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How Effective Is the EU as a Mediator?
The Case of the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia

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About the Author

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Abstract

This paper aims to assess the effectiveness of the mediation endeavour of the European Union (EU) in the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYROM) since March 2015. The analytical part of this paper rests upon the identification of EU mediation objectives as defined in documents published before and during the mediation, notably the 2015 Pržino Agreement. It draws on the work of Bergmann and Niemann which operationalises mediator effectiveness along two dimensions: goal-attainment and conflict-settlement.[1] The factors that have – directly or indirectly – a bearing on the mediation process can be structured around four key clusters of variables: conflict context, mediator leverage, mediation strategy and coherence. The paper finds that the mediation process in the case of FYROM has been rather effective owing to the EU's mediator strategy and its high level of coherence. However, certain factors seem to have had a constraining impact on EU mediation effectiveness: very low levels of internal cohesiveness amongst the conflict parties and hence a high proclivity to spoiler problems, as well as the waning EU leverage as a result of the lack of a firm EU membership perspective.

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[1] J. Bergmann & A. Niemann, "Mediating International Conflicts: The European Union as an Effective Peacemaker?", *Journal of Common Market Studies*, vol. 53, no. 5, 2015, pp. 957-975.

Introduction

International peace mediation has been receiving ever more policy attention across the globe in the past decades. Regarded as a cost-effective and useful tool for solving conflicts, the European Union (EU) has commenced to gradually consider its potential role of mediator on the international stage. This development is exemplified by the adoption of the 2009 EU Concept on Mediation,[2] which – built on the lessons learned from the Aceh Peace Process – rapidly became the policy reference in that field. In spite of a growing interest and a maturing practical engagement of the EU in the field – notably the 2001 Ohrid Framework Agreement, the Aceh Peace Process, the Geneva International Discussions on Georgia's territorial conflicts or the United Nations (UN) Contact Groups – the role of the EU as a mediator and the consequent scope of its action have not aroused quite the same level of attention among academics as other policy fields have.

At the crossroads of European foreign policy and peace mediation studies, the analysis of EU effectiveness as a third-party mediator allows us to reconcile two disciplines that are often opposed, or at least dismissive of one another. This paper endeavours to explore the extent to which the European Union has been an effective peace mediator in intra-state conflicts with a case study of the mediation process in FYROM from March 2015 to January 2017.[3] This study posits that EU mediation has been effective along a short-term dimension owing to significant conducive factors such as the EU's coherence and strategy. A fragile conflict setting as well as a waning EU leverage in light of the distant membership perspective have nonetheless hindered better mediation outcomes inasmuch as the quest for stability has been informing the EU's attitude at the expense of structural reforms.

The paper proceeds as follows: first, I examine the theoretical framework put forward by Bergmann and Niemann to assay EU effectiveness in international mediation.[4] I subsequently apply this framework to the context of the EU mediation in

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[2] Council of the European Union, *Concept on Strengthening EU Mediation and Dialogue Capacities*, 15779/09, Brussels, 10 November 2009, p. 2.

[3] I use the terms "Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia", "FYROM" and "Macedonia" in an alternating fashion, absent any politically oriented statement.

[4] This theoretical framework lends itself to an interesting, albeit not exhaustive, analysis of the mediation process. The thesis on which this paper is based went beyond by adding an indicator to assess the level of consistency in the EU's action as well as a conflict analysis model to account for the specific nature of the situation on the ground. See T. Coibion, *The EU as an Effective Mediator: Devising an Effectiveness-Assessment Framework for the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia*, Master's thesis, Bruges, College of Europe, June 2016.

FYROM with an eye to evaluating the extent to which EU mediation has been effective. Finally, some lessons will be drawn from the findings with a view to furthering potential avenues to be explored.

Analytical Framework to Assess Effectiveness

Defining Effectiveness in EU Mediation

Any potential misunderstanding should be downright discarded, as the following framework will be zeroed in on the analysis of effectiveness, not efficiency. While efficiency is used to assess how resources are mobilised to attain a pre-identified target, conventionally resorting to a cost-benefit analysis, effectiveness focuses on the possible changes and alterations that mediation has induced and whether or not the latter has reached its initial objectives.

As a starting point, the concept of effectiveness of EU mediation needs to be defined. In applying Bergman and Niemann's analytical framework, I retain the dichotomy between EU-specific and conflict-specific perspectives for the definition of effectiveness.[5] Indeed, while examining the literature and conducting interviews, this differentiation rapidly came to the fore, spotlighting the hiatus between what the mediator hopes to achieve – its ultimate goals usually ranked in order of importance – and its actual impact on the crisis that is being addressed.

In the case of Macedonia, the first dimension I will be looking at is the internal perspective of the European Union as a mediator (EU-specific) to evaluate the extent to which the EU has achieved its initial objectives. "This dimension captures what Young terms 'effectiveness as goal-attainment'", which can be measured by means of three different gauges acting as reference points: high, medium and low.[6] As Bergmann and Niemann argue, a high degree of effectiveness (in terms of goal-attainment) is realised "if the EU is able to achieve most or all of the goals set before the start of negotiations".[7] A medium degree would be equivalent to the

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[5] J. Bergmann & A. Niemann, "Mediating International Conflicts: The European Union as an Effective Peacemaker?", *Journal of Common Market Studies*, vol. 53, no. 5, 2015, p. 960. See also A. Peen Rodt, "EU Performance in Military Conflict Management", in R. G. Whitman & S. Wolff (eds.), *The European Union as a Global Conflict Manager*, London, Routledge, 2012, p. 169; K. E. Jørgensen, "The European Union's Performance in World Politics: How Should We Measure Success?", in J. Zielonka (ed.), *Paradoxes of European Foreign Policy*, The Hague, Kluwer Law International, 1998, pp. 87-101.

[6] O. R. Young, *International Governance: Protecting the Environment in a Stateless Society*, Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 1994, p. 144.

[7] Bergmann & Niemann, *op. cit.*, p. 961.

accomplishment of several, but not all, key objectives.[8] Should the EU fall short of its initial goals or barely meet some secondary ones, the level of goal-attainment would equate to a low degree of effectiveness.[9] With a view to ascertaining whether or not the European Union has been effective in the ongoing mediation in the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, the initial goals being pursued need to be singled out. To do so, I will peruse several EU policy documents, press releases and media reports and put the interviews I conducted to good use to corroborate the preliminary findings.

The second dimension of the definition of effectiveness will assume the form of an evaluation of the conflict-settlement potential of EU mediation.[10] That is, how well has the EU been faring during the mediation endeavour in terms of real impact on the crisis at hand. This conflict-specific dimension thus "refers to an observable change in conflict behaviour on the sides of the disputants, which may be observable both during the process of mediation and as an outcome".[11] While the first dimension bears on the EU effectiveness in terms of reaching its own mediation goals, the second one, termed 'problem-solving effectiveness' by Young, fathoms the measurable imprint of the mediation on the conflict, which can translate into an abatement of tensions, a settlement of the conflict, a peace agreement or a ceasefire agreement to name but a few.[12] The complexity of this dimension lies in its intrinsic subjectivity inasmuch as a mediator's conception of impact or success might very well be someone else's conception of failure or, as Bercovitch says, "success in conflict resolution is an elusive quest".[13] In order to empirically evaluate the conflict-specific dimension, the categorisation set forth by Bergmann and Niemann adequately sets out the various possibilities of conflict settlement:[14]

(0) No agreement: the mediation does not yield any outcome whatsoever.

(1) Ceasefire: given the absence of any military activity in FYROM relating to – or occurring during – EU mediation, this stage has been intentionally left out of the case study.

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[8] *Ibid.*
[9] *Ibid.*
[10] *Ibid.*
[11] *Ibid.*
[12] Young, *op. cit.*, p. 142.
[13] J. Bercovitch, "Mediation Success of Failure: A Search for the Elusive Criteria", *Cardoso Journal of Conflict Resolution*, vol. 7, no. 2, 2006, p. 301.
[14] Bergmann & Niemann, *op. cit.*, p. 961.

(2) Process agreement: a procedural agreement whose significance lies in the commitment of the conflicting parties to hold further rounds of negotiations.

(3) Settlement of minor conflict issues: an agreement that solves some lesser issues, regarded as trivial by the conflicting parties.

(4) Settlement of major conflict issues: an agreement that solves some key issues, regarded as vital by the conflicting parties.

(5) Full settlement: an agreement that addresses and solves all contentious issues between the conflicting parties.

Conditions of Effectiveness in EU Mediation

Having expounded the two dimensions of EU mediation effectiveness, this section will spell out the conditions that influence the mediation process and determine whether or not it is effective. To do so, the analysis will espouse Bergmann and Niemann's model comprising four conditions to assess the EU's effectiveness in mediation: (1) conflict context, (2) mediator leverage, (3) mediation strategy, (4) coherence.[15] While these four variables constitute the bedrock of the analysis, I will attempt to apply them to the case study with an eye to assessing as critically as possible their relevance and suitability for evaluating effectiveness. Additionally, it is worth mentioning that even though these variables will be temporarily isolated for analytical purposes, they are concomitant and complementary. This effectiveness assessment model does not pretend to address all the potential criteria in an exhaustive fashion, nor does it confirm its universal pertinence and applicability.[16]

(1) Conflict context: a survey of the parties' internal cohesiveness whose appositeness resides in an *ex post* analysis. Drawing on Bergmann and Niemann's argument that principally stresses the need to investigate the extent to which conflict parties harbour 'internal cohesiveness' and 'spoiler problems', this exercise needs to account for Macedonia's complex and rapidly-evolving dynamics at play within the domestic political sphere. A thorough conflict analysis, appreciated through an *ad*

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[15] *Ibid.*

[16] OECD, "Guidance on Evaluating Conflict Prevention and Peacebuilding Activities", *Working Draft*, Paris, Development Assistance Committee (DAC), 2008; D. Frei, "Conditions Affecting the Effectiveness of International Mediation", *Peace Science Society*, vol. 26, 1976, pp. 67-84; J. Bercovitch & J. Langley, "The Nature of the Dispute and the Effectiveness of International Mediation", *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, vol. 37, no. 4, 1993, pp. 670-691; A. Herrberg, J. Packer & M. Varela, "The Evolution of the United Nations Standby Team of Mediation Experts in Context: Key Trends, Issues and Recommendations", Brussels, Peace my Way, 2015, p. 17.

hoc model, would be interesting to complement this variable but space restrictions do not allow it.[17]

   (2) Mediator leverage: probably one of the most elusive elements of mediation and certainly the most debated, the notion of leverage and its role in mediation have yielded various research outcomes, often diverging or even contradictory. A commonly shared understanding has nevertheless emerged, positing that leverage refers to "a mediator's ability to put pressure on one or both of the conflicting parties to accept a proposed settlement".[18] Hence, the assumption that a mediator possesses a certain amount of power and influence resources "that can be brought to bear on the parties".[19] Scholars and analysts have elaborated on the nature and form of these potential resources, discerning positive from negative sanctions ('carrots and sticks') and material from immaterial aspects (economic or commercial sanctions *vs.* moral or psychological pressure).[20] Irrespective of the nature of the resources, their alleged significance in achieving successful or effective mediation outcomes has been widely debated.

   (3) Mediator strategy: the relative effectiveness of any mediation is contingent upon contextual variables (conflict-specific analysis) and process variables, that is, the particular strategy adopted by the mediator. The decision to embrace a specific course of action carries significant methodological weight and practical implications to the extent that it "has an impact on mediator effectiveness".[21] After carefully reviewing the two prominent typologies within the international mediation literature, I opted for the one elaborated by Touval and Zartman, which I think lends itself to an interesting comparison with the role of the EU.[22] This taxonomy identifies three ideal types of mediator behaviour and their subsequent strategies on an ascending gamut of involvement, from passive to active: communication, formulation and

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[17] See Coibion, *op. cit.*

[18] M. Kleiboer, "Understanding Success and Failure of International Mediation", *The Journal of Conflict Resolution*, vol. 40, no. 2, 1996, p. 371.

[19] *Ibid.*

[20] S. Touval & W. I. Zartman, *International Mediation in Theory and Practice*, Boulder, Westview, 1984, p. 13; T. Princen, "Mediation by a Transnational Organization: The Case of the Vatican", in J. Bercovitch & J. Z. Rubin (eds.), *Mediation in International Relations: Multiple Approaches to Conflict Management*, New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 1992, p. 167.

[21] Bergmann & Niemann, *op. cit.*, p. 962.

[22] Touval & Zartman, *op. cit.*, pp. 10-12. The other typology has been developed by Kressel and spells out three different mediator strategies: (1) reflective behaviour, (2) nondirective behaviour, and (3) directive behaviour. K. Kressel, *Labour Mediation: An Exploratory Survey*, Albany, NY, Association of Labour Mediation Agencies, 1972, p. 13.

manipulation.[23] At the low end of the engagement spectrum, the communication strategy – often referred to as facilitation – typically advocates for a rather low-key mediator role, whereby the mediator acts as a "passive conduit and repository".[24] One step higher on the mediator involvement scale, the formulation strategy describes a more active mediator role, whereby he or she "exerts more control on the mediation process and formally structures the negotiation process, formulates alternatives to resolve the conflict and makes substantial suggestions for compromise".[25] Should the abovementioned strategies not yield any positive outcome, the mediator could assume a resolutely interventionist behaviour, not only substantially contributing to the negotiations but also directly "influenc[ing] the bargaining structure and process through the use of coercive measures and/or the provision of positive incentives".[26] The course of action espoused by a mediator is obviously very much connected to the degree of leverage at his or her disposal, given that the greater a mediator's resources, the more likely his/her proclivity to adopt a manipulative strategy.[27]

(4) Coherence: building on Gebhard's typology, which spells out four dimensions of coherence (vertical, horizontal, internal, external), the extent to which the various actors involved in EU mediation share some sense of coherence needs to

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[23] *Ibid.*, p. 11. It is worth underlining that this typology is closely linked to the different strands of mediation to the extent that they overlap and resort to the same tactics. Accordingly, a distinction is often made between a *power-based approach* of mediation (directive-oriented, resorting to the 'carrot and stick' tactic, thus comparable to the manipulative strategy) and an *interest-based approach* (favouring guidance and support, thus on a par with the communication or the facilitation strategy). A third strand is sometimes put forward as a *transformative, long-term mediation* whose peculiarity lies in the broad spectrum of action and actors involved. Kleiboer identifies four strands of mediation, namely, the power brokerage model, the domination model, the political problem-solving model and the transformative restructuring relationships. Kleiboer, *op. cit.;* see also L. Kirchhoff, *Constructive Interventions: Paradigms, Process and Practice of International Mediation: Global Trends in Dispute Resolution*, The Hague, Kluwer Law International, 2008, pp. 242-246.

[24] Touval & Zartman, *op. cit.*, pp. 10-12.

[25] Bergmann & Niemann, *op. cit.*, p. 962.

[26] *Ibid.*

[27] Remarkably, certain mediation pundits have discarded the power-based approach – and its corollary, the manipulative behaviour of the mediator – because "the distinctive normative dimension of mediation that empowers parties is not enshrined in such an approach". A. Herrberg, "International Peace Mediation: A New Crossroads for the European Union", *DCAF Brussels - ISIS Europe*, Brussels, 2012, p. 13. See K. Kovach & L. P. Love, "Mapping Mediation: The Risk of Riskin's Grid", *Harvard Negotiation Law Review*, vol. 3, spring 1998, pp. 71-110.

be explored.[28] Pursuant to this definition, the evaluation of coherence in this study attempts to encapsulate the degree of coordination across the many actors involved in EU mediation. This becomes particularly compelling in this instance, as different actors with distinct mandates pertaining to separate political ensembles have committed themselves to the mediation process in FYROM. The four dimensions of coherence will not be analysed in an isolated manner. Rather, I will attempt to grasp a general sense of coordination and coherence among the affected actors with an eye to assessing the extent and the pertinence of this variable in mediation. It is noteworthy that, "[i]n practical terms, coherence is – *stricto sensu* – an unattainable state, which does not imply that it is inappropriate as a guiding principle".[29] Following that thought, I assume that the higher the degree of EU coherence – particularly among the various actors involved –, the greater its impact on both goal-attainment and conflict-settlement, thus increasing EU mediator effectiveness. By the same token, a low level of coherence would hamper EU effectiveness, dramatically lessening the likelihood of any successful outcome while undermining its credibility as a mediator.[30]

To sum up, Bergmann and Niemann's four variables are used to assess EU mediator effectiveness: conflict context, mediator leverage, mediator strategy and coherence. The analytical isolation of the latter is, once again, not reflective of their practical functioning since these conditions are closely interconnected and often overlap.

Empirical Evaluation of EU Mediator Effectiveness in FYROM

As regards the goal-attainment dimension of effectiveness, a distinction between different EU objectives needs to be underlined. Indeed, along a set of broad goals – imbued with the enlargement narrative – that consistently inform the European Union's posture and actions, more narrowly defined objectives arose whose primary target was the ongoing political crisis. This section will briefly identify the EU distinction between the EU's long-term and short-term goals in the mediation in FYROM.

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[28] C. Gebhard, "Coherence", in C. Hill & M. Smith (eds.), *International Relations and the European Union*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2011, 2nd edn., pp. 101-127. See also, C. Bretherton & J. Vogler, *The European Union as a Global Actor*, London, Routledge, 2006, 2nd edn., pp. 12-61; J. Jupille & J. A. Caporaso, "States, Agency, and Rules: The European Union in Global Environmental Politics", in C. Rhodes (ed.), *The European Union in the World Community*, London, Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1998, pp. 213-229.
[29] Gebhard, *op. cit.*, p. 124.
[30] Bergmann & Niemann, *op. cit.*, p. 963.

Identifying EU Mediation Objectives

When the possibility of a mediation was still being discussed in Brussels throughout February and March 2015, various arguments were put forward to vindicate such an endeavour in a candidate country. Across the interviews I conducted, a shared sense of responsibility for and commitment to Macedonia's Euro-Atlantic path manifested itself. Not only has the EU consistently reiterated its "determination to fully and effectively support the European perspective of the Western Balkan countries – which will become an integral part of the EU, once they meet the established criteria", but it also has asseverated the need for a stable and secure neighbourhood.[31] Ensuring the avoidance of any instability hotbed at its borders has indeed been and remains the EU's main objective.[32] The prosaic nature of this security aspect, to the extent that it reflects the EU's self-interested calculations rather than the ideals and values it aims to impart, has been perceptibly imprinting the EU's response to this crisis.[33]

Imbued with – and directly deriving from – this rationale, the overall EU objective prior to any mediation attempt has been to end the cycle of violence and abuses, or, as an EU official said, "to avoid the implosion of the country into inter-ethnic violence anew".[34] While this overarching narrative, deeply rooted in the enlargement perspective, has remained present at all times, the EU has espoused a narrower objective and has called on the parties to address the ongoing political crisis, as the uncommonly numerous Council Conclusions on FYROM illustrate:

> The Council urges all sides to assume their respective responsibilities and take immediate measures towards a sustainable solution, constructively engage to restart political dialogue and restore trust in the institutions by adequate political steps.[35]

Quite evidently, the short-term objective of the EU has been to put an end to the serious political crisis on the ground and bring the country back to 'democratic normality'.[36] As regards the potential means to address the situation, several officials

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[31] Council of the European Union, *Thessaloniki European Council Presidency Conclusions*, 11638/03, Brussels, 1 October 2003, p. 12.
[32] *Ibid.*
[33] Interview with an EU official, Brussels, 5 March 2016.
[34] *Ibid.*
[35] Council of the European Union, *Council Conclusions on the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia*, 196/15, Brussels, 21 April 2015. The situation in FYROM has been unusually recurrent on the agenda of the Council in April and June 2015 – which is a rather telling indicator of the EU's commitment to the country's stability.
[36] Interview with a European Commission official, via telephone, 16 March 2016, *op. cit.*

pointed out the very peculiar nature of the crisis, which required a tailored solution.[37] The political crisis has indeed been that of a rupture of all communications between the governing party and the opposition inside the country's parliament. This observation has steered the EU towards a refinement of its objectives, so as to reflect the necessity to tackle the breakdown of communications first and foremost.[38]

In sum, the objectives of the European Union can be characterised as twofold: on the one hand, the enlargement narrative has very much been informing the EU's approach to the crisis as a long-term goal. On the other hand, the EU's short-term objective was a solution of the political crisis by resuming parliamentary activities and engaging in confidence-building measures. These two prongs are clearly interrelated as the achievement of the latter constitutes but a step towards the realisation of the former.[39]

With the inking of the Pržino Agreement – consisting of both the June and July 2015 Agreements –, the EU's short-term objectives translated into concrete benchmarks with strict implementation deadlines.[40] Interestingly, the all-encompassing enlargement narrative showed through the agreement in the form of essential clauses:

> 1. The parties agree to put the interest of the country first and confirm their commitment to the Euro-Atlantic process and democratic principles.
> 2. In the interest of all citizens and all communities in the country, the parties agree on steps to overcome the current crisis. They commit to ensuring inclusiveness in taking this agreement forward, through consultation and coordination with the main parties in the country.
> 3. The parties commit to respecting the democratic principle of political accountability in addressing key challenges facing the country.
> 4. At a time of great national challenge, the parties agree that they must, acting in the interest of all citizens, address critical and unprecedented challenges facing the country, to consolidate its economic and democratic development, to strengthen inter-ethnic relations, to ensure full implementation of the Ohrid Framework Agreement, to strengthen good neighbourly relations and its international standing and, in so doing, to bring the country forward on its Euro-Atlantic path.[41]

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[37] Interview with a European Parliament official, via telephone, 11 March 2016.
[38] *Ibid.*
[39] J. Hahn, Commissioner for European Neighbourhood Policy and Enlargement Negotiations, "Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia: No Time to Loose to Reform the Country!", *Blog Post*, 24 July 2015.
[40] 2 June 2015 Agreement between the European Union on the one hand, and the four main political parties in FYROM on the other hand, Skopje, 2 June 2015; Annex to the agreement signed on 2 June 2015, Skopje, 19 June 2015; J. Hahn, "Agreement in Skopje to Overcome Political Crisis", Statement, Skopje, 15 July 2015.
[41] 2 June 2015 Agreement, *op. cit.*

Unequivocally stipulated therein, the long-term European perspective further materialises in the form of the Urgent Reform Priorities and the Senior Experts' Group's 'Priebe Report', both to be fully implemented.[42] Besides this overarching narrative, the agreement spells out several measures that need to be swiftly implemented with an eye to addressing the crisis. Among the numerous conditions the agreement enumerates, the most salient are:[43]

1. The establishment of a transitional period ending in free and fair elections on 24 April 2016;

2. The exact organisation of the new government preparing the elections;

3. Contingent upon the above second measure, the return of the opposition to the parliament and the set-up of a specially constituted parliamentary committee of inquiry into the wiretap scandal;[44]

4. The resignation of the incumbent Government "in due time to enable the new Government to be sworn in on 15 January 2016, 100 days before the parliamentary elections".[45] Importantly, "the new Government shall be headed by a new Prime Minister nominated by the Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization – Democratic Party for Macedonian National Unity (VMRO-DPMNE). Its government programme shall be limited to the organisation of the early parliamentary elections";[46]

5. The review and modification of the State Elections Commission;

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[42] European Commission, Neighbourhood and Enlargement Negotiations, *Urgent Reform Priorities for the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia*, Brussels, June 2015; Senior Experts' Group, *The Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia: Recommendations of the Senior Experts' Group on Systemic Rule of Law Issues Relating to the Communications Interception Revealed in Spring 2015*, Brussels, 8 June 2015.

[43] I do not argue that some elements laid down in the agreement are unnecessary. However, I believe that the measures highlighted in this paper should have been tackled first given their far-reaching structural implications.

[44] "Against a backdrop of political deadlock, the SDSM (opposition party) began releasing excerpts of what appeared to be a massive illegal wiretap programme in February 2015, laying bare 'ample indications of apparent direct involvement of senior government and party officials in corruption, abuse of power, blackmail, political interference in the judiciary system, as well as electoral fraud'". N. Dimitrov, I. Jordanovska & D. Taleski, "Ending the Crisis in Macedonia: Who Is in the Driver's Seat?", *Policy Brief*, Graz, Balkans in Europe Policy Advisory Group, April 2016, p. 4.

[45] 2 June 2015 Agreement between the European Union on the one hand, and the four main political parties in FYROM on the other hand, Skopje, 2 June 2015; Annex to the agreement signed on 2 June 2015, Skopje, 19 June 2015; J. Hahn, "Agreement in Skopje to Overcome Political Crisis", Statement, Skopje, 15 July 2015.

[46] 2 June 2015 Agreement, *op. cit.*; Hahn, "Agreement in Skopje", 15 July 2015, *op. cit.*

6. The appointment of a Special Prosecutor "with full autonomy to lead the investigations surrounding and arising from the interception of communications. This Special Prosecutor shall be appointed by agreement of the undersigned parties".[47]

This list indicates the different EU objectives in the mediation process. A differentiation between two sets of EU goals is manifestly observable; the EU realised that however potent the overarching narrative, well-defined and accurate benchmarks needed to be set to spur the parties to find a way out.

Having identified the objectives of the EU, the next section will apply the four indicators of the framework to assess how effective the mediation has been.

Assessing the Extent of EU Effectiveness

To what extent has the EU attained its goals in the context of mediation in the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia? With regard to the short-term objective of solving the political crisis, it seems that in January 2017 a medium degree of goal-attainment effectiveness has been reached given that the cycle of political violence has ended, the opposition has agreed to stop releasing any other surveillance tape and an agreement has been signed.[48] Remarkably, the Pržino Agreement in itself has been widely hailed within the European Union institutions, and described as "an important step in overcoming the current crisis and towards addressing key challenges facing the country".[49] The strong commitment of the political leaders and the sense of ownership across the political aisle have been welcomed and regarded as a crucial juncture in the mediation process.[50] "The joint mediation efforts of the European Parliament, of our Member States, the US and myself [Commissioner Hahn] were instrumental in bridging the gaps between them [the political parties in FYROM]."[51] According to Member of the European Parliament Richard Howitt, this agreement went as far as "pulling the country back from the brink".[52] However, the rhetoric employed by the mediators seems to have been overly optimistic, ascribing far-reaching positive ramifications to the newly reached agreement. Following a 13 hour-

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[47] *Ibid.*
[48] Hahn, "Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia: No Time to Loose to Reform the Country!", *op. cit.*
[49] S. J. Marusic, "Hahn Brokers Deal Ending Crisis in Macedonia", *Balkan Insight*, 15 July 2015.
[50] Hahn, "Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia: No Time to Loose to Reform the Country!", *op. cit.*
[51] *Ibid.*
[52] Quoted in Marusic, "Hahn Brokers Deal Ending Crisis in Macedonia", *op. cit.*

long negotiation round with the leaders of the four main political parties in Skopje on 15 July 2015, Commissioner Hahn declared:

> This day is an excellent day for your country, it will open the door very wide to a Euro-Atlantic perspective […] I think you can be proud of your leaders in this country, who learned how to get a compromise in order to guide your country in a prosperous future […] I think the momentum for this country is a perfect one […] The outcome is something which gives a lot of hope for the country. The agreement tonight will give all opportunities for a further continuation of recommendations to open negotiations and I am more than confident that with the help of many of our Member States, those who have been resistant and reluctant in the past and have blocked opening negotiations should be convinced to open the doors for your country for the European perspective [sic].[53]

This public statement before various domestic and international media in Skopje is quite telling about the short-sighted approach that the European Union has embraced according to Erwan Fouéré, former European Union Special Representative (EUSR) to FYROM.[54] The mere signature of a political agreement appears to fulfil the EU's definition of success – for it appreciates the mediation in an isolated fashion, irrespective of the country's background and previous experience, let alone the effective implementation of the agreement. Perhaps more importantly, this narrow vision reflects the lack of consistency affecting the EU's policy. Indeed it seems that, in an attempt to make up for the long-running mismanagement of the country's European path, the short-term objective of crisis mediation has been prevailing. Consequently, although the strictly defined objective of resuming political communication has been achieved, the political crisis is far from being solved considering the long-running structural circumstances that need to be addressed. A quick-fix mediation cannot and will not help the country where it needs it the most – in its structural foundations. Tellingly, the popular uproar in April 2016 called for a new agreement among the four main parties, signed in July 2016, laying bare the lack of political will across the political spectrum.[55] In light of these observations, a medium degree of effectiveness as regards the political crisis appears to be correct.

In terms of conflict-settlement, the more narrowly defined benchmarks spelled out in the Pržino Agreement and their implementation indicate a similar degree of

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[53] J. Hahn, "Visit of Johannes Hahn to the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia: Press Statement", European Commission Audiovisual Services, I-106821, Brussels, 15 July 2015.
[54] Interview with Erwan Fouéré, former EUSR to FYROM, Bruges, 12 April 2016.
[55] S. J. Marusic, "Macedonia Parties Renew Crisis Deal", *Balkan Insight*, 20 July 2016; Agreement between the four political parties, Skopje, 20 July 2016.

effectiveness inasmuch as several – not all – key measures have been achieved. It is worth deconstructing the final Agreement so as to analyse both components (2 June 2015 and 15 June 2015) in an individual fashion. The 2 June 2015 Agreement qualifies as a process agreement (grade (2) on the conflict-settlement spectrum), to the extent that its significance lies in the commitment of the conflicting parties to hold further rounds of negotiations. Although this first agreement comprises specific conditions and reforms that need to be fully implemented, its expediency rather lies in its symbolic nature – for it brought the four party leaders to the negotiating table and resumed political communication. In this sense, the agreement provides a solid base upon which to erect political scaffolding and hence augurs a potential way out of the crisis.[56] The 15 June 2015 Agreement, however, clearly delineates substantial measures that need to be fulfilled, hence the grade (4) on the conflict-settlement spectrum. Bearing in mind the previously highlighted measures, an attempt can be made to take stock of the implementation of the Pržino Agreement and hence vindicate the chosen degree of EU effectiveness. The following numbering refers to that used for the identification and explanation of the six measures of the Prizno Agreement (see previous section):

1. The establishment of a transitional period starting right after signing the agreement in June-July 2015 and ending in free and fair elections is not easy to assess. When it comes to the political transition, despite numerous missed deadlines and a blatant lack of commitment from the parties, a shift was taking place through the achievement of several substantial measures. However, the organisation of free and fair elections was the real point at issue of this agreement because it was supposed to conclude the transitional period. Hence, it appears to indicate that not only the Pržino Agreement but also the Urgent Reform Priorities have been fully implemented. The date of the elections has indeed been postponed from 24 April 2016 to 5 June 2016 following a joint letter from the EU and the US, pointing to the

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[56] The secrecy around the specifics of the agreement as well as the poor implementation thereof prior to that of July tend to corroborate its predominant symbolic value. "Macedonia: Experts Say June 2 Agreement Necessary for EU Recommendation", *InDependent, The Macedonian English Language News Agency*, 19 June 2015; A. Croft, "Macedonian Leaders Fail to Reach Final Deal to End Crisis", *Reuters*, 11 June 2015.

lack of sufficient progress in various areas.[57] Eventually, parliamentary elections were held on 11 December 2016 and ended in a near-tie result with the ruling party, the VMRO-DPMNE, winning 51 of the 120 seats in parliament and 49 for the Social Democratic Union of Macedonia (SDSM) in the opposition.[58]

2. Regarding the exact organisation of the new government, the deadline of 20 October 2015 was missed for the appointment of interim ministers.[59] A late-night agreement early November eventually set out the names and portfolios of the newly-appointed ministers in charge of the caretaker government until early elections.[60] The lack of progress on this issue – and many others – has been ascribed *inter alia* to the poor commitment of Prime Minister Gruevski to the implementation of the crisis agreement. The formation of the new government following the 11 December 2016 elections is likely to take much longer than the EU officials expected, as tensions with the ethnic Albanian minority appear to flare up anew.[61] The leader of the VMRO-DPMNE, Gruevski, is attempting to gather a majority in parliament and for that needs the support of the Albanian parties. Should he fail, the opposition leader Zaev will be given a chance to form a new government.[62]

3. The opposition returned to parliament on 1 September 2015 after a 15-month boycott, thereby respecting the deadline set out in the agreement.[63] "The boycott seriously affected the oversight function of the institution over the executive

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[57] The exact date for early elections – as stipulated in the Pržino Agreement – has been subject to a heated debate among the parties, the EU and the US. First set on 24 April 2016 after a unilateral expedient move from the VMRO, the opposition refused to proceed with it unless the electoral roll was effectively verified and media freedom ensured. Zoran Zaev, the political leader of the opposition party SDSM has indeed been asking for the reforms to be fully implemented before holding new elections, all the more so after the absence of consensual agreement on a potential date. The joint letter of the EU and the US seems to corroborate the insufficient level of preparation for early elections. See S. J. Marusic, "Macedonia Postpones Elections Amid Battle of Nerves", *Balkan Insight*, 24 February 2016; S. J. Marusic, "Macedonia Risks Opposition Boycott Over Early Polls", *Balkan Insight*, 19 January 2016; S. J. Marusic, "EU, US Advise Postponing Macedonia Elections", *Balkan Insight*, 21 February 2016.

[58] The elections failed to bridge the communication gap, let alone the distrust between the main parties, as both the VMRO-DPMNE and the SDSM claimed victory the day after the elections. S. J. Marusic, "Macedonia 2016: Elections Leave Crisis Unresolved", *Balkan Insight*, 3 January 2017.

[59] S. J. Marusic, "Ambassadors Demand Action From Macedonia PM", *Balkan Insight*, 28 October 2015.

[60] S. J. Marusic, "Late-Night Deal Saves Macedonia Crisis Agreement", *Balkan Insight*, 6 November 2015.

[61] S. J. Marusic, "Macedonia's Albanians Urged to Reject Gruevski Coalition", *Balkan Insight*, 18 January 2017.

[62] *Ibid.*

[63] S. J. Marusic, "Macedonia Opposition MPs Return to Parliament", *Balkan Insight*, 1 September 2015.

branch", and the return of the opposition was the proviso upon which the resumption of political communication was contingent.[64] As an integral part of the deal, the SDSM stopped publishing excerpts of illegal surveillance records.[65] On 17 November 2015, the parliament approved the formation of a parliamentary committee of inquiry whose primary responsibility lies in the investigation of the wiretap programme.[66] Set up belatedly, this committee has thus far fallen short of the Pržino Agreement's demands.[67]

4. Although the resignation of the incumbent government took place on 14 January 2016, one day before the set deadline, Prime Minister Gruevski made his stepping down conditional on the 24 April election date.[68] As laid down in the agreement, the VMRO-DPMNE endorsed the new interim Prime Minister, Emil Dimitriev (former Secretary General of the party), in charge of the organisation of the early elections.[69]

5. The review and modification of the State Elections Commission has endured a four-and–a-half month delay, thus "preventing effective investigation into recently disclosed irregularities from previous election cycles".[70] Directly linked to this measure, the clean-up of the electoral roll has yet to be effectively conducted, as the following EU/US Joint letter emphasises:

> We note that the work of the State Electoral Commission to date and the findings of all relevant experts indicate that at this stage the necessary conditions for organising credible elections on 24 April are currently not in place, although some progress has been achieved.[71]

6. The appointment of a Special Prosecutor by 15 September 2015 as part of the Agreement was publicly announced on that very day after protracted

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[64] European Commission, "The Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia Progress Report", November 2015, *op. cit.*, p. 4.
[65] D. Taleski, "Macedonia in 2016: Resolving or Reinforcing the Political Crisis?", *Balkans in Europe Policy Blog*, 18 January 2016.
[66] "Macedonian Parliament Approves Formation of a Wiretapping Inquiry Committee", *Albeu*, 17 November 2015.
[67] Taleski, *op. cit.*
[68] S. J. Marusic, "Macedonian Prime Minister Confirms His Resignation", *Balkan Insight*, 14 January 2016.
[69] Taleski, *op. cit.*
[70] "Letter to EU and USA from 78 CSOs: We Demand Reforms for Fair and Democratic Elections", *NVO Infocentar*, 28 January 2016.
[71] Joint Letter from the European Union and the United States of America to the Prime Minister of the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Skopje, 21 February 2016.

negotiations in Skopje.[72] The new Prosecutor Katica Janeva has appointed her own deputies and assistants pursuant to the law on Special Prosecution agreed on by the political leaders. To ensure her independence, she shall not be subject to any political office and shall have an unlimited budget – whose disbursement will be accounted for.[73] Ever since her appointment to this important position, there have been multiple setbacks in terms of allocation of the necessary resources, lack of follow-up by and cooperation with other authorities and serious political pressures.[74]

In light of all the above mentioned considerations, I argue that the EU effectiveness along both dimensions – goal-attainment and conflict-settlement – can be evaluated as medium (a combination of the grades (2) and (4) on the second dimension). Throughout the evaluation of the mediation, it appears that a far too short-sighted approach was embraced, favouring stability considerations at the borders of the European Union rather than instigating the parties to actually conduct much-needed reforms before holding any elections. In this regard, the short-term nature of EU objectives translated into the Pržino Agreement, whose provisions seem to be geared towards elections rather than structural reforms. By appending the Urgent Reform Priorities and the Priebe Report to the political agreement instead of compelling the conflict parties to enforce them from the outset, the EU has *de facto* depreciated the value of the expected reforms prior to any election. The political parties have indeed husbanded their few resources to the meagre implementation of the Pržino Agreement, deliberately dismissing the structural recommendations. The attempt to rekindle the necessary political will among the main parties has translated into the 20 July 2016 Agreement whose implementation remains feeble up to now.[75]

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[72] S. J. Marusic, "Macedonia Parties Clinch Deal on Special Prosecutor", *Balkan Insight*, 15 September 2015.

[73] S. J. Marusic, "Macedonia's Special Prosecutor Reveals Her Team", *Balkan Insight*, 30 September 2015.

[74] S. Dimovski, "Pressure Mounts on Macedonia's Special Prosecution", *Balkan Insight*, 25 January 2016; S. J. Marusic, "Macedonia Police Destroyed Evidence of Illegal Wiretaps", *Balkan Insight*, 30 March 2016; S. J. Marusic, "Macedonian Ex-PM Gruevski Back on Suspect List", *Balkan Insight*, 10 June 2016.

[75] BIRN Team, "Balkan States Reforming at Different Paces, Brussels Says", *Balkan Insight*, 9 November 2016.

Conducive Factors

Based on the above empirical analysis, I argue that two variables pertaining to the theoretical framework have been conducive to the relative success of EU mediation, namely (a) the EU's mediator strategy and (b) its rather high degree of coherence.

In terms of mediator strategy, the evaluation of the course of action embraced by the European Union can be conducted at two levels: the strategic configuration of the mediation, and the strategy *per se* akin to the mediator behaviour. From the outset, the European Commission, in the person of Commissioner Johannes Hahn, was involved in Macedonia which falls within his neighbourhood and enlargement portfolio. Although Commissioner Hahn had meetings with the party leaders in Skopje as the political crisis unfolded, he decided to involve three Members of the European Parliament – Ivo Vajgl (ALDE), Richard Howitt (S&D) and Eduard Kukan (EPP) – in the mediation.[76] The reason behind this choice lies in the parliamentary nature of the crisis, as the opposition refused to sit in parliament and all channels of communication were disrupted. After having played a rather successful role in mediating the parliamentary crisis in Albania in December 2014, involving knowledgeable parliamentarians with a special affinity for the country seemed to be the best option.[77] Additionally, the three MEPs embodied the political spectrum of the European Parliament and matched the Macedonian parties' affiliations – the VRMO-DPMNE belonging to the EPP, the SDSM to the S&D and MEP Vajgl bringing some neutrality to the mediation process.[78] This peculiar configuration rested upon the hope that the parties would engage in confidence-building measures – the MEPs appealing to their counterparts' political affinities.[79] So as to facilitate and monitor the daily implementation of the agreement, Peter Vanhoutte, a Belgian parliamentary expert, has also been mandated by the European Union – though his mandate seems to have been prematurely terminated.[80]

The strategy embraced by the aforementioned mediators consisted of an alternation of facilitation and formulation, with an inclination for the latter. As a matter of fact, the EU has very much been playing a structural role in the course of the

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[76] Interview with a Policy Advisor on External Relations of the European Parliament, Brussels, 4 April 2016, *op. cit.*
[77] Interview with an EU official, Brussels, 5 March 2016, *op. cit.*
[78] *Ibid.*
[79] According to some interviewees, this specific configuration adequately addressed the lack of trust and the time pressure inasmuch as it facilitated bridge-building and confidence-building measures.
[80] V. Apostolov, "Peter Vanhoutte, Man on Mission in Macedonia", *Balkan Insight*, 2 March 2016.

mediation process, which is reflected in the 2015 Pržino Agreement, the 20 July 2016 Agreement and most unequivocally in both the Urgent Reform Priorities and the Priebe Report.[81] By appending these reform-oriented reports to the political agreement, the EU has gone beyond the mere tasks that a facilitative strategy comprises and has formulated substantial proposals in the form of clearly delineated measures to be implemented in the near future.[82] Likewise, the appointment of Peter Vanhoutte as the EU facilitator/mediator on the ground has strengthened this formulation strategy because he could bring the parties into a working group and monitor the implementation of the reforms on a daily basis.[83] Perhaps a last element that illustrates the EU's control of the mediation is the formulation of strict deadlines pertaining to every substantial reform. Without going as far as resorting to actual leverage – and hence sliding into a manipulative strategy –, setting up clear-cut deadlines echoes the willingness of the EU to move the process forward and hammer out a compromise.[84]

Closely linked to the mediator strategy, the degree of coherence plays a major role in increasing the likelihood of an effective mediation outcome. Considering the circumstances, a high degree of coherence across the various actors at different levels seems necessary in order to deliver a unified message to the country and instigate further reforms. In light of this observation, a question comes quite naturally to the fore: Does complexity in terms of multiplicity of actors preclude coherence? I find that rather than precluding coherence, complexity might even facilitate and buttress it. This argument seems to be widely shared across the spectrum of respondents, inasmuch as the mediation configuration rests upon the strengths of each individual actor/institution and reflects the multifaceted nature of the EU.[85] While the European Parliament has conveyed its political expertise and multi-level engagement, the European Commission has provided its long-standing technical expertise as regards the enlargement process; and both have been supplemented with the EU facilitator's daily monitoring.[86]

When it comes to the coordination among actors, all the respondents' accounts seem to corroborate the preliminary findings. The communications as well

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[81] Interview with a European Commission official, via telephone, 16 March 2016, *op. cit.*
[82] *Ibid.*
[83] Interview with an EU official, via telephone, 7 April 2016, *op. cit.*
[84] Interview with a European Commission official, via telephone, 8 March 2016.
[85] Interview with a Policy Advisor on External Relations of the European Parliament, Brussels, 4 April 2016, *op. cit.;* Interview with an EU official, Brussels, 5 March 2016, *op. cit.*
[86] *Ibid.*

as the flow of information appeared to be consistent and regular, notably since the European Parliament became involved as an institution, thereby endowing the mediation process with elaborated and effective administrative and logistic capacities.[87] Accordingly, there have been frequent contacts between the Commission, the European Parliament, and the Council – acting through the COWEB – and actors on the ground such as the EU Delegation, the member state embassies, the Belgian facilitator as well as the United States.[88]

Constraining Factors

The empirical analysis suggests that several variables have had a constraining effect on the EU's mediation, notably (a) the ever-decreasing EU mediator leverage and (b) the low level of internal cohesiveness.

As discussed in the conceptual framework, leverage is probably the most elusive notion in mediation considering that both its necessity and potential ramifications have been comprehended in various ways. Albeit seemingly potent, the EU membership appeal has kept diminishing over the years. This was notably due to the Council's inability to deliver on its enlargement agenda as a result of the (one-time) Bulgarian and continuous Greek veto.[89] It has greatly lessened the overall EU leverage up to a point.[90] The fading European perspective has been all the more damaging forasmuch as it had been acting as a societal cement that held the country together, irrespective of the language, religion or ethnicity.[91] As the EU's credibility has been waning, these elements translated into a rather low political commitment of the parties to the effective implementation of the agreement. The incentives the EU membership is supposed to induce have indeed been depreciating and the actual accession prospects look just as bleak to the extent that the Greek veto is not contingent on the resolution of the current crisis but on the long-standing

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[87] Although the question of the Council configuration – as regards the most adequate one between the General Affairs Council (GAC) and the Foreign Affairs Council (FAC) – has been a much-discussed topic, the former was eventually chosen so as to maintain the country within the enlargement framework as opposed to the external action discussed in the FAC. This has, however, not impacted the mediation overmuch, hence my decision not to consider it as evidence of incoherence. *Ibid.*

[88] Interview with a European Commission official, via telephone, 8 March 2016, *op. cit.*

[89] *Ibid.*

[90] In the words of a Macedonian official, "The EU does not have a carrot anymore which is the reason why we no longer are afraid of the stick". Interview with a Macedonian official, Brussels, 4 April 2016, *op. cit.*

[91] *Ibid.*

name dispute.[92] Should the political crisis be brought to an end in the near future, there is no guarantee that the accession negotiations will pick up, let alone the opening of chapters.[93] Since November 2015, the Commission has made its recommendation to open accession negotiations conditional on "continued implementation of the Pržino agreement and substantial progress in the implementation of the 'Urgent Reform Priorities'".[94] The latest Progress Report issued on 9 November 2016 has maintained this position stating that the country is "moderately prepared in most areas" and "further efforts are needed across the board" – thus failing to usher in a reawakening of the accession talks.[95]

When it comes to the conflict context variable, the findings suggest that the internal cohesiveness of the conflict parties – the ruling party and the opposition – has been under significant strain due to the lack of political will and the dramatically divisive nature of the political climate which have translated into a poor commitment to the implementation of the Pržino Agreement and an obstructive strategy of the ruling party, akin to spoiler problems.[96] I found abundant evidence of the VMRO-DPMNE's non-cooperative strategy – to say the least – pointing to internal factors (the alleged obstruction of the opposition) and external factors (the name dispute with Greece) to vindicate the lack of progress in terms of implementation.[97] Numerous examples can be put forward to illustrate the spoiler behaviour of the ruling party, such as the unilateral declaration to set the date of the elections on 24 April 2016, constant intimidation and harassment of voters or the criminal charges filed against the Chief Special Prosecutor and her team to undermine her work.[98] This series of deliberate hindrances is quite telling about the governing party's spoiler behaviour rooted in high levels of irrational distrust.[99] The popular uprising in April 2016 following the presidential

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[92] Interview with a European Commission official, via telephone, 16 March 2016, *op. cit.*

[93] The fact that no chapter has been opened yet dramatically lessens the EU's leverage as it cannot apply pressure on the candidate nor threaten to halt the negotiations. By the same token, however significant the Commission's annual Progress Report, the absence of prospects and the lack of a European perspective have greatly diminished the EU's potential leverage. The newly-added conditionality in the 2015 Progress Report, linking the positive recommendation to the effective implementation of the political agreement and the Urgent Reforms Priorities, illustrates the willingness of the EU to recover some leverage by spurring the parties to move forward.

[94] European Commission, "The Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia Progress Report", *Commission Staff Working Document*, SWD(2015) 212 Final, Brussels, 10 November 2015, p. 4-5.

[95] European Commission, "The Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia Progress Report", *Commission Staff Working Document*, SWD(2016) 362 Final, Brussels, 9 November 2016, p. 4-5.

[96] Taleski, "Macedonia in 2016: Resolving or Reinforcing the Political Crisis?", *op. cit.*

[97] Interview with a European Commission official, via telephone, 16 March 2016, *op. cit.*

[98] *Ibid.*

[99] Interview with Erwan Fouéré, *op. cit.*

pardon of politicians involved in the wiretap scandal, quickly coined 'Colourful Revolution', has increased the lack of cohesiveness and added to the climate of political distrust.[100] The EU with the US eventually put pressure on the political representatives of the main parties and concluded a 'second Pržino Agreement' on 20 July 2016 whose scope was much more minimalistic and whose main purpose was to agree on a date for parliamentary elections (which finally took place on 11 December 2016).[101] In terms of implementation of the agreements and reform priorities, the numerous missed deadlines reflect quite clearly the disinclination of the parties to seriously commit themselves to the mediation process. The very low levels of internal cohesiveness have led to spoiler behaviour of the ruling party – and hence greatly undermined the mediation process' purview and effectiveness.

Conclusion

This paper has attempted to assess the effectiveness of EU mediation in the case of the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia. First, Bergmann and Niemann's analytical framework, comprising two dimensions and four indicators, has been presented. Second, after identifying the objectives of the EU within the mediation process, the analytical framework has been applied to the case of FYROM in order to assess the level of effectiveness of the overall mediation. Finally, the EU mediation process has been deconstructed in order to identify the conducive and constraining factors as well as their respective bearing thereon.

The results of the empirical analysis suggest that if we comprehend mediation as EU officials seem to do – conceiving of it as an analytical unit that can be construed absent any contextual considerations or historical perspective –, then the mediation can be assayed as a rather successful endeavour. Indeed, it did lead to the resumption of political communication by bringing the four parties together, engage in confidence-building measures and provide them with a much-needed framework whose highlight so far has been the organisation of parliamentary elections on 11 December 2015. These fairly positive outcomes, induced by the EU mediation strategy and coherence, have led me to evaluate EU effectiveness along both goal-attainment and conflict-settlement dimensions as medium. Why, though, has EU mediation not led to higher levels of effectiveness? A critical analysis resting upon

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[100] S. J. Marusic, "Macedonia 2016", *op.cit.*
[101] S. J. Marusic, "Macedonia Parties Renew Crisis Deal", *op. cit.*

criteria such as leverage and internal cohesiveness suggests that the EU's 'wait-and-see' policy, underpinned by its security considerations – notably the stability at the EU's external borders –, has dramatically lessened the EU mediator effectiveness. The likelihood of an effective implementation of the agreement has clearly weakened due to the EU's waning leverage, a highly fragmented conflict setting prone to spoiler problems and very low levels of internal cohesiveness.

The renewed crisis has highlighted the blatant lack of consistency on the EU side – embracing a crisis management posture rather than a long-term structural one – and should be seized as an opportunity to re-engage FYROM in the enlargement perspective while conducting concrete reforms on the ground before holding any further sham elections. The move of President Ivanov on 12 April 2016 to pardon all politicians facing crime investigations linked to the wiretap allegations before backtracking two months later not only reflects the disruptive and reckless attitude of the ruling class but also the lack of political will and the absence of democratic standards. Beyond the mere success or effectiveness of EU mediation, the deterioration of the political climate does not bode well for the country's European perspective; hence the need to shift the strategy's rationale from stability-oriented to reform-oriented since the European Union's most highly regarded policy – enlargement – and its credibility as a global actor are at stake.

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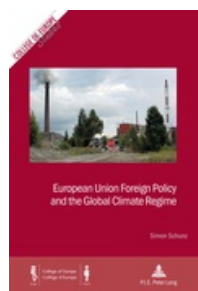
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