moscow's delegation demanded a platform for negotiating arrangements which would guarantee South Ossetia and Abkhazia's territorial integrity and would include guarantees from Tbilisi to refrain from further attempts at reintegrating the two *de facto* states by force. They interpreted their own role in the process as that of a peacekeeper and not a conflict party since the conflict was seen as taking place between South Ossetia and Abkhazia on the one hand and Georgia on the other. Finally, the participants from South Ossetia and Abkhazia were condemning Tbilisi's position of turning a blind eye on the conflicts with both *de facto* states and requested this issue to be addressed in the talks in order to prevent any discussions of a possible reintegration into Georgia. The EU's own standpoint can be added to the mosaic of perspectives on what the practices of the Geneva talks should deliver. The Joint Action of the Council of the European Union emphasizes in 2008 in this regard '[…] that a peaceful and lasting solution to the conflict in Georgia must be based on full respect for the principles of independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity recognised by international law, the Final Act of the Helsinki Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe and United Nations Security Council resolutions' (Council of the European Union, 2008d, p. 1). In an attempt to reframe this policy position in light of the Union's conflict resolution mandate, the EUSR for

the South Caucasus, Semneby, coined the phrase of 'non-recognition and engagement' (Grono, 2010, p. 41). Whereas this was also accurately describing the situation EUSR Morel and his team were confronted with after the war in 2008, it did not make it any easier in trying to move the Geneva talks forward.

Comparing the accounts of the respective interviewees in summer 2015, their problematization tends to account for three dimensions of the conflicts. First, they assess the EU's role in the conflict by reflecting on its policy, room to manoeuvre and ability as well as limitations in responding to concerns and needs of the conflict parties. Second, they take the practices of the Geneva talks and recent developments in the process into consideration. Third, they offer an analysis of the violent conflict which sketches the different perspectives of the conflict parties to explain particular events or incidents. As to the first dimension, many interviewees referred to the EU's policy position as 'non-recognition and engagement'. It reflects the political rationality of the Council of the European Union but tries to shift the focus on what the Union can and cannot do for Abkhazia and South Ossetia. The interviewees interpreted this position as making them partial towards the Georgian government. They were aware that some actors even perceive them as ill-disposed towards the concerns, interests and grievances of the Abkhaz and South Ossetian representatives; also the Russians eye EU actors sceptically due to this policy, as an EU official explained (EU-21, September 2015). Also the title of the post of the EUSR for the crisis in Georgia reflects these difficulties and sensitivities since the Georgian side used to refer to the war in 2008 as a conflict between Georgia and Russia, whereas the Russians portrayed themselves as peacekeepers who acted in response to Georgian aggression. The EU, however, intentionally refrained from taking a position on how the war started before the fact finding mission had presented its final report and chose not to call it a conflict but crisis in Georgia (EU-21, September 2015). Nonetheless, the notion of 'crisis in Georgia' frames the events of August 2008 within the language of Georgia's territorial integrity and, as such, reiterates the EU position on the status question. The policy of non-recognition and engagement constitutes the sensitive background against which other actions and decisions are understood by the participants of the talks. The interviewees pointed to many incidents in which it limited the options of the EUSR and created a number of issues which surfaced either during bilateral visits or the Geneva talks. For instance, it is impossible to address some concerns of the Abkhaz by transforming it into an opportunity for EU engagement because it could be interpreted as a statebuilding measure. These constraints in turn undermine the standing of the EUSR and complicate the relations

with the *de facto* authorities. The Abkhaz representatives often do not accept an intervention of the EUSR as was recently the case when Herbert Salber tried to talk to them about their considerations of abolishing Georgian as a language and to introduce Russian at the schools of the Georgian minority (EU-20, September 2015). Here the partiality of the EU and the consequential limits of providing support to the region hamper the EUSR's work. In trying to cope with this challenge, several team members emphasized that the post of the EUSR covers the crisis in Georgia and the South Caucasus since 2011 when the two positions of the EUSR for the crisis in Georgia and for the South Caucasus were merged (EU-21, September 2015). This allows them to argue that their mandate does not only embrace Georgia but also the South Caucasus when responding to a representative of a *de facto* authority who is stressing their view of not being a part of Georgia. Although the EUSR has to liaise with the Georgian government if they want to engage with the *de facto* authorities, it is sufficient to inform them about a scheduled meeting without mentioning what it is about (EU-20, September 2015).

The work of the EUSR and his team is considerably influenced by the decisions of other EU actor-networks and member states. For instance, they perceived the signing of the Association Agreement or establishing the NATO training centre in Georgia proper as challenging events (EU-21, September 2015). According to an interviewee, the signing of the Association Agreement shifted the focus away from the isolation of Abkhazia (EU-14, July 2015). Moreover, the Geneva talks are considered to be in a stalemate by several people in the Council of the European Union, which makes it increasingly difficult to convince the members of the Political and Security Committee to agree to deepen the engagement with Abkhazia and South Ossetia. As an EU official noted, they favour maintaining the EUMM in its current form but lose interest in other Georgian matters (EU-20, September 2015). At the same time, diverging positions among the member states curtail any attempt to capitalize on the potential leverage that the EU could have over the conflict parties. These rifts also lead to different practices of how the policy of non-recognition and engagement is interpreted by member states. For instance, some states do not issue visas for residents of Abkhazia and South Ossetia which isolates the regions even further. As an interviewee put it, there is little the EUSR and his team can do but to convey the concerns of Abkhazia and South Ossetia to diplomats, international organizations and the EU institutions (EU-20, September 2015).

The second dimension of the problematization concerns the practices of the Geneva talks. As an EU official noted, it would be wrong to refer to it as a conflict resolution mechanism as this would imply having an agreement and a framework in place. This was the case until 2008

but everything changed when Russia recognized Abkhazia and South Ossetia as independent states on 26 August 2008. Thus, technically the GID are not even talks but discussions. Their goal is to facilitate the negotiations on security arrangements and humanitarian issues. Hence, the format was designed to restore stability and is not a mechanism to solve the underlying issues of the conflict. This said the interviewees evaluated the prospects of settlement as dim even within this rather narrowly defined scope of the talks. One of them elaborated on this in September 2015 by highlighting two diverging patterns (EU-20, September 2015). Five or six years ago it was possible to observe a small degree of openness among the Abkhaz participants. This window of opportunity seems to be closing in connection to several developments which resemble a return to the cold war. In fact, Abkhazia and South Ossetia are moving towards Russia, and Georgia towards the EU, which creates a situation that is not conducive to dialogue. Yet the round of the Geneva talks in July 2015 painted a different picture in that the participants demonstrated interest in dialogue. It seemed that there was room to address a number of issues although of course not the major items on the agenda like the question of return of IDPs. While this does not raise hopes for a major breakthrough, it makes new confidence building measures more likely (EU-20, September 2015). Moreover, throughout the years the process has been affected by the ambiguity of what the conflict is about in that it made it more difficult to agree on rules and the structure of the discussions with, for instance, Georgia refusing to recognize Abkhazia and South Ossetia as conflict parties and Russia insisting to be an observer like the US and not a stakeholder in the conflict (EU-23, November 2015). Even after the talks became more formalized, the participants could not agree on adopting a Guide of Procedures which made it impossible to change the agenda and the process became inflexible and static. This sheds some light on why very few documents were accepted by the participants, in fact, only the six-point agreement and the implementing measures, although there are two existing versions, one in French and the other in Russian and they are not identical, and a document for establishing the IPRMs. Nevertheless, the Guide of Procedures, although rejected by the participants, serves as an informal basis of the talks (EU-23, November 2015). This illustrates to what extent the diverging perspectives on the conflict influence and structure the process.

These differences in positions and perspectives are reflected in the third dimension of the problematization of the EUSR team, namely how they assess the conflict dynamics. They generally differentiate between the Georgia-Russian, South Ossetia-Georgian, and Abkhazia-Georgian dimensions of the conflict. From this perspective, they notice an interest of

Abkhazia in the EU which they assume to be the result of the Abkhaz representatives not wanting to depend entirely on Russia although they would never admit that they see the EU as an option in addition to Russia (e.g. EU-21, September 2015). South Ossetia, on the contrary, as the interviewee observed, does not seem to be interested in any of the international actors as it does not pursue independence but is increasingly leaning towards Russia. The government in Moscow features prominently in the assessment of the EUSR team. They are aware of the debate between proponents of the view that the de facto authorities are merely puppets of Moscow and the opponents who emphasize the importance of addressing the Georgia-Abkhaz and Georgian-South Ossetian conflicts individually. As an EU official noted, the aspect that Russia would like to prevent Georgia from moving closer to the EU matters in that this would make the conflicts between Georgia and Abkhazia and Georgia and South Ossetia a means to an end and Moscow would have an incentive to object to genuine progress between Tbilisi, Tskhinvali and Sukhumi (EU-23, November 2015). In this scenario, progress between Georgia and the *de facto* states would aggravate the conflict between Russia and Georgia. As a result, it is not surprising that several people perceive the goal or the reason of the Geneva talks to be continuing with it despite the lack of significant progress as it is the only format which brings all the conflict parties to the table and manages to maintain relative stability in the country (EU-23, November 2015).

These views on the EU's role, the Geneva process and the conflict dynamics sketch a problematization which gives rise to a contradictory strategic response for it is contradictory in itself. On the one hand, the practices of the EUSR are shaped by the problematization of the Council of the European Union which addresses the violent conflict as a threat to Georgia's sovereignty and emphasizes the Union's support to the country's position of demanding the reintegration of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. On the other, the policy of non-recognition and engagement emphasizes the EU's stance towards the two *de facto* states but refrains from mentioning the *telos* of reintegration of the Council's political rationality towards Georgia's conflicts. Does the strategy of the EUSR team establish non-recognition and engagement as an end in itself? Being honest about the EU policy of non-recognition and engagement comes at the price of having to convince the authorities of the two *de facto* states that it is beneficial for them to talk to the EU through the EUSR (EU-20, September 2015). As a result, the team has not only tried to find common interests between the Georgian, Abkhaz and South Ossetian participants but has also worked towards being accepted as a mediator. This demonstrates that although the Council of the European Union established the EUSR as an

obligatory passage point and spokesperson of the Union by mandating him to lead the Geneva talks and represent the EU, his authority is contested in that South Ossetia and Abkhazia do not always accept his interference. Recalling the mandate of the EUSR and the practices of the Geneva talks allows for another conclusion. The mandate details negotiating a security arrangement, humanitarian issues and all other issues the parties agree to, as the objectives of the talks. As such, it problematizes the immediate consequences of the war but does neither define the roles for the conflict actors and who they are nor the nature of the violent conflict. Thus, the practices of the Geneva talks, which are the crucial interessement device of the EU, only manage to enrol a group of actors but without trying to make them accept a specific role other than being a participant of the talks. In other words, the participants bring their own problematization to the table, thereby treating the nature of the conflict as well as the question of assigning spokespersons as a conflict issue. One of the many implications of this problematization is that the mediator team struggles with Georgia's position of not accepting Abkhazia and South Ossetia to be represented by their own delegation due to perceiving the conflict as playing out between Georgia and Russia.

Moreover, the assessment of the EUSR team regarding the multiple dimensions of conflict, in particular of how the Georgian-Russian conflict is interconnected with the Georgian-Abkhaz and Georgian-South Ossetian conflicts makes the goal of resolving the status question seem unreasonable and the prospect of resolving any of the conflict issues unlikely. With this in mind, the interviewees of the EUSR team explained their strategy as rapprochement over time through taking small steps and building trust. They are aware of the Geneva talks being in a stalemate pertaining to major topics such as an agreement on the non-use of force or the return of IDPs. Hence, they focus on smaller issues at the margin of the major ones hoping that this will improve the atmosphere and build trust to eventually tackle the bigger problems (EU-23, November 2015). An interviewee described this strategy, which they are pursuing for the last one and a half years, as finding pragmatic solutions and to concentrate on what is feasible (EU-21, September 2015). As an EU official explained, it does not make sense to have a more comprehensive plan or strategy for the Geneva talks because the process is very much dependent on the context (EU-23, November 2015). For instance, the preparations for WG 2 focus on long-term salient issues such as the border crossing regime, on issues which came up due to short-term incidents, and, more generally, on projects which could be seen as confidence building measures (EU-14, July 2015). The proposals for the latter are often brought up by the participants or develop during the consultations of the mediator team

between the rounds of talks (EU-20, September 2015). To illustrate the approach of the EUSR team, the box tree moth epidemic which Abkhazia is facing is a suitable example (EU-21, September 2015). The box tree forests are now infested by the moth which was brought in from Sochi during the preparations for the Olympic Games. Since the forests are special to the Abkhaz and the epidemic is spreading, the issue was raised in WG 2. Devising a plan on how to deal with the moth will eventually require regional cooperation; thus, this issue has the potential of developing into a confidence building measure. This example highlights two important aspects of the practices of EU mediation. First, since directly addressing new avenues for confidence building is met with refusal by the Abkhaz and South Ossetian participants and the talks suffer a setback after proposing ideas on how to solve the conflicts, such as suggestions of various kinds of federalism, the mediator team focuses on smaller issues which foster cooperation of the parties. Second, this approach necessitates the team to be able to support projects in Abkhazia that might not involve regional cooperation from the very beginning. However, the practices of funding are part of the responsibilities of the delegation as well as the respective European Commission officials in Brussels who are in charge of the funding instruments. Funding projects outside the realm of traditional confidence building measures is challenging because of both the Georgian government and the funding instruments at the EU's disposal. First, since Georgia is the de jure state EU-supported projects in Abkhazia require the government's approval. Second, the practices of funding instruments create what could be called a path dependency through practices by being subject to funding decisions which can be a few years old and make it difficult to adapt to the changing environment. Even one of the most flexible instruments for funding projects in a conflict environment, the Instrument contributing to Stability and Peace, does not solve the problem as its regulations do neither allow for supporting pure development projects nor does it involve substantial funds. This leaves the EU with the European Neighbourhood Instrument which is subject to the focus areas of EU bilateral assistance. Currently these are public administration with 25% of the overall budget of the indicative allocation for the period of 2014 to 2020 which is between 610 and 746 Million Euro, agriculture and rural development with 30%, justice sector reform with 25% and 20% for complementary support for capacity development and civil society (EEAS & European Commission, 2014). Previously, the EC assistance priorities, as listed in the country strategy for 2007 to 2013, were first, political dialogue and reform; second, cooperation for the settlement of Georgia's internal conflicts; third, cooperation on justice, freedom and security; fourth, economic and social reform, poverty reduction and sustainable development; fifth, trade-related issues, market and

regulatory reforms; and the final two areas are cooperation in specific sectors and people-to-people contact (European Commission, 2007, pp. 20-24). When comparing both sets of priorities, a shift is visible which reflects the needs of Georgia proper and does not account for the multiple realities of conflict in the entire country. While the envelope of the European Neighbourhood Instrument has considerable resources, the focus areas of the EU's bilateral assistance render support in other fields impossible. So even though there would be ample opportunities such as in health and education to improve the position of the EU mediators in the eyes of the Abkhaz authorities, these cannot be seized as the European Neighbourhood Instrument provisions exclude these areas from being eligible (EU-18, September 2015). As a result, it is challenging to ensure the funding of projects which the EUSR and his team would like to support and can result into giving away opportunities. For instance, a study showed that the majority of Abkhaz students would prefer Europe over Russia to study abroad but it is difficult to facilitate projects of this kind because it is a thin line between working with the two regions and developing bilateral relations. According to an EU official, a successful example in this regard was a project in which the EU supported the collaboration between the Abkhaz University and the Vrije Universiteit Brussel in Belgium (EU-14, July 2015).

Despite these obstacles the EUSR team manages to advance its step-by-step approach between Georgia and Abkhazia by paving the way for gestures of reconciliation rather than confrontation. An important moment of this kind presented itself when the Georgian delegation handed copies of various documents of the Abkhaz archives of Sukhumi, which they had burnt during the war in 1992, to the Abkhaz participants. This is not a breakthrough but it is strengthening the efforts of the EU mediators to establish a culture of engagement that is seen as conducive to discussing the bigger issues on the agenda. Even these limited forms of cooperation fail with South Ossetia. Here the EU team is able to keep the situation stable thanks to the collaboration between the EUSR, the EUMM, and the OSCE, the South Ossetian and Russian as well as Georgian authorities on the IPRM. In particular the EUSR and the EUMM work closely together to diffuse tensions and deescalate arising issues. In April 2015, for instance, South Ossetians put up signs of the 'Republic of South Ossetia'. They were taken down by the Georgians but the South Ossetians put them up again. The incident involved a considerable number of Georgian police men being present at the border. Eventually, some of the actors involved used the hotline under the IPRM and the EUSR engaged to calm down both sides (EU-21, September 2015). As this example illustrates, the

work of the EUSR takes a different form with South Ossetia than with Abkhazia. Attempts to go beyond this stage of crisis management have been futile.

However, there are currently additional efforts under way to overcome a pattern of the talks, namely to make sure that the conflict parties will focus less on format issues and more on substance than has been previously the case. Questions such as who is allowed to speak first, who has the right to speak at all and who is granted observer status, as well as which issues should be a part of the agenda, have been discussed more intensely than the issues themselves (EU-20, September 2015). To this end, the mediator team was trying to make the process format more flexible in 2015 which, as an EU official added, results in the participants being alert to the events unfolding (EU-14, July 2015). As it appears changes of this kind are not only a sensitive matter but the room to manoeuvre of the mediator team is limited for it depends a lot on the disputants as a result of the inherent ambiguity of the Union's political rationality which is embodied in the practices of mediation. Accordingly, the mediator team cannot prevent new contentious issues. For instance, the Georgian delegation consists of members of the Ministry for Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of Justice, and the Ministry for Reconciliation, but also representatives of the authorities in exile of Abkhazia. The Abkhaz participants vehemently oppose to the authorities in exile being present in the talks (EU-14, July 2015). Also the assessment of the months from January to July 2015 of interviewed members of the EUSR demonstrates how much the mediator team depends on the conflict parties. Until 2015 the frustration among the EU, UN and OSCE representatives was growing and the Geneva talks were increasingly questioned. However, during the round of talks in July 2015 the conflict parties expressed their commitment to maintaining the process (EU-20, September 2015). An EU official summarized this development by describing the Geneva talks as starting out as a very fragile process and gradually developing into a routine set in stone which became a bit more flexible in the beginning of 2015. EU actors consider the newly gained moment of flexibility to be mainly due to the new Georgian chief negotiator and the fact that the co-chairs were signalling that they grew tired of the political games (EU-23, November 2015). Whereas the Georgian side was caught up in a legal discourse under President Saakashvili, an alternative approach is developing under the new government of 2012. Several among the new Georgian representatives, as an EU official observes, have been involved in track two dialogue initiatives, particularly the Schlaining process facilitated by Conciliation Resources and the Berghof Foundation, earlier in their career. They have ties to the Republican Party, a very liberal and Europe-oriented party. Moreover, the new defence

minister is from the same political party as well as the new advisor to the president who also brings in expertise on conflict. Whereas these developments have not changed the process yet, several members of the EU mediator team were hoping that this might influence the talks in the long run (EU-14, July 2015).

It has been already mentioned that the assemblage of EU mediation brings together several actor-networks of the Union. In fact, the EUSR's practices of mediating between the conflict parties also enrol actors for whom the Geneva talks are not necessarily a key priority. Especially actors, who are engaged in what this dissertation called the supporting practices of mediation, can do both harm the EUSR's efforts or reinforce them. Hence, the last section of the chapter assembles the practices of the EUMM and the EU delegation as to the political rationality of the assemblage of EU mediation.

Translating the political rationality of the assemblage of mediation: the EUMM

The EUMM engages in three sets of practices: monitoring, analysing and reporting, and confidence-building. The EUMM has its headquarters in Tbilisi, where they coordinate the mission and collaborate with the EUSR team and the EU delegation. The field offices are in charge of monitoring the Administrative Boundary Line. The Zugdidi office, for instance, comprises of an Administrative Boundary Line and Confidence Building Team, a Human Security Team and a Compliance Team. The first one, patrols the boundary line, speaks to the commuters, the police and checks the informal trade between Abkhazia and Georgia or Tbilisi Administrated Territory, as they call it (EU-22, September 2015). The Human Security Team is responsible for the IDPs and civil society. In fact, it acts as an umbrella of all the civil society organizations in the area which includes an information sharing meeting with civil society representatives and is attended by UNHCR, UNDP, ICRC, and the UN Special Envoy. More broadly, they work on human rights and gender issues and take care of the school children who cross the Administrative Boundary Line every day to go to school in Georgia. Finally, the Compliance Team checks on military and police units to ensure that they only carry the allowed weapons and wear the correct badges. The work of the teams feeds into a daily, a weekly and a monthly report (EU-22, September 2015).

This reflects the mandate of 2008, when the Council agreed on a civilian peacekeeping operation and formulated the mandate as follows:

EUMM Georgia shall provide civilian monitoring of Parties' actions, including full compliance with the six-point Agreement and subsequent implementing measures throughout Georgia, working in close coordination

with partners, particularly the United Nations (UN) and the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), and consistent with other EU activity, in order to contribute to stabilisation, normalisation and confidence building whilst also contributing to informing European policy in support of a durable political solution for Georgia. (Council of the European Union, 2008b, Art. 2).

According to the mandate, the EUMM has three objectives: at first, the mission is tasked with monitoring the implementation and compliance of the parties with the six-point agreement and the implementing measures. Second, they are to stabilize and normalize the situation on the ground and build confidence between the conflict parties. Third, they are mandated to help inform EU policy as to the goal of finding a solution for the county. Their *telos* is to contribute to stabilization and to inform 'European policy in support of a durable political solution for Georgia' (Council of the European Union, 2008b, Art. 2). As such, the practices of the EUMM are a result of the efforts of the Council of the European Union to prevent another violent escalation by monitoring the Administrative Boundary Lines but do not contradict the long-term goal of reintegrating Abkhazia and South Ossetia into Georgia.

The EUMM is particularly important for the Union's mediator team since they provide them with information on incidents and updates on broader developments along the Administrative Boundary Line. However, the staff of the mission does not have permission to enter Abkhazia and South Ossetia, hence, their knowledge on the two regions is limited to what they learn during meetings. Whereas they are confident about their contribution as regards monitoring and reporting and evaluate the situation at the Administrative Boundary Line as stable, the interviewed officials were less optimistic about confidence building. Not only is their contribution through the Confidence Building Facility and the IPRM for South Ossetia limited but the mechanism of the Geneva talks would have to deliver on this objective too. The interviewed officials problematized that relations with South Ossetia are not improving and attempts to reinstate the IPRM for Abkhazia have been futile. An interviewee stated that all the actors involved have failed to build confidence between the conflict and emphasized that their practices of funding these projects means delegating confidence building to other actors since they do not have an implementing arm and are not allowed to enter Abkhazia and South Ossetia (EU-22, September 2015).

Trying to understand why the IPRM with Abkhazia was put on hold and has not been reinstated is difficult as the interviewed EU officials differentiate between an event that triggered it and other underlying reasons for why Abkhazia was against continuing the IPRM. What triggered it was a comment of a former Head of Mission of the EUMM in response to a

requested murder investigation (EU-19, September 2015). However, this was a pretext, as an EU actor argued, and it is much more likely that the Abkhaz authorities either disapproved of the EUMM officials meeting with Russian border guards instead of the Abkhaz counterpart, the arrangement is such that Russian border guards patrol the Administrative Boundary Line and the Abkhaz guards are stationary, or had an interest in ending this form of engagement with the EU (EU-19 & EU-22, September 2015). Neither the EUMM nor the EUSR could deescalate the situation and prevent the Abkhaz authorities from terminating the IPRM. One of the biggest obstacles to reinstating it is that Georgia insists on having a member of the Abkhaz government in exile in its delegation (EU-22, September 2015).

Translating the political rationality of the assemblage of mediation: the EU delegation

The mandate of the delegation includes amongst other tasks maintaining and enhancing the diplomatic and economic relations between the EU and Georgia, to monitor the implementation of the Association Agreement and facilitate the implementation of the assistance programmes (EU Delegation to Georgia, n.d.). In accordance with the policy of non-recognition and engagement in Abkhazia and South Ossetia, the delegation's mandate embraces both Georgia proper and the *de facto* states or, in the terminology of the Georgian government, the occupied territories, although delegation staff are not allowed to enter the two regions. Against this background, an EU official explained that Georgia's conflicts matter in their daily routines but only account for a part of their responsibilities (EU-17, September 2015). Moreover, the practices of maintaining bilateral relations with the Georgian government reflect the political rationality towards the conflicts of the country in that they allow for collaboration with the Georgian government authorities and none with the *de facto* authorities. This nurtures the post-war rift between the EU delegation and Abkhazia and South Ossetia. In contrast to the EU's increasing role and leverage in Georgia after the war in 2008, it is losing its foothold in both regions which is exploited by several local groups who portray the Union as an enemy of the Abkhaz and South Ossetian people (CSO-12, January 2016). This is aggravated by the effects of the EU policy on financial assistance for the two regions which, as elaborated earlier in this chapter, falls short compared to the support granted to Georgia proper. External but also local civil society organizations, which implement projects of the Union in the regions, struggle with this development and perceive the climate especially in South Ossetia but also in Abkhazia as increasingly hostile towards the EU (CSO-12, January 2016). Nevertheless this observation is not reflecting the perceptions of the people

in Abkhazia and South Ossetia generally but rather refers to members of the political elite, according to the interviewee (CSO-12, January 2016).

The practices of funding of the delegation also provide support to various projects that aim to overcome the differences between the conflict parties, to establish direct communication between the disputants and to transform the conflict. It is through mainly these practices that the delegation is enrolled in the assemblage of mediation as well as the implementing organizations of the confidence building measures. Even though the EU's political rationality also informs the selection process of the projects, the approach to conflict of the selected implementing organizations varies. Put differently, the implementing organization might advance a different political rationality towards dealing with Georgia's conflicts than the EU. Since it is beyond the scope of this chapter to provide a comparison of all EU supported confidence building projects, the remainder of this section assesses the approach of two external actors which have been active in Georgia, Abkhazia and South Ossetia for more than a decade, have been recipients of EU funds and were mentioned by EU officials during the interviews: the British organization Conciliation Resources and the German Berghof Foundation.

Both organizations work towards the *telos* of solving the conflicts through conflict transformation albeit they employ different strategies. After having learned about specific approaches to particular projects during interviews with different actors from the same organization, it became apparent that the strategies can also vary across projects of one organization. Thus, the following comparative perspective does not depict the approach of the organizations as such but of their projects in Georgia. Conciliation Resources began its work on the Georgian-Abkhaz conflict in 1997 to address 'the root causes and consequences of the 1992-93 Georgian–Abkhaz war' (Conciliation Resources, n.d.). Characteristic of its efforts is their approach of working at different levels in collaboration with local partners. For instance, they facilitate exchanges between Abkhaz and Georgian civil society to create the space for them to engage and develop solutions to various problems. They also engage with local and international actors of the political sphere in order to change the way they are managing and dealing with the realities of the conflict. The latter is the approach of 'whispering into the king's ear' and was at the heart of the 'Schlaining process', a 1.5 track process which was later on referred to by the name of the location of its first meeting, Schlaining in Austria, and was facilitated by Conciliation Resources and the former Berghof Research Centre for Constructive Conflict Management in cooperation with Manana Gurguulia (Sukhumi) and

Paata Zakareishvili (Tbilisi). The project aimed at providing 'political office-holders, members of the executive apparatus, members of parliament and civil society actors' from Abkhazia and Georgia with the opportunity of discussing the conflict in-depth to develop internal capacities, communication forums and joint perspectives that can lead to projects and actions (Wolleh, 2006, pp. 25-26). Between 1997 and 2006 the team of the organizations facilitated 18 workshops of one week each. The Berghof Research Centre for Constructive Conflict Management left the project format in 2006 and developed a different approach for engaging in Georgia and the *two de* facto states. An interviewee from the Berghof foundation noted, the moment a member of such a dialogue process joins a government institution, he or she faces constraints that do not allow for translating the perspective of the dialogue process into practice (CSO-11, January 2016). For instance, Paata Zakareishvili, the partner from Georgia in the Schlaining process, is the current Minister of Reconciliation and a member of the Georgian delegation to the Geneva talks. In fact, he and other new actors were mentioned by officials of the EUSR team as having contributed to making the Geneva process more flexible although this did not lead to concrete results. This reinforces the argument of the interviewee from the Berghof Foundation who grasped the approach of 'whispering into the king's ear' as rooted in a rather superficial and narrow understanding of politics.

So what then is the current approach of the Berghof Foundation? The project of the 'Young Facilitators Group' was launched in 2010 and is still ongoing. Financed through several donors including the EU's COBERM, an EU-funded but UNDP-administered mechanism, the idea is to go beyond the notion of trying to have a project which has impact within the system of peacebuilding but to alter the system itself for it forms a part of the problem that impedes conflict transformation. In this regard, Berghof engaged to enable a new generation of facilitators with an Abkhaz, South Ossetian and Georgian section to eventually work not only in their respective region but also across conflict lines as a group. A considerable amount of time was invested in carefully selecting participants who could become a member of the Young Facilitator Group. Criteria such as being a student or represent different regions of the country, which are often used to recruit participants by other organizations in the field, were replaced by making sure that the young facilitators would be a group of people whose mind-set and emotional state were such that a strong group could be created. As such, the initial phase of the project was to build groups within a conflict party and to prepare and train them as a facilitator team which would eventually engage with the respective team of the other conflict parties. To this end, the local partners of the Berghof Foundation, based in

Tskhinvali, Tbilisi and Sukhumi facilitated mono-communal training workshops in the three regions covering various communication concepts. This was complemented by three additional workshops conducted by a member of the Berghof Foundation in 2011. Building up an insider group which cuts across conflict divides was the next phase of the project. The Georgian-Abkhaz and South Ossetian-Georgian teams participated in facilitation trainings in Moldova in 2011 and 2012. The format of self-regulated dialogue workshops, in which the young facilitators were able to practise facilitation, also paved the way for the senior facilitators to take up the role of mentor and coach. As a follow-up activity, the teams engaged in peer-to-peer training in their communities to expand the network of the young facilitators in the regions. For instance, as sections they are organizing workshops in Georgia, Abkhazia and South Ossetia respectively during which they work on transcripts of biographical interviews of a person from the other conflict party. One organizer of this project depicts the task of the team as ensuring that the workshops are life changing events for the participants because only then they can facilitate the process of coming to terms with the past and create the conditions for conflict transformation (CSO-11, January 2016). Another facilitator describes the workshops as almost having the effect of therapy in that they are an intense experience which has the potential of altering the views of the participants and of leaving behind the dominant narratives which reflect the conflict divides (CSO-14, September 2015). The project entered a third phase with the Concilium of the young facilitators in 2013 during which all the Georgian, Abkhaz and South Ossetian teams met. At some point, the facilitator team was confronted with a series of obstacles by governmental authorities who were against the emerging country-wide confidence building structure. As a response, the group was expanded to make it inter-generational and to include key actors with a firm stand towards the respective authorities (CSO-11, January 2016). Therefore, the group in its current form also comprises veterans, representatives of the Mothers of Georgia that is people from the groups who suffered the most. It is about to regularly broadcast on Abkhaz television and launch a weekly radio program on the Georgian Radio Free Europe. As such, this is not only a novel project idea but a network which is now getting the attention of the high-level actors including the EUSR. As an organizer put it, the idea is to work your way up to track 1 as this is the platform for discussing issues such as freedom of movement and freedom of contract (CSO-11, January 2016). For instance, the lack of freedom of movement results in having to bring participants from across the conflict divides to a 'neutral territory' which necessitates the involvement of external donors who do not only raise the financial resources but often also engage in developing the project.

Both the Schlaining process and the Young Facilitators Group are not representative of the EU approach to selecting organizations and projects but highlight how the funding instruments are interessement devices to enrol actors who can go beyond the scope of actions of the delegation or the EUSR. At the same time, a short glance at other projects such as funding a virtual confidence building measure with teams from Abkhazia, South Ossetia and Georgia building a peace park online demonstrate that it would be wrong to assume that the approach of the Berghof Foundation or Conciliation Resources is in line or reflects the strategy of the EU delegation towards the conflict between Georgia and Abkhazia and Georgia and South Ossetia. This said the practices of EU mediation of all actors, who maintain, shape, and, in so doing, form the assemblage on the EU-side haven become visible. An appraisal of these actors working with and against each other, their standpoints and priorities as well as summing up how this informs and engenders different sets of practices allows for concluding the chapter.

5.5. Summary

So how is the understanding of the conflicts in Georgia, Abkhazia and South Ossetia reflected in the respective policy response of the EU? Who are these actors who form the assemblage of EU mediation and what are the moments of translation which engendered the Union's approach to the conflicts over the last two decades? Building once again on the notion of two different phases in this period of time, that is before and after the war in 2008, it was possible to observe a pattern of several opportunities for conflict resolution and entry points for the EU to commit to the goal of conflict settlement before 2008 which were not seized on the one hand and the war as the turning point after which the Union was ready to take the lead as mediator but was facing a different context with a much more narrow space for transforming the conflict. Prior to the five-day-war, the decisions of the Council of the European Union were guided by a threefold problematization regarding the significance of Georgia to the EU both in terms of security and geopolitical interests, the commitment to the country's territorial integrity, and an awareness of other regional and international actors hampering the progress of the conflict resolution processes. Against this background, relations between the EU and Georgia intensified and the conflicts of the country surfaced on the agenda of EU actors and were included in the policy response as depicted in the country strategy and the Action Plan of the European Neighbourhood Policy. The practices of funding as well as the tools and platforms of the European Neighbourhood Policy were employed to bring Georgia closer to

the EU and to support it in its efforts of strengthening its state institutions, thereby creating a democratic and prosperous country Abkhazia and South Ossetia would want to be a part of. This belief or *telos*, namely that building a strong and democratic state would solve the conflicts, was informed by an interpretation of the root causes of conflict which problematized bad governance, weak market structures, poverty and enemy images as sources and drivers of the differences between Georgia, Abkhazia and South Ossetia. The EUSR for the South Caucasus was mandated accordingly. He was to advance political and economic reform as well as to engage in a supportive role as regards established conflict resolution mechanisms not only in Georgia but also in Nagorno-Karabakh. It does not come as a surprise that the EUSR was also tasked to oversee the rule of law mission EUJUST Themis in 2004, to monitor the reform of the criminal justice system and to oversee the Border Support Team as of 2005. Although the EUSR might have advocated a more nuanced approach especially towards Abkhazia and South Ossetia, whose demands, interests and grievances were not accounted for in EU policies, the mandate was limited and excluded all forms of direct engagement as facilitator or mediator even after being amended in 2006 to emphasize conflict settlement more strongly. Small-scale confidence building and dialogue projects of EUSR Semneby reflected this change and made the EUSR the most visible actor among the actor-networks of the EU in Georgia but failed to feed into the overall approach of the Union. What is more, all of these practices were interessement devices to make the conflict environment conducive to conflict resolution and increasingly focused on enrolling the conflict parties in the processes led by the UN and OSCE. In fact, the problematization of the EU defined its role as supporting both mediating organizations and refrained from establishing itself as an obligatory passage point of the assemblage of mediation.

Mounting tensions, which were neither successfully addressed by the existing conflict resolution mechanisms nor by other international actors, eventually culminated in the war of 2008. The five days of fighting fundamentally changed the situation on the ground. The Georgian government eventually succeeded in getting the EU's direct involvement with President Sarkozy mediating between the conflict parties and paving the way for the EUMM and the Geneva talks. At the same time, the partial recognition of Abkhazia and South Ossetia by a few states in addition to Russia pledging to prevent another military attempt of reintegration and to support the regions in their statebuilding efforts altered the realities of the conflicts. In the immediate aftermath of the war – that is prior to Russia's recognition of Abkhazia and South Ossetia – the goal of reinstating the *status quo ante* and with it also the

EU's political rationality was guiding President Sarkozy's efforts of brokering a ceasefire on behalf of the Union. However, the EU initiative was only successful as long as it was accommodating common interests of the disputants, Russia and Georgia, but failed to change those positions which did not answer to the standpoint of the EU. Nevertheless, the Council of the European Union reaffirmed its commitment to Georgia's territorial integrity and paved the way for direct EU engagement spanning the instrument of an EUSR for the Crisis of Georgia and a monitoring mission. In doing so, it created the conditions for the formation of the assemblage of EU mediation as it exists until today. Two key characteristics of the assemblage of EU mediation are, on the one hand, the codified practices of the Common Foreign and Security Policy in that the Council of the European Union has the authority to determine the Union's external policies and, on the other, the decision of the same body to mandate an EUSR to mediate on behalf of the EU and to assist with developing the EU's approach towards Georgia. This grants the EUSR the status of an obligatory passage point and spokesperson of the assemblage albeit only within the scope of his mandate that is he has to act in line with what EUSR Semneby referred to as the EU policy of non-recognition and engagement as regards Abkhazia and South Ossetia. This highlights the approach of the Council of the European Union for it problematizes the events of the war pertaining to a particular narrative of Georgian history which establishes Georgian statehood as including the two *de facto* states as well as it allows for engaging with the two breakaway regions under the assumption of them constituting a part of the country. Owing to the Council's position in the hierarchy of the actor-networks of the Union, this problematization has had an impact on the various formats and instruments which were either established for the purpose of dealing with the conflict or employed to this end: the Geneva talks, the monitoring mission, and financial support to projects with a confidence building dimension.

To begin with the EUSR, Herbert Salber leads the Geneva talks together with the co-chairs of the UN and OSCE but is mandated to represent the EU position and mediate between the parties. With this double-hatted role, the Council of the European Union created a partial mediator, yet without the ability to capitalize on the EU's bias as leverage due to cleavages among member states as to how to deal with Georgia and Russia. In view of the changes of the five-day-war, the political rationality, put forward by the Council of the European Union, is challenging the EUSR in at least two ways. First, whereas Georgia and most states of the world including international and regional organizations consider Abkhazia and South Ossetia as part of Georgian territory, the two *de facto* states and Russia and a few other states do not.

Hence, the nature of the conflict is itself disputed and the EUSR biased towards the Georgian position. Moreover, the participants of the Geneva talks diverge on who the conflict parties are. Second, despite having a team with experts on conflict resolution and the South Caucasus and knowing that the EU is the most prominent external actor in Georgia, the EUSR can only take a pragmatic approach and accept the limits of partiality and of not being able to make use of the EU's leverage. The mandate of the EUSR adheres to Georgia's territorial integrity and problematizes the immediate consequences of the armed conflict. This problematization envisions the Geneva talks to ensure security and stability but does not explicitly state the *telos* of reintegration Abkhazia and South Ossetia in the long run although the reference to Georgia's territorial integrity reflects this stance. Accordingly, the 'inherent ambiguity' of the problematization does not define clear roles for the disputants but enrols them through the interessement device of the Geneva talks. In doing so, their enrolment is successful in that they participate in the talks but it locks them in their diverging problematizations of what the conflict is about and who the disputants are. As a result, the EUSR is the obligatory passage point and spokesperson of the assemblage by bringing the participants to the table. The practices and content of mediation itself, however, are subject to discussion, thereby partially contesting the EUSR as an obligatory passage point. In sum, what the EU mediator team can do is to address the issues which the conflict parties are willing to discuss, which revolve around clarifying incidents that could seriously threaten the ceasefire and manage the realities created by the Administrative Boundary Lines or, employing the Russian, South Ossetian and Abkhaz terminology, borders. With this in mind, it would be possible to argue that the process is successful if the six-point agreement had not listed security arrangements and resolving the issue of the IDPs as goals. In fact, in their current form the Geneva talks are not meant to resolve the conflicts in the region but to manage and negotiate normalization based on the situation on the ground created by the war in 2008. Facing these constraints, the problematization of the mediator team pertaining to the conflicts differentiates between a Georgia-Abkhaz, South Ossetia-Georgian, and Russian-Georgian conflict as well as the EU's own stake in it due to the political rationality of the Council of the European Union, the association process of Georgia and the geopolitical shift in its relations to Russia. They are aware of the isolation of the two *de facto* states to which the Union is actively contributing and the increasing influence of Russia but perceive their room to manoeuvre to be limited. Hence, their goal is to resolve small-scale issues in order to build trust to address major problems in the long run.

The EUMM's mandate of monitoring the Administrative Boundary Lines and reporting embodies the concern over security in these areas and to promote a process of normalization. The practice of bilateral meetings between the EUMM and Russia serves the goal of tackling problems at the Administrative Boundary Line between Abkhazia and Georgia proper which might jeopardize the ceasefire agreement. The Incident Prevention and Response Mechanism fulfils the same function for South Ossetia. The last actor of the assemblage of EU mediation is the delegation. For its staff, Georgia's conflicts matter in their work as they are in charge of maintaining the relations with the Georgian government as well as they administer the financial instruments that allow for engaging in Abkhazia and South Ossetia under the principle of non-recognition and engagement. Their problematization resembled the position of Tbilisi and envisioned conflict resolution as a long-term goal. Whereas their partiality towards the Georgian government is reflected in the practices of maintaining bilateral relations with Georgia as to the available communication channels and the funding decisions of the financial instruments which primarily account for Georgian needs, several EU-funded projects go beyond narrow forms of confidence building and aim at transforming the conflict divides. These projects try to create space for dialogue and engagement within and across conflict parties, thereby fighting the rift between Europe and Abkhazia and South Ossetia which is partly created and deepened due to the EU's political rationality towards the conflicts.

All of this substantiates the argument put forward in the beginning of the chapter that the political rationality of the assemblage of EU mediation can be characterized by an inherent ambiguity which revolves around the notion of adhering to the Georgian concept of statehood on the one hand, and the goal of stabilizing the region on the other. This ambiguity engenders differences in how EU actors problematize the conflict developments and their ways of trying to address them to the extent of working against each other. This gives rise to an approach of conflict management in that the EUSR can only tackle issues in collaboration with the EUMM which might threaten the ceasefire. In doing so, they contribute to maintaining a state within a system of which the current practices such as the Geneva talks and the monitoring mission constitute a part. Despite the efforts of the EU mediator team to alert member states and other international actors about the isolation of Abkhazia and South Ossetia against the background of the growing influence of Russia in the regions, it is ironically the policy of non-recognition and engagement which drives Georgia and the *de facto* states further apart and indirectly contributes to strengthening this notion of statehood within a system of conflict

management that the practices of EU mediation engender. Moreover, it illustrates how the Union's approach to resolving violent conflict is paralyzed the moment its state-centred political rationality is vehemently contested.

To take stock of both case studies, the next chapter will explore the relationship between the political rationality and *techne* within the assemblage of EU mediation. It will illustrate how the technologies of mediation can serve as interessement devices and structure the thinking on conflict. Furthermore, it will deepen our understanding of the political rationality of the assemblage in that it draws our attention to the state-centred concept of violent conflict and how neither the Mediation Support Team nor the dissident voices of the assemblage in Georgia and Myanmar managed to scrutinize its underlying knowledge claims.

6. Assembling practices of EU mediation: Myanmar and Georgia in perspective

At first glance, the EU's efforts of mediation and peace process support in Myanmar and Georgia and the conflicts of both countries seem to be very different in nature. One country is in the immediate neighbourhood of the Union and its history is deeply entangled with that of the Soviet Union, whereas the other is far away and is facing the legacies of British colonialism. The EU has maintained relations for more than two decades with one country, while it is present in the other for just a few years. Georgia is part of the European Neighbourhood Policy and Eastern Partnership and signed an Association Agreement with the Union in 2014, which is the first step towards integrating the Georgian economy into the internal market of the EU, whereas policies towards Myanmar are governed only by the Comprehensive Framework since 2013. As regards the violent conflicts, the EU supports a peace process in Myanmar which is not facilitated by external third parties but it is the lead mediator in the Geneva talks on Georgia. More specifically, the main actors of the assemblage, who represent the Union, are not the same in both countries and their ways of engaging with the conflict parties and stakeholders differ. However, Myanmar and Georgia are conceptualized by the EU as two countries in which the notions of sovereignty and territorial integrity have been problematized as core issues of the respective violent conflicts. The government of Myanmar has been fighting a number of ethnic armed organizations who either demanded secession or autonomy within a federal union. The Georgian government has been facing the struggle of Abkhazia and South Ossetia for being granted equal status with the government in Tbilisi and eventually their unilateral declaration of independence and Russia's recognition of the *de facto* states. Put differently, the EU's practices of mediation and peace process support in both case studies have more in common than meets the eye. As this chapter amplifies, this is the result of both the political rationality and the *techne* of the assemblage of mediation. The political rationality draws on a state-centred concept of violent conflict which seems to give rise to similar policy responses across conflicts. At the same time, the technologies of the practices of mediation engender a kind of path dependency through practices for they bring together a particular group of people and structure the process of thinking on the conflict issues. It is the task of this chapter to delve deeper into the EU approach to violent conflict by putting the case studies into perspective pertaining to how the political rationality and *techne* inform each other. So far, it has not been sufficiently explored

how the processes of problematizing, of developing a *telos* and a strategy are interlinked with the technical dimension such as assessment tools or instruments of funding. In what way does the problematization of violent conflict affect the EU response? Is the approach tailored to the respective conflict? At the same time, technologies such as conflict analysis workshops, training and coaching in mediation, needs assessments, supporting and funding the mediation efforts of others, have been employed in various cases to inform the efforts of developing a policy response to a given crisis. Thus, the question arises to what extent do available tools and instruments of mediation and the mechanisms for establishing the infrastructure for peace guide the thinking on how to address a particular conflict?

6.1. The techne *of the assemblage of EU mediation*

How does the dimension of *techne* shape mediation practices? The tools and instruments are not only the material form of practices but, once established, they are devices which reflect and re-enact a particular political rationality. As such, they guarantee a specific kind of structured process of thinking about an issue and bring together a particular group of people. In fact, it could be argued that these mechanisms or the infrastructure of the approach to violent conflict have a degree of agency within the assemblage in that they structure the ways of engaging of the other enrolled actors and, in so doing, they are actants. When recalling the tools and instruments mentioned in the previous chapters, elements of the EU approach such as conflict analysis workshops, trainings on mediation, needs assessments and scoping missions, and requests of studies or evaluations but also the Instrument contributing to Stability and Peace, which enables the deployment of external experts, come to mind and allow for making three crucial observations. First, these instruments and tools are interessement devices of the assemblage of EU mediation in that they target and try to enrol a particular group of people. For instance, a training workshop on mediation for the staff of an EU delegation establishes associations between one or more members of the Mediation Support Team and the delegation personnel. Moreover, it also brings in a carefully selected external expert through an interessement device such as ERMES. Such tools primarily address officials on the ground such as EU delegation staff or EUSR teams. Hence, they do not directly inform or enrol actors of the Council of the European Union, which develops EU policies but, as the case study of Myanmar demonstrated, they can do so in an implicit manner. The needs assessment for the MPC and the subsequent practices of collaboration between the officials of the EU office in Yangon and the Mediation Support Team did not

only involve other officials from Brussels in that their consent was required for supporting the MPC but also fed into the draft of the Comprehensive Framework, thereby directly shaping the Union's policies towards Myanmar. Second, the devices introduce specific concepts and methods to the target group but also maintain the assemblage of mediation. By way of example, a training workshop on conflict analysis and mediation introduces notions like conflict sensitivity, principles of an inclusive process and local ownership amongst others. Assessing the causes and drivers of conflict also ensures that the participants of the workshop review the involvement of the EU pertaining to what they consider to be the most pressing issues and how these could be dealt with. At the same time, the training is a means to an end for the K2 division in that it raises the awareness of delegation staff of the instruments of mediation and the Union's in-house mediation support. In other words, these tools create platforms for the actor-network of K2 and its external experts to advocate certain concepts and form associations of collaborating with the participating EU officials in the future. Third, the tools and instruments transcend the boundaries between EU and non-EU officials for they facilitate the exchange between EU and non-EU actors who work on resolving violent conflicts. In this regard, the devices of requesting studies or evaluations can be employed to inform the process of identifying new projects and areas of engagement under a financial instrument like the Instrument contributing to Stability and Peace which are carried out by external experts and enrol them in the assemblage of mediation of the Union. In short, these mechanisms form a part of the explanation for how concepts travel from research institutions and think tanks to the policy world. They can also give rise to controversies in that partially successful processes of translation engender new and diverging interpretations of an issue and the Union's response. For instance, the stance of the interviewed EU delegation officials in Yangon, which depicts the practices of supporting the MPC as political support and problematizes the peace centre as not being an example of pure mediation, leads to two findings (EU-11, 2015): At first, it reveals an understanding of these practices as political support which is different from the concepts the Mediation Support Team was trying to convey, which differentiate between mediation-relevant tasks and diplomacy. Second, it points to the difficulties of passing the insights and results of previous practices such as assessments and other forms of collaboration to new actors, which had the consequence that it changed the way how EU officials comprehended the nature, role and risks of supporting the MPC. In conclusion, the technologies structure the thinking on a particular problem, enrol specific actors in the assemblage of mediation, and in so doing, produce what could be called a path dependency of practices in that the devices come to be seen as part of the EU approach

to violent conflict. However, the devices also embody and engage with a particular political rationality. So how does such a political rationality shape and produce technologies such as interessement devices?

6.2. The political rationality of the assemblage of EU mediation

The political rationality of the assemblage of EU mediation draws on a concept of violent conflict and how to build peace which is state-centred and seems to inform the Union's so-called Comprehensive Approach to External Conflict and Crisis. Textual artefacts of the K2 division illustrated a tendency of challenging the assumptions of the dominant concept of violent conflict. However, as the third chapter uncovered, the documents on conflict and security have a particular kind of thinking in common despite being informed by two different philosophies of violent conflict. Whereas one approach perceives conflict as an integral part of social change and advocates the transformation of violent conflict, the other rationale securitizes conflict by pointing to the devastating effects of political violence not only for the conflict-affected country or region but also for the security of Europe. It suggests mechanisms of early warning and conflict prevention but recommends reacting quickly once a conflict turns violent by using all the instruments at the EU's disposal from civilian and military missions, mediation and shuttle diplomacy to sanctions and humanitarian assistance. What is more, the securitized approach to conflict can integrate the transformative response to conflict at the level of instruments, in that it envisions processes of reconciliation and transitional justice, reform of state institutions and the security sector as well as DDR programmes for the medium to long-term. A closer reading of this suggested response to conflict and crisis reveals how the rationales or philosophies of conflict seem to be based on the same understanding of what causes violent conflict. It is the conundrum of poverty, weak state institutions, a lack of good governance, and a fragile economy which is problematized as inherently linked to violent conflict. This presupposes a *telos* and rationale of building peace for it gives rise to a response which is embodied by a set of instruments and techniques that facilitate the Union's reasoning on peace and violent conflict. At the heart of this *telos* is promoting democracy, strong government institutions and sustainable development in the conflict-affected country since only a democratic and economically prosperous state embedded in a system of effective multilateralism is believed to be conducive to peace. The adapted transformation timeline, referred to above, details the peacebuilding strategy accordingly by spanning the instruments from short- to medium- and long-term intervention.

In a nutshell, despite the heterogeneous and dynamic nature of the assemblage of mediation, its political rationality can be summarized as resonating an understanding of peace which reflects a particular reading of the history and experience of the Union and is enshrined in the values of EU external action. As Barroso put it, it is rooted in the equation of peace, democracy and inclusive development and the conviction that 'one will always be incomplete without the other two' (Barroso, 2012).

Turning to Myanmar and Georgia, is this understanding of peace and conflict guiding the efforts of the EU officials in the respective countries? As the Comprehensive Framework indicates, Myanmar's transition is problematized pertaining to 'the legacy of conflict, poverty, oppression and weak institutions' and peace is identified as 'a precondition for consolidating democracy, promoting development and protecting human rights' (Council of the European Union, 2013, pp. 1-2). More specifically, an EU official of the group, who was working on Myanmar in the early days of the transition, assessed the situation Myanmar was facing as regards its history of violent conflict as characterized by non-inclusive political institutions, youth unemployment and alienation, high levels of ethnic, social and religious inequality, and corruption and engagement of criminal actors (EU-38, 2014). Both the Council document and the account of the interviewee reflect the problematization of violent conflict as intimately connected to bad governance, poverty and weak institutions. The European Security Strategy offers a more elaborate but surprisingly similar explanation for this reasoning:

Almost 3 billion people, half the world's population, live on less than 2 Euros a day. 45 million continue to die every year out of hunger and malnutrition. Sub-Sahara Africa is poorer now than it was 10 years ago. In many cases, the failure of economic growth has been linked to political problems and violent conflict. In some parts of the world, notably sub-Sahara Africa, a cycle of insecurity has come into being. Since 1990, almost 4 million people have died in wars, 90% of them civilians. Over 18 million people world-wide have left their homes or their countries as a result of conflict.

Bad governance is often at the heart of these problems. Corruption, abuse of power, weak institutions and lack of accountability corrode states from within and contribute to regional insecurity. Security is a precondition of development. Conflict not only destroys infrastructure, including social infrastructure; it also encourages criminality, deters investment and makes normal economic activity impossible. A number of countries and regions risk becoming caught in a downward spiral of conflict, insecurity and poverty. (European Council, 2003, p. 3).

In this view, the downward spiral must be terminated by re-negotiating the social contract of Myanmar (EU-38, 2014). Accordingly, promoting an inclusive political system, good governance, and sustainable development, serve the *telos* of building a strong, democratic and

peaceful state. In connection to peace as a key priority of the Union's strategy and precondition for sustainable development, this goal was translated into strengthening the capacities of the government to engage in a credible process of negotiating a Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement. Moreover, the delegation promoted the idea of Political Dialogue as a platform for addressing the sources of conflict which are understood as spanning the absence of democratic institutions and the rule of law, the violation of human rights, poverty, and the lack of a federal and inclusive system. In fact, this approach is not unique but similar to the EU's support to the National Dialogue Conference in Yemen between 2013 and 2014 in the aftermath of the mass protests of 2011 that brought the country to the brink of civil war and eventually led to the resignation of President Saleh. The National Dialogue Conference was also understood as an opportunity for the stakeholders of the conflict to re-negotiate the social contract (Girke, 2015). In this respect the topics of the conference's working groups covered the secessionist movement in Yemen's South; the conflict between the government and the Houthis, who are Zaydi Shiite fighters and descendants of the tribe that governed the North of the country until 1962; transitional justice; state building; good governance; military and security; development; right and freedoms; and special entities (Girke, 2015, p. 11). In Yemen the *telos* of EU actions was also to promote a federal and democratic system which would be able to reconcile the stakeholders of the conflicts and to advance the economic development of the country. In other words, the political rationality which informs the approach to violent conflict of the EU depicts conflict resolution and statebuilding as integrated, and ascribes a prominent role to an inclusive and democratic system concerning resolving conflicts and paving the way for a peaceful future. Practices of mediation are seen as capable of facilitating both. In doing so, it emphasizes the problematization of violent conflict which perceives conflict as reactive and as a result of grievances over an unequal political system and deprivation of rights and resources. While the Union's approach might address these identified root causes in the long run, this perspective did not convince the Houthis of Yemen in the short-term, hence they continued to fight for their objectives. The mediation efforts of the UN between the government and the Houthis after the conclusion of the National Dialogue Conference failed to prevent the escalation into civil war. Of course, the context is different in Myanmar and a relapse into a country-wide civil war is unlikely. Nonetheless, the peace process is not inclusive and familiar concerns are voiced that the Political Dialogue is going to be about democracy and changing the constitution rather than about resolving the ethnic conflict.

Moving on to the case study of Georgia, before the five-day-war in 2008 the Union's approach to resolving the conflicts between Georgia and Abkhazia and South Ossetia was guided by the *telos* of building a strong and democratic state, thereby providing the two *de facto* states with an incentive to reintegrate into Georgia. The underlying problematization lists bad governance, a weak economy, poverty, and enemy images as at the heart of the conflict and is neglecting the histories of conflict between the parties, the grievances caused by the wars, and criminal offences committed by all sides. Moreover, the actor with a different view on this matter, the EUSR, was constrained by his mandate and his options of initiating projects to reconcile the conflict parties were very limited. The war, however, changed the realities of conflict on the ground in that it was no longer possible to hope for the eventual reintegration of Abkhazia and South Ossetia into Georgia since Russia recognized the independence of the two *de facto* states. As a result, the Council of the European Union problematized these developments as threatening Georgia's territorial integrity and sovereignty but also prioritized restoring security and stability in the region. To this end, the EUSR was mandated to lead the Geneva talks, the EUMM to monitor the Administrative Boundary Lines, and the delegation to financially support confidence building projects. The EU's stance of non-recognition of Abkhazia and South Ossetia gave rise to what can be called an inherent ambiguity concerning both the commitment to Georgia's territorial integrity and the objective of promoting normalization. For the EU the two *de facto* states are still a part of Georgia, hence treating them as such would mean to support them like they support projects in Georgia proper but the balance of spending demonstrates the difficulties in doing so with only a negligible share being spent on Abkhazia and South Ossetia. Accounting for the implications that non-recognition has on engagement illustrates the ambiguity of the problematization. In fact, the policy of non-recognition and engagement confines relations with the *de facto* authorities almost entirely to the realm of informality and poses an obstacle to achieving the goal of normalization. For instance, trade between Georgia and the *de facto* regions is prohibited and the freedom of movement is restricted. Also financial support to projects of external actors is affected in that they cannot fund initiates which could be interpreted as promoting statebuilding. The EU-funded exchange between the Free University of Brussels and the Abkhaz University can shed light on how engagement takes place under these circumstances. The idea of the project was to initiate an exchange of professors from Europe and Abkhazia as a first step and to eventually aim at a programme of student exchange (CA-4, February 2016). To do so, the universities signed a Memorandum of Understanding, a standard practice among cooperating universities, which was criticized by

the Georgian authorities. More generally, Tbilisi feared that the Abkhaz University may exploit the EU-supported project by framing it as a step towards recognition. At the same time, the infrastructure for projects of this kind was not very well developed. The book delivery to the Abkhaz University can serve as an example. When the coordinator of the project tried to send books to the university in Abkhazia, it proofed to be difficult to determine whether a book delivery via Russia, where the books had to be purchased since they were needed in Russian language, would be considered illegal by the Georgian government. To prevent further complications, the books were bought in Russia, which was facilitated by a German agent and were shipped first from Russia to Germany and from Germany to Georgia. Once in Georgia, EU officials assisted with bringing the books to Abkhazia and eventually organized the vehicles and accompanied the delivery (CA-4: February 2016). This brief sketch highlights not only why projects that are meant to overcome the isolation of Abkhazia can hardly live up to the sustainability criteria of funders but also how the policy of non-recognition refutes many forms of engagement. Nevertheless, the policy of non-recognition and engagement is the overarching principle of EU involvement in conflict resolution in Georgia. Yet the problematization of this policy focuses on sovereignty and territorial integrity at the expense of the narratives of conflict between Georgians and Abkhaz and Georgians and South Ossetians. Put differently, the state-centred approach of the Union faces difficulties as it subscribed to the narrative of statehood of one conflict party. As a result, the Union's efforts at resolving the violent conflicts are paralyzed since the notion of statehood is contested in this conflict. In sum, both case studies confirmed that the political rationality shapes the policies towards conflict-affected countries as well as the use of mediation instruments. The political rationality also penetrates the ways of how actors form associations which the last section of this chapter demonstrates by tracing the associations between the actors of the assemblage of EU mediation.

6.3. The actors of the assemblage of EU mediation

The Concept on Strengthening EU Mediation and Dialogue Capacities envisioned the Mediation Support Team to be at the centre of the assemblage of mediation as the obligatory passage point and guarantor of mediation expertise. In fact, they facilitate most of the tools and instruments, thereby assuring its position within the assemblage. At the same time, their practice of working on the basis of requests from relevant EU officials curtails their influence and allows Heads of Delegations and EUSRs to have the final say on all matters of mediation

and conflict, thus, the Mediation Support Team is not the obligatory passage point of mediation expertise of the assemblage. Nevertheless, the collaboration of the Mediation Support Team and external conflict resolution professionals introduces a particular kind of thinking, raises questions about the conflict-affected country, and offers a platform to address challenges and short-comings of EU action. In fact, the line between EU officials and external actors is blurred when it comes to mediation. These practices point to the importance of processes of translation as they bring together a group of people with different backgrounds and responsibilities. A tool such as a conflict analysis workshop, for instance, takes place for a couple of days during which the participants exchange ideas, engage in simulations and try to assess the current stage of a conflict resolution process. These are the interactions in which various actors from the delegation, K2 and external actors enrol in the assemblage of mediation and bring in new ideas and perspectives, thereby potentially changing the problematization of the respective conflict and the EU's role in it and trying to lock the actors in their roles as envisioned by the problematization. It should be noted that the notion of political rationality does not depict a way of reasoning or problematizing which is homogeneous; it can accommodate controversies and differences. Accordingly, it does not come as a surprise to find different problematizations of a given conflict among EU officials albeit another set of practices establishes a hierarchy between the problematizations of actor-networks of the Union. Delegation officials and EUSRs and their teams are subject to the codified practices of the *Common Foreign and Security Policy* with the Council of the European Union as the leading actor-network. The processes of decision-making are accessible to and involve officials from the EEAS, delegations and the Commission; hence, it is not only a matter of member state representatives. Nevertheless, it might be argued that the Council is a distant actor in the assemblage of mediation but its practices are binding for the other enrolled actors. As an interviewee noted, mediation was not mentioned even once during his time of working for the Council and it was not very clearly conceptualized at this level (EU-26, February 2014). Terms like conflict prevention and negotiation are employed when EUSRs report to the Council. This elucidates the meaning of Council Conclusions in that they give a sense of direction but the actor-network does not engage directly when it comes to developing a strategy on how to implement the respective policies that might involve practices of mediation. Recalling the Comprehensive Framework for Myanmar, it becomes apparent that the Council problematized various aspects of the developments in the country and identified four focal areas for EU engagement. Hence, the document provides a sketch of the challenges that should be addressed and develops the goals or *telos* of the policy

of the Union. The Council Decisions regarding the EUSR for the South Caucasus and the Crisis in Georgia are equally brief but do not only denote the objectives of this instrument but also subject the holder of the post to those Council Conclusions which detail the Union's position towards Georgia and the two *de facto* states. Against this background, the Council is relevant to the assemblage of mediation in that it structures the field of action of the actors who mediate on behalf of the EU or support, fund, promote and leverage the mediation efforts of others. At the same time, it has become apparent that the assessments and positions of the actor-networks, which are directly engaged in EU mediation and peace process support, also feed into the practices of the Council, and can transform how particular developments in a conflict-affected country are problematized. These actor-networks are the EUSRs and their teams, the delegations and also the staff of CSDP missions, and their Brussels-based counterparts at the EEAS and the Commission.

So how do these actor-networks enrol in the assemblage of EU mediation? As regards Georgia, the EUSR could be described as the spokesperson of the assemblage of mediation of the conflict-affected country or region he or she is responsible for. The objectives of this job are defined by the Council but within his or her mandate, the EUSR is free to decide on how to work towards achieving these goals. In the case of Georgia, Herbert Salber is authorized to mediate and speak on behalf of the EU and can rely on the support of his team in Brussels and Tbilisi. The advisors are seconded staff from the member states. Some of them have worked for the OSCE and the EUMM earlier in their career and have experience on the region and conflict in common. The next actor, the EUMM is enrolled in the assemblage in that it monitors the Administrative Boundary Lines and reports about the incidents. By providing information, the mission assists the EUSR but also cooperates directly with him as regards deescalating issues at the Administrative Boundary Lines. Put differently, the EUMM is the spokesperson of the Administrative Boundary Line. A small budget for confidence building adds another dimension to the work of the EUMM which is geared towards fostering normalization and establishing trust. Since the budget of the EUSR does not suffice to finance projects, this is the entry point for the EU Delegation to Georgia. Its contribution to the assemblage is complementing the efforts of the mediator team and enables the EUSR to implement ideas. Whereas the conflicts affect the daily routine of the delegation, they are not their primary concern. For instance, they are also involved in another set of practices which maintains bilateral relations between the Union and Georgia and facilitates the implementation of the Association Agreement. A consequence of being the diplomatic

representation of the Union is that its relations to the government of Georgia also constrain its actions pertaining to the conflicts of the country. For instance, the delegation can neither establish relations with the *de facto* authorities nor fund projects without the agreement of the government in Tbilisi. On top of this, the *de facto* authorities perceive them as solely responsible for Georgia as indicated by the name of the delegation, which explicitly excludes Abkhazia and South Ossetia in their opinion. In this respect, only the mandate of the EUSR, which covers Georgia and the South Caucasus, allows for forming associations with representatives of all conflict parties including the *de facto* authorities although the EUSR team is bound by the policy of non-recognition and engagement. The EUSR and his team are the only EU actors who are permitted to enter Abkhazia and South Ossetia on a regular basis.

As the case study of Myanmar demonstrated, it is also possible that a delegation is the only EU actor involved in supporting a peace process on behalf of the Union. Although the Ambassador is not mandated to mediate between the conflict parties, he represents the Union and fulfils the function of a spokesperson of the EU in the assemblage of mediation for the local counterparts in Myanmar. As in the case study on Georgia, the delegation takes care of the political and economic relations with the government of Myanmar and administers the envelopes for development cooperation. Accordingly, the support to the peace centre is divided among the different sections of the delegation in that the political section is responsible for other tasks related to funding the MPC than the technical section. Although the practices of the Common Foreign and Security Policy give member states a say on how to engage in the respective country, they were not very visible pertaining to EU action albeit some of them have long-standing relations with Georgia in the area of peace support. Nonetheless they attend briefings in Georgia and delegation officials engage with representatives of member states at forums like the Peace Support Group in Myanmar. In other words, member states are relevant to the assemblage of EU mediation because of being represented in the Council and due to their engagement on the ground but not in a similar manner as actor-networks such as delegations or CSDP mission staff or the team of an EUSR. However, since some member states also pursue their own agenda in the conflict-affected country and can be an important and influential external actor, their initiatives can affect the assemblage of EU mediation, which can be an avenue for future research.

Moving beyond the EU or EU-associated actors, the assemblage also embraces the conflict parties in the respective country. Although this study followed the actors of the Union within it in order to explore how they comprehend a conflict and its resolution through the device of

practices of mediation, it also tried to account for the conflict parties and stakeholders and how they are enrolled in the assemblage of EU mediation. This is essential because studies of mediation often focus on the mediator, his or her interests, potential bias, strategies and style of mediation, while ignoring the conflict parties and the processes and actions through which they bring about certain responses or choices of the mediator. Reviewing both case studies in an exemplary manner suffices to illustrate how the disputants and stakeholders of the conflict influence the assemblage of EU mediation. In Myanmar a loosely knitted assemblage of delegation officials and MPC staff, government officials but also representatives of the ethnic side that is the NCCT and UNFC, and civil society actors became apparent. Most visible were the implementing partners of the EU, conflict resolution professionals and advisers of the delegation, and government officials, in that they had sparked controversies or were mentioned as important sources of information by interviewed delegation officials. For instance, such a controversy was the request of Thein Sein's administration to the delegation asking them to put the Peacebuilding Needs Assessment on hold because it was considered as too early. Another debate was revealed when many implementing partners explained why they perceive the EU as influenced by the MPC and as not having unique access to the Myanmar officials because of funding the peace centre. The MPC had become the obligatory passage point. In fact, the government of the country had enrolled the EU and locked it in its role as a funder under the aegis of its own problematization rather than the other way around.

Pertaining to Georgia, the ways of engaging and maintaining relations with the conflict parties are significantly more formalized. It is primarily through the practices of country visits and the Geneva talks that the mediator team interacts with representatives from Moscow, Tbilisi, Tskhinvali and Sukhumi. These actors are very much determining the approach of the EU as the case study chapter on Georgia showed. By way of example, the co-mediators and co-moderators have not been able to facilitate an agreement on the issues at stake nor on who the parties in conflict are, since the views on such matters diverge fundamentally among the participants of the Geneva talks. Moreover, questions of the format such as who speaks first and the fact that South Ossetia and Abkhazia are a part of the Russian delegation because Georgia did not recognize them as conflict parties, have been discussed extensively. Being confronted with this situation, the mediator team adopted a pragmatic approach, as it is called by the advisors of the EUSR, in that they focus on the issues which the participants are willing to discuss hoping that this will prepare the ground for addressing the key issues in conflict. This brief sketch sheds light on the importance of the conflict parties and

stakeholders and demonstrates how the practices of EU mediation result from the associations which are formed between these actors. In addition, it emphasizes how EU actors depend on the conflict parties and that they often respond to developments which were not of their making but the decisions and actions of actors in Georgia or Myanmar. Hence, an essential part of the work of the Union's officials is to observe and understand the processes underway, to situate the EU within them and to respond accordingly.

6.4. Summary

This chapter addressed the puzzle of how the political rationality and the dimension of *techne* of the assemblage of mediation are interrelated. It explored the question of how the tools and instruments structure the way of thinking on conflict of EU officials and bring together a particular group of people, thereby pointing to their actant-like role in the assemblage of EU mediation. Particularly by drawing on the case study of Myanmar and the example of the Union's support to the National Dialogue Conference in Yemen, it became apparent that the *techne* of the assemblage creates a degree of path dependency through practices in that the supporting mechanisms and devices form a part of the Union's approach to violent conflict and thus are relatively similar across both cases. However, the instruments and tools also reflect and re-enact a particular kind of political rationality which is state-centred and conceptualizes resolving conflicts and statebuilding as integrated. Building on the findings of the third chapter and of both of the case studies, it was possible to illustrate how the understanding of how to build peace is tied to the Union's history and perceives democracy and sustainable development as preconditions for the *telos* of a strong state that is capable of successfully dealing with conflict and crisis. As a result, bad governance, weak state institutions, poverty and slow economic development were problematized as leading to the violent escalation of conflict. This political rationality has informed EU strategy and actions in Georgia and Myanmar at the expense of a detailed understanding of what the conflicts are about. In both cases, however, it was possible to trace dissident voices among the actors enrolled in the assemblage of EU mediation. They advanced a different understanding of the respective conflict and have been working towards transforming the approach of the Union. In Myanmar, this was the group of actors who was responsible for EU-Myanmar relations in the early days of the transition to a semi-civilian government and who considered the ethnic conflict as the make-or-break question of Myanmar's future. Their assessment of the developments in the country and the decision to support the MPC as a capacity building

measure for the government fed into the Comprehensive Framework, but seems to have since been forgotten by the current actors of the delegation actor-network. In Georgia, a problematization which is different from the one of the Council of the European Union is put forward by the EUSR and his team but recent developments have been working against them. It is not only the policy of non-recognition and engagement but also the signing of the Association Agreement between Georgia and EU and the war in Ukraine that constrain the room to manoeuvre of these actors. However, while these actors call elements of the EU approach into question, they have not seriously challenged the political rationality of the assemblage of EU mediation with regard to its core assumptions of violent conflict and what it is that constitutes peace.

7. Conclusion

This study examined the question of how the understanding of conflicts by EU actors is reflected in their ways of responding to them through practices of mediation. In this regard, it advanced the argument that the seemingly incoherent and to an extent diverging practices of mediation are in fact organized around a reasoning on violent conflict which could be called, drawing on Michel Foucault, the political rationality of mediation practices, and is rooted in a concept that problematizes conflict as a security threat. It is challenged by a transformative rationale which is advocated by the Mediation Support Team. However, the common denominator of both concepts is an understanding of what constitutes peace which perceives peace, stability and security to be inseparable from sustainable economic development, the eradication of poverty, strong and democratic state institutions and an effective system of multilateralism. Taken together, this reasoning gives rise to a state-centred approach to violent conflict which often plays out at the expense of a detailed conflict assessment as it simplifies the multiple realities and narratives of violent conflict.

To substantiate this argument, this dissertation proposed a practice theoretical approach which is inspired by the sociology of translation and governmentality studies. By conceptualizing mediation as an assemblage in the Latourian sense of a loosely knitted web of practices, which is formed, maintained but also dissolved through processes of translation, and deepening our understanding of these practices through the concepts of political rationality and *techne*, this conceptual framework is capable of examining both changes and projections of stability of the social (Latour, 2005; Callon, 1986; Miller & Rose, 1992). This tension between the emphasis on performativity and enactment of the sociology of translation and the focus on reproduction of 'orders' of governmentality studies, which other scholarly traditions might perceive as a dichotomy, is conceptualized as inherent to practices for they can reproduce and re-enact 'orders' on the one hand and unsettle, challenge and transform them on the other. The process of translation has been defined through four moments: problematization, interessement, enrolment and mobilization (Callon, 1986). These concepts allow for a systematic assessment of how actors form associations, thereby establishing this loosely knitted web of practices or assemblage, but also how ideas on violent conflict are developed, which knowledge claims they draw on, which controversies they spark, and how such processes might fail. To tap the full potential of assemblage thinking, the concepts of political rationality and *techne* of Foucault's governmentality studies as developed by Nikolas

Rose and Peter Miller deepen the conceptualization of practices by grasping the dimension of how thought operates within them as well as how their materiality helps to enact and re-enact this reasoning or political rationality but also shapes and structures the field of action of actors, thereby assuming an actant-like role. More specifically, Callon's concept of problematization was refined with the notion of political rationality which spans the aspects of problematization, *telos* and strategy. Furthermore, a twofold definition of *techne* was suggested that is as interessement devices for enrolling actors in the assemblage and as mechanisms for creating asymmetric relations and codified practices which produce what was referred to in this dissertation as a path dependency through practices and stabilize the assemblage.

This approach also informed the choice of methods for collecting and assessing textual artefacts and interview data. Textual artefacts are material traces of practices and assist the researcher in studying practices over time. Selecting relevant documents was based on three criteria. First, the research question of how the understanding of conflicts by EU actors is reflected in the policy response through practices of mediation necessitated tracing the textual artefacts or outputs of the practices of decision-making regarding policies towards the conflict-affected country. Second, accounting for the artefacts of the actor-networks responsible for developing the Union's approach to violent conflict, which are primarily the Council of the European Union and the division K2 of the EEAS, in a chronological order assisted with uncovering how conflict has been defined, presenting knowledge claims and concepts that were integrated into the approach, and explaining how it changed. Third, following-up on references to textual artefacts mentioned by interviewees as essential to their work or by the authors of already collected documents facilitated complementing the selection of textual artefacts. The interviewees of the 63 semi-structured interviews conducted during fieldwork in Brussels, Belgium; Yangon, Myanmar; and Tbilisi, Georgia, were chosen by taking the Mediation Support Team as a starting point and employing a snow-balling approach in the first round. The second round of interviews addressed actors who were identified through the analysis of textual artefacts and secondary sources. Moreover, the data of the collected accounts was verified by triangulating it and taking secondary sources into consideration. The assessment of the collected accounts was guided and structured by the adapted four moments of translation.

To clearly define the scope of the study, two cases were selected – the Union's efforts of mediation and mediation support in Georgia and Myanmar – because of three reasons. First,

since the approach of the study takes into account how both the EU's Concept on mediation and relevant officials conceptualize mediation, it was pivotal to select cases which embrace all five types of EU mediation involvement as depicted by the Concept, namely being the lead- or co-mediator, as well as promoting, supporting, leveraging and funding of mediation efforts of others. This way it was possible to explore how EU actors agreed or deviated from the approach to mediation as put forward by the Concept in that they considered the Geneva talks to be an example of EU mediation but voiced diverging opinions as regards the Union's engagement in Myanmar's peace process. Second, the cases should also reflect the diverse group of actors and potential mediators with whom the Union's Mediation Support Team collaborates with the EU delegation being in charge of supporting the peace process in Myanmar and the EUSR for the South Caucasus and the Crisis in Georgia being responsible for the Geneva talks and collaborating with the delegation and the EUMM in Georgia. The third criterion accounts for the foreign policy dimension of mediation and geographical proximity in that the EU's relations are governed by a different set of policies and interests depending on whether the country is in the immediate neighbourhood of the Union or not. Whereas the policy basis of EU-Myanmar relations is the Comprehensive Framework of 2013, the history of the EU and Georgia dates back to the 1990s and relations have intensified during the last two decades with the signing of the Association Agreement in June 2014 as the most recent step towards bringing Georgia closer to the Union.

7.1. Findings

This study argued that practices of EU mediation are not arbitrary but organized around a political rationality which draws on a state-centred concept of violent conflict. Its knowledge claims give rise to a securitized understanding of conflict but are challenged by a transformative approach as put forward by the Mediation Support Team. However, the political rationality incorporated this criticism without being prone to scrutinizing its underlying assumptions by integrating both concepts of violent conflict into an understanding of what constitutes peace. Peace, stability and security are perceived to be inseparable from sustainable development, the eradication of poverty, strong and democratic state institutions and an effective system of multilateralism. The state-centred approach to violent conflict derived from these concepts simplifies the multiple realities and narratives in conflict-affected countries and engenders an EU response which fails to integrate the perspectives and demands of the conflict parties in its practices of mediation. In this regard, chapter three to six served as

building blocks to substantiate this argument by at first, tracing the state-centred concepts of peace and conflict of the Union's approach; second, examine how the practices of mediation are dominated by a securitized rationale and why the Mediation Support Team cannot successfully challenge these knowledge claims; and third, demonstrating how the state-centred concept of violent conflict transforms the efforts of the EU to resolve conflicts, including the assemblage of mediation, into practices that resemble statebuilding at the expense of addressing the disputed issues in Myanmar and Georgia.

First, the textual analysis of chapter three revealed a controversy of two diverging philosophies or rationales on how EU officials comprehend violent conflict. One of them depicts conflict as an essential part of social change and problematizes any form of its violent escalation as the factsheets of the *Conflict Prevention, Peacebuilding and Mediation Instruments* unit illustrate. They recommend transformative approaches to address the root causes of conflict and are guided by the idea of enabling the groups of actors within society, who demand change, to do so without resorting to the use of force. The other concept securitizes conflict as a threat to European and global security and problematizes it as leading the affected country or region astray. Its emphasis on security suggests preventing and containing the conflict to restore stability and perceives actions for addressing the sources of conflict as a form of long-term engagement to prevent the recurrence of conflict. What is more, the chapter showed how all instruments at the Union's disposal are combined into the Comprehensive Approach to External Conflict and Crisis along a timeline of crisis management, followed by peace-making and eventually peacebuilding to foster long-term peace and stability. As such, it demonstrated how the Comprehensive Approach draws on both philosophies of conflict by conceptualizing the transformative dimension as long-term measures, and further aligns both concepts through a specific understanding of what constitutes peace which problematizes bad governance, slow economic growth, poverty and weak state institutions as root causes of violent conflict. Consequently, violent conflict is seen as intimately linked to an exclusionary, corrupt and unaccountable political system which erodes the state and regional security from within, thereby hampering development and allowing criminal networks to gain a foothold in society. The European Security Strategy refers to this pattern as the 'downward spiral of conflict, insecurity and poverty' (European Council, 2003, p. 3). Thus, it appears that political violence is understood as reactive and motivated by relative deprivation and greed. Against this background, the chapter uncovered that the *telos* of this concept of violent conflict and peace is to build a strong, democratic and

economically prosperous state which is embedded in a system of effective multilateralism or, in other words, the *telos* is to reproduce and maintain a system, which the Union perceives itself to represent, by incorporating the conflict-affected state into the networked relations which maintain it. This translates into objectives such as promoting democracy, preserving peace and international security, supporting sustainable development, the integration of all countries into the global market as well as 'an international system based on stronger multilateral cooperation and good global governance' (European Union, 2012, 21 A (I, II)). To address the causes of violent conflict, the documents suggest promoting democracy, sustainable development, and building a strong state which reflects the principles of EU external action. As stated in the *Consolidated Version of the Treaty on European Union*, they comprise democracy, the rule of law, human rights and fundamental freedoms, respect for human dignity, equality and solidarity (European Union 2012, 21 A (I)).

Second, the hierarchy of practices of the assemblage of mediation curtails any attempt at altering the securitized rationale of the EU approach to external conflict and crisis as chapter three and the case study chapters four and five demonstrated. Practices of mediation evolved from security policies of the Union but partially emancipated themselves through the newly established actor-network, the Mediation Support Team. In doing so, the team challenged the securitized understanding of violent conflict through the set of practices of in-house mediation support that is operational support, coaching and training, knowledge management and lessons learned, and expanded its partnerships, in order to assist those actors who mediate on behalf of the Union. The mainly seconded or externally recruited members of the team and external experts, which they enrol in the assemblage through the interessement device ERMES, a programme funded by the Instrument contributing to Stability and Peace, advocate a transformative understanding of violent conflict. However, the practices of this actor-network fulfil a supportive role and the team is neither an obligatory passage point for mediation expertise of the assemblage of mediation nor its spokesperson. In fact, the codified practices of the Common Foreign and Security Policy authorize the Council of the European Union as the actor-network which determines the Union's foreign policy objectives, including mandating an actor to mediate on behalf of the EU, and require all efforts of resolving violent conflicts to be in line with Council policies. Accordingly, EUSRs or Heads of Delegations engage in those practices that engender a peace process, thereby establishing them as the obligatory passage point and laying claim to spokespersonship. On top of this, the Mediation Support Team works on a request basis, hence, EU mediators can bypass this actor-network

entirely. The study also found that the tools and instruments as codified practices structure the ways of thinking on peace and conflict and also bring together a certain group of actors. They demonstrated an actant-like role in that these tools and instruments were not acting as pure intermediaries but as mediators in the Latourian sense by introducing a specific kind of reasoning to the people involved and by drawing on a particular body of knowledge. Thus, the dimension of *techne* seems to create a form of path dependency through practices which – like the political rationality of the assemblage – speaks to the observation of significant similarities across cases. Finally, assessing the associations between the actors who are enrolled in the assemblage of EU mediation rendered visible how practices engender power relations. For instance, the codified practices of the Common Foreign and Security Policy granted a degree of authority to the Council in that it was guiding all other actors of the assemblage pertaining to the problematization and *telos* of the Union's policies. The controversy on the lifting of the sanctions against Myanmar in April 2011, illustrated how other EU actors are not excluded but can enrol in this actor-network. Nevertheless, it is a matter of whether they are able to convince the officials and member states representatives in the Council which determines their success or failure. Another example provided by the case study of Myanmar are the consequences of EU delegation officials working from within a certain set of expectations as to how information should be provided to them. This leads to international experts or local experts with an education in Europe, the United States or Canada, being chosen as external consultants over actors who have lived in the country all their life and who experience the conflict in their everyday, thereby producing another form of asymmetric relations which basically pre-selects the kind of knowledge claims and concepts the external consultants will draw on.

The third dimension of the argument raises the question: how does the political rationality or state-centred concept of violent conflict shape the practices of mediation at the expense of a detailed assessment of the disputed issues? At first, the approach to the developments in Myanmar and Georgia reflect this political rationality. In Myanmar, EU actors problematize the legacies and realities of the military regime and civil war, human rights abuses, weak government institutions, and poverty as impeding a peaceful future and envision a democratic, federal, economically sound, and inclusive state which is integrated in the 'international community' as the *telos* of the Union's efforts. They advance a strategy which embraces the following key priority areas: peace, democracy, trade and development, and integrating Myanmar in the 'international community'. The central contribution towards promoting the

peace process of the country are the practices of supporting the Myanmar Peace Centre, the government secretariat and platform for negotiating the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement and planning the Political Dialogue. In Georgia, EU actors are paralyzed since the state-centred political rationality is contested as it is the notion of statehood which is at the heart of the violent conflict. Whereas the policy of non-recognition and engagement problematizes the threat to Georgia's territorial integrity, thereby subscribing to the government's narrative of statehood, Russia's recognition of Abkhazia and South Ossetia countered the EU's *telos* of reintegration. Hence, the EUSR and his team are confined to managing the post-war realities and cannot overcome the paradox of EU policies which ironically contribute to strengthen Abkhazia's and South Ossetia's statehood by driving Georgia and *de facto* states further apart. Second, the state-centred concept of peace and conflict also helps to understand failing processes of translation in both case studies. In Georgia, the EUSR could not employ the contested political rationality of the Union to enrol the conflict parties through the interessement device of the Geneva talks since key parties to the conflict rejected the EU position altogether. Hence, the set of practices of the Geneva talks were conceptualized based on a 'creative ambiguity' which did not define the roles of the actors who had to be enrolled. In other words, their enrolment was successful in that they participated in the talks but it locked them in their diverging problematizations of what the conflict is about and who the disputants are. As a result, the EUSR is the obligatory passage point and spokesperson of the assemblage by bringing the participants to the table; the practices of mediation itself, however, are subject to discussion, thereby partially contesting the EUSR as an obligatory passage point and spokesperson of the assemblage. In Myanmar, the peace centre was initially thought of as a capacity building measure for the government since EU officials identified the need to address the ethnic conflict and formalize the peace process, thereby increasing the chances of the process leading to a comprehensive peace agreement. In this regard, a needs assessment of the Mediation Support Team addressed the risks of supporting a peace centre, which would be a part of the government mechanism, including recommending that support should also be offered to other dialogue and mediation initiatives. These suggestions were based on the assessment that the ethnic groups were sufficiently prepared to engage in a peace process. In March 2015, the interviewed officials perceived the MPC differently than the group of actors who established these practices. The notion of supporting a ministry for peace was not mentioned any longer. The MPC was rather seen as a difficult but much needed creature which turned out to be less neutral than what they had hoped for and the practices of supporting and funding it were seen as political support. Moreover, it appears that the MPC

managed to establish itself as the obligatory passage point of the peace infrastructure in Myanmar and enrolled the EU as the funder of the peace process rather than being locked in the role envisioned by the problematization of the Union. Moreover, the EU did not manage to establish itself as the obligatory passage point of the assemblage of mediation in that its own officials do no longer engage in mediation support but perceive their work as political support. This partially failed process of translation curtails the Union's immediate efforts of addressing the ethnic conflict, mainly because supporting the government actors in taking on the lead role in the peace process has the adverse effect on the EU in that it inadvertently helps sustain authoritarian legacies and blurs the lines between an EU which acts as an impartial external third party and one which takes sides with the government.

7.2. Taking stock and moving on

This study set out to contribute to the scholarship of mediation and the EU in primarily three ways. First and foremost, it developed a novel conceptual approach towards the study of diplomatic practices. EU mediation has not been explored through the lens of a practice theoretical account which marries concepts of the sociology of translation and Foucauldian governmentality studies. Although this study is not the first to notice how both scholarly traditions can reinforce each other with the work of Merlingen (2011) and Rose and Miller (1990) as two examples, it joins the relatively small group of scholars who have studied the EU in this way. In fact, research in European Studies which is informed by international practice theory has been mostly inspired by Bourdieu. Whereas these studies have contributed a lot, they also struggled with the underlying assumption of a rather homogeneous world and difficulties of addressing change, material intermediaries and reflexivity with Bourdieusian concepts (Nicolini, 2013, pp. 68-69). In this regard, the sociology of translation has been neglected although it offers very powerful concepts to trace how practices produce ideas and knowledge claims, engender asymmetric relations through their materiality, and how they build projections of order, while being capable of both maintaining established practices and changing them. This study only began to explore the potential of this approach.

Second, the dissertation questioned essential assumptions of the positivist mediation literature. It challenged the conceptualization of mediation as an external framework for the study of practices of mediation. By drawing on a precise definition of which criteria need to be satisfied to be able to speak of mediation or fixed concepts such as strategies, mediator attributes, or context variables, the researcher automatically works from within a set of

assumptions pertaining to the subject matter which might be wrong in the context he or she is studying. Moreover, the notion of the mediator was disaggregated by focusing on the actors who are engaged in practices that produce a mediation process but also on those practices that can indirectly advance or impede it. In doing so, this study criticizes the conceptual boundaries which are often drawn between practices of peacebuilding, statebuilding, and mediation by demonstrating that the EU's concept of violent conflict penetrates the practices of mediation and integrates them into an approach to external conflict and crisis which combines aggregates of practices that could be characterized as statebuilding, development cooperation, and peacebuilding. In addition, focusing on practices allowed for tracing how the mediating actors form associations with the conflict parties as well as other non-EU actors who were enrolled in the assemblage, thereby demonstrating that practices of mediation are produced through networked relations of the mediators and a whole range of other actors. This rendered forms of being dependent on each other and vulnerabilities visible in as much as it pointed to why EU actors could not leverage their resources in some cases, while they were able to do so in others. Last but not least, a practice-oriented approach transcends the differentiation between mediation and the broader foreign policy agenda since it can account for actor-networks of the Union even if they are only indirectly relevant to mediation the moment one of the actors enrols in the assemblage of EU mediation.

Finally, this study addressed the gap in the literature regarding the Union's efforts to promote a more systematic approach to mediation. While research on the EU's approach to conflict more generally is quite common, it is important to explore the mechanics or *techne* of practices in this realm in order to understand how actor-networks re-enact and uphold certain knowledge claims and concepts. Also, studying the EU as a mediator allowed for examining how the assemblage emerged and how it engages with more established assemblages. In view of this, the study was able to offer many new insights and findings, including a case study of the EU's practices of mediation support in Myanmar which is to my knowledge the very first academic treatment of this topic. However, it could also be looked at as a comprehensive pilot study which brings me to the limitations of my work.

Focusing on mediation as practices goes hand in hand with fieldwork and spending a considerable amount of time on collecting data or, in other words, it necessitates an in-depth approach and does not allow for working on a big number of case studies. It requires the researcher to clearly define the scope of which practices and actors he or she is addressing. As a result, the study focused on two cases and a few actor-networks of the EU and neglected

other EU and non-EU actors. For instance, it only briefly touched on the conflict parties in that the research question shifted the focus on how officials of the Union understand conflict and how this is reflected in their strategies of responding to them through practices of mediation. Thus, the disputants were part of the study in that their actions were often essential to EU actors but the thesis did not zoom in on assembling their perspectives, interests and demands in greater detail. Similarly, it did neither systematically account for member states with a history of engagement in conflict resolution in Georgia and Myanmar nor did it trace their struggles in the Council of the European Union. It was also beyond the scope of my study to assess other external actors such as the UN or China in Myanmar or the UN, OSCE and Russia in Georgia. Addressing these limitations will be the task of future research.

There are three areas for further research which this study considers as particularly important: expanding the focus to include other actor-networks, exploring the use of specific instruments as regards knowledge production on conflict, and engaging in comparative studies. As regards actor-networks, it would be interesting to determine whether the rather distant role of member state representatives in Georgia and Myanmar constitutes a finding. Are EU officials from the delegation, the EUMM or an EUSR team relatively independent in their ways of engaging with the local counterparts and rather controlled through the practices of reporting to and briefing of the Council and the European Parliament? In the same vein, the practices of the European Parliament could be explored with regard to the question of how these tie in with the efforts of other EU actor-networks. Turning to specific instruments, this study could only briefly touch upon the practices of collaborating with external experts. Examining these practices in more detail – especially as to the transfer of concepts and the production of knowledge claims but also the notion of the expert and practices of mediation – could offer many new insights. However, maybe the most important and understudied area of further research would be to focus on the conflict parties and to assemble their practices of engaging in a peace process. Also expanding the number of case studies in order to assess the assemblage of EU mediation across cases would allow for exploring several puzzles which were brought up by this study. For instance, are there cases where a small group of dissident voices successfully challenged the state-centred concept of violent conflict of the Union? All three areas of further research lend themselves to continue exploring the potential of the sociology of translation for the study of EU diplomatic practice and, in particular, mediation. This dissertation illustrated how such an approach successfully links the analysis of the institutional practices of the EU and peace and conflict research. In this respect, the moments

of translation complemented with concepts of governmentality studies provided new insights into how mediation practices are co-produced by EU and non-EU actors, how the power struggles of defining an obligatory passage point and designating spokespersons take place and how knowledge claims are maintained and re-enacted through these practices. Seen from this perspective, the sociology of translation has a lot to offer, in particular related to knowledge production on peace and conflict.

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9. Annex

9.1. Country maps

Myanmar

Source: CIA Factbook, n.d.

Georgia, Abkhazia and South Ossetia
Source: CIA Factbook, n.d.

9.2. List of interviews

	Code	Institutional Affiliation	Position	Location	Date
1.	MSD-1	Member State	Diplomat	Phone	13 November 2014
2.	EU-1	European Commission	Financial Instruments	Email exchange	27 November 2014
3.	CSO-1	Civil Society Organization	Programme Director	Phone	5 December 2014
4.	EU- 37	European Commission	Official involved in drafting the Concept	Phone	10 December 2014
5.	EU-2	European Commission	Programme Manager	Brussels	9 December 2014
6.	CSO-2	Civil Society Organization Representative	Head of Office	Brussels	20 January 2014
7.	CSO-3	Civil Society Organization	Researcher	Brussels	20 January 2014
8.	EU-3	European Commission	Geographical Coordinator	Brussels	13 February 2015
9.	EU-4	European External Action Service	Thematic Desk Officer	Brussels	16 February 2015
10.	EU-5	European External Action Service	Senior Official	Brussels	20 February 2015
11.	EU-6	European External Action Service	Thematic Desk Officer	Brussels	24 February 2015
12.	EU-7	European External Action Service	Thematic Desk Officer	Brussels	25 February 2015
13.	CSO-4	Civil Society Organization	Senior Associate	Brussels	23 February 2015
14.	EU-38	European External Action Service	Senior Official	Phone	5 March 2015
15.	EU-8	European External Action Service	Senior Official	Phone/Email Exchange	6 March 2015
16.	EU-9	EU Delegation to Myanmar	Delegation Official	Yangon	11 March 2015
17.	CA-1	Consultant/Conflict Resolution	Consultant to the EU	Yangon	12 March 2015
18.	CSO-5	Civil Society Organization	Country Manager	Yangon	12 March 2015
19.	CSO-6	Civil Society Organization	Operations Director	Yangon	12 March 2015
20.	CSO-7	Civil Society Organization	Research Director	Yangon	17 March 2015
21.	CSO-8	Civil Society Organization	Country Director	Yangon	17 March 2015
22.	EU-10	EU Delegation to Myanmar	Delegation Official	Yangon	19 March 2015
23.	CSO-9	Civil Society Organization	Acting Director	Yangon	23 March 2015
24.	EU-11	EU Delegation to	Delegation Official	Delegation	24 March 2015

		Myanmar		Official	
25.	EU-8	European External Action Service	Senior Official	Phone	March 2015
26.	CA-2	Member State	Conflict Advisor	Phone	23 April 2015
27.	EU-12	European External Action Service	Thematic Desk Officer	Brussels	23 July 2015
28.	EU-2	European Commission	Programme Manager	Phone	26 July 2015
29.	EU-14	European Commission	Official	Brussels	7 July 2015
30.	EU-15	European External Action Service	Thematic Desk Officer	Phone	18 June 2015
31.	EU-7	European External Action Service	Thematic Desk Officer	Phone	16 July 2015
32.	EU-16	European Commission	Thematic Desk Officer	Brussels	3 July 2015
33.	EU-17	EU Delegation to Georgia	Delegation Official	Tbilisi	2 September 2015
34.	EU-18	EU Delegation to Georgia	Delegation Official	Tbilisi	4 September 2015
35.	CSO-10	Civil Society Organization	Programme Director	Phone	3 February 2016
36.	EU-19	EUMM	Senior Official	Tbilisi	4 September 2015
37.	CSO-11	Civil Society Organization	Programme Director	Phone	29 January 2016
38.	CSO-12	Civil Society Organization	Regional Manager	Phone	29 January 2016
39.	CSO-13	Civil Society Organization	Local Partner of International CSO	Tbilisi	1 September 2015
40.	CSO-14	Civil Society Organization	Local Partner of International CSO	Tbilisi	1 September 2015
41.	EU-20	European External Action Service	Political Advisor	Tbilisi	2 September 2015
42.	EU-21	European External Action Service	Political Advisor	Tbilisi	8 September 2015
43.	EU-22	EUMM	Monitor	Brussels	22 September 2015
44.	EU-23	European External Action Service	Political Advisor	Brussels	13 November 2015
45.	EU-24	European External Action Service	Senior Official	Brussels	11 December 2015
46.	EU-25	European External Action Service	Senior Official	Phone	7 March 2014
47.	EU-26	European Council	Senior Official	Phone	7 February 2014
48.	EU-27	EU Delegation to Yemen	Delegation Official	Brussels	16 June 2014
49.	EU-28	Member State	Senior Delegation Official (Secondment)	Phone	6 June 2015
50.	EU-29	EU Delegation to Yemen	Delegation Official	Brussels	17 June 2014
51.	EU-30	EU Delegation to Yemen	Senior Delegation Official	Phone	4 June 2014
52.	CSO-15	Civil Society Organization	Programme Director	Phone	11 June 2014
53.	EU-31	European External	Political Advisor	Brussels	5 February 2014

		Action Service			
54.	EU-32	European External Action Service	Senior Official	Brussels	20 June 2014
55.	EU-33	European External Action Service	Senior Official	Brussels	5 December 2014
56.	EU-34	European External Action Service	Senior Official	Brussels	21 November 2013
57.	EU-35	EU Delegation to Yemen	Senior Delegation Official	Brussels	12 June 2014
58.	EU-36	European External Action Service	Senior Official	Brussels	11 May 2015
59.	CSO-16	Civil Society Organization	Senior Member of Staff	Brussels	14 March 2014
60.	CA-3	Conflict Resolution Professional	Free-lance Consultant	Phone	13 March 2014
61.	EU-39	European External Action Service	Senior Official	Phone	19 October 2015
62.	CA-4	Research Institution	Researcher	Brussels	4 February 2016
63.	CA-5	Research Institution	Researcher	Brussels	16 February 2016

9.3. Fig. 6 – List of armed organizations in Myanmar

Acronym	Name	Founded	Old ceasefire	New ceasefire	Strength
NEW CEASEFIRE GROUPS					
ALP/ALA = RSLP	Arakan Liberation Party	1968		2012	<100
CNF	Chin National Front	1988		2012	200+
DKBA-5	DKBA-5/Klo Htoo Baw Battalian (Democratic Karen Benovelent Army)	2010			1500+
KNPP	Karenni National Progressive Party	1957	2005	2012	600+
KNU	Karen National Union	1947		01/2012	6000+
KNU/KNLA (Peace Council)	Karen National Union/Karen National Liberation Army Peace Council	02/2007	02/2007	02/2012	200+
NDAA-ESS	National Democratic Alliance Army	1989	1989	2011	4000+
NMSP	New Mon State Party	1958	1995	2012	800+ (reserved 5000)
NSCN-K	National Socialist Council of Nagaland-Khaplang	1980		2012	<400
PNLO	Pa-O National Liberation Organization	1949		2012	<200
SSA/SSPP	Shan State Army/Shan State Progress Party	1989	1989	2012	8000+
SSA/RCSS	Shan State Army/Restoration Council of Shan State	1964/1996		2012	8000+
UWSA/P	United Wa State Army/Party	1964/1989	1989	2011	20000-25000
COMBATANT GROUPS					
KIO/A	Kachin Independence Organization/Army	1961	1994		10000+
ABSDF	All Burma Students's Democratic Front	1988			450+
AA	Arakan Army (Kachin)	2008			1500+
TNLA	Ta'ang National Liberation Army	1992			3000+
MNDAA	Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army	1989	1989		3000+
TRANSFORMED BORDER GUARD FORCE GROUPS					
NDA-K	New Democratic Army-Kachin	1989	1989		<900
KCNPLF	Karenni National People's Liberation Front	1978	1994		<600
KNPDP	Karenni National Peace and Development Party	1999			<40
KNDP/A	Karenni National Development Party/Army	1996			60
KNUSO	Karenni National Unity and	2002			70

	Solidarity Organization				
MNDAA	Myanmar National Democracy Alliance Army	1989	1989	2009	1000+
Ja Pikwe group	Lahu militia group				
Jakuni group	Mongkoe Lahu militia group	2010			
	Lahu Militia Group (East Shan State)	2010			
	Makman Militia (East Shan State)	2010			
DKBA	Democratic Karen Buddhist Army	1994	1995		<5000
KPF	Karen Peace Force		1997		<500
TRANSFORMED PEOPLE'S MILITIA FORCE GROUPS					
RRF	Rebellion Resistance Force				<60
KDA	Kachin Defense Army	1991	1991		<200 (claims to have 3000, 900 of which are militia)
SSA-N 3	Shan State Army-North brigade 3				<400
SSA-N 7	Shan State Army-North brigade 7				<400
SSA-S 758	Shan State Army-South brigade 758				<850
KNG	Kayan National Guard	1970	1992		<50
KNPP (hoya)	Karenni National Progressive Party (Hoya)				<60
PSLP/O	Palaung Staaate Liberation Party/Organization	1976	1991		<1500