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CIDOB

15
JANUARY
2024

UNDERSTANDING THE ROLE OF NORWAY AS A FACILITATOR IN THE VENEZUELAN PEACE PROCESS

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Winner of the Global Talent Award, launched by CIDOB and Banco Sabadell Foundation in the framework of Programa Talent Global.



1. Introduction

Since the early 2010s, Venezuela has been embroiled in a grave economic, political, and humanitarian crisis resulting in institutional disarray that reached critical point in 2017. It was in this year that the constitutional order was broken after Decision 156 of the Supreme Tribunal of Justice in Venezuela, whereby this organ attributed to itself the functions of the National Assembly, the country's legislative organ. Deemed unconstitutional by the political parties with a majority in the National Assembly, this move led to mass protests. The government reacted by calling for a new constitution to be drafted by a newly created Constituent National Assembly which, in August 2017, granted itself powers to

pass legislation, thus overriding the National Assembly (Bronstein & Cobb, 2017). This was not recognised by the National Assembly but, in 2018, the Constituent National Assembly went ahead and blocked the participation of the

main opposition parties in the presidential elections that year. These elections were rejected by a broad sector of the international community, among them the European Union (EU) and the Lima Group.¹

From 2017, Norway, with a population of just 5.5 million, has been exploring possibilities in Venezuela for political dialogue between

Abstract: This study offers a comprehensive overview of the Norwegian involvement in the Venezuelan peace process as a facilitator of the peace talks between the Venezuelan government and the opposition. It explains what Norway does as a facilitator (the process), as well as how (approach) and why (characteristics of Norway as a suitable mediator, and possible interests), not only in terms of the characteristics making Norway a suitable facilitator, but also its interests and motivations. The main goal is to draw attention to the importance and the usefulness of soft power tools for the achievement of foreign policy objectives and, in particular, peace-making. The study concludes that, for Norway, mediation as foreign policy is, in general but also in the case of Venezuela, the result of a combination of idealist, value-oriented motivations (humanitarian reasons and international stability), and realist, non-altruistic interests (status and access) arising from its constructed national identity and role conception

Key words: Venezuela, Norway, national role conception, mediation, peacebuilding, foreign policy, conflict resolution

1. Originally consisting of 12 Latin American nations and formally created on 8 August 2017, the Lima Group is a multilateral body whose goal is to explore mechanisms for a peaceful solution to the political crisis in Venezuela and restoration of a democratic order (Government of Colombia 2017).

the government of Nicolás Maduro and the opposition, first through the Norwegian Centre for Conflict Resolution (NOREF), an independent foundation that receives funding from the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA), and later, after 2019, with direct state involvement.

Norway has built an image as a peace broker with its success in processes like the Oslo Accords between Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO), and in the talks between the Colombian government and the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC). But *why did Norway decide to facilitate the peace talks in Venezuela? How does Norway approach peacebuilding in this conflict?* This article aims to analyse the causes, process, approaches, and motivations for Norwegian mediation in Venezuela, in order to draw attention to the importance and the usefulness of soft power tools for the achievement of foreign policy objectives and, in particular, peace-making. I therefore explore the comprehensive role of Norway in the Venezuelan peace talks, the background, the process, and Norway's possible interests as a facilitator. I argue that, for Norway, mediation as foreign policy is, in general, but also in the case of Venezuela, the result of a combination of idealist, value-oriented motivations (humanitarian reasons and international stability), and realist, non-altruistic interests (status and access) arising from its constructed national identity and the way it perceives its role as a peace-making nation.

As mentioned above, the Norwegian state became officially involved in the Venezuelan conflict in 2019. The domestic situation had come to a head on 23rd January when Juan Guaidó, leader of the opposition and president of the National Assembly, rejected the authority of Nicolás Maduro and declared himself acting president of Venezuela. However, the strategy failed when the military remained loyal to Maduro. Negotiation then became a last resort (NUPI 2020) and Norway began to facilitate negotiations between government and opposition, first in Oslo and then in Barbados, in 2019. These efforts led to further discussion between the parties through 2021 and 2022, in Mexico.

In 2022, the war in Ukraine prompted changes in the positions regarding Venezuela of certain actors, notable among them the United States (U.S.) and the EU. As the Spanish Institute of Strategic Studies (Remacha, 2023) points out, U.S. concerns about energy security made it necessary to find a way of guaranteeing the international supply, and Venezuela was (and is) considered to be a strategic source. Contacts between the U.S. and Venezuela were made in 2022, and talks began about removing the sanctions imposed on the country. Given its economic situation, and the presidential elections due in 2024, Venezuela welcomed the rapprochement. If the sanctions

were to be removed (at least partially), it was necessary to resume dialogue with the opposition, so in November 2022, negotiations recommenced in Mexico with Norway's mediation. Significant progress was made, and the release of previously frozen international funds was agreed upon (up to 3,000 million dollars earmarked mainly for public health, education, and food), as well as the lifting of some sanctions. Maduro's government is also aware that the 2024 elections should be held according to a model that respects democratic safeguards, with unrestricted participation by the opposition, so that results will be internationally recognised. Venezuela would then be able to resume relations with countries and regions like the U.S. and the EU, thus enabling international investment, particularly in the oil industry, and an improved economic situation (NUPI, 2020). Although the presidential crisis formally lasted until 5th January 2023 when Guaidó's acting presidency was abolished by the National Assembly, the political crisis with the opposition continues to the present day, in November 2023.

1.2. Research goals and objectives

This study aims to explore the role of Norway as a facilitator in the Venezuelan peace talks, focusing on what it does (the process), how (approach), and why (characteristics of Norway as a suitable mediator, and possible interests). It seeks to demonstrate that, given Norway's national conception as a peacemaker, its strategy in Venezuela expresses a broad foreign policy endeavour that has humanitarian but also reputational and political motivations. More broadly, the importance of soft power tools for state actors to achieve their foreign policy objectives is discussed.

Constructivism and Holsti's theory of National Role Conceptions (NRC) help to explain Norway's self-image as a peacemaker, while idealism and realism, together with Touval's "mediation as foreign policy" theory shed light on Norway's use of mediation as a foreign policy tool. Qualitative methods based on analysis of primary and secondary sources, complemented with semi-structured interviews with experts and officials of the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, have been used.

1.3. Relevance and justification

Norway is a small country in terms of population but one with a notable ability to influence international affairs thanks to soft power. One of ways it exercises its influence is its internationally recognised image as a peacemaker, evidenced through its involvement in several peace processes. Indeed, since 1993, Norway has been engaged in 11 different peace processes (Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2019) with some major successes but also others that were limited.

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The case of Norwegian facilitation of the Venezuelan peace talks is studied for two main reasons. First, is its relevance in terms of policy significance, as it is an ongoing process, which leads to questions about why Norway acts as a facilitator, and the possible interests it has in doing so, apart from the goal of peace itself. Second, is the practical reason of the author's knowledge of the three languages relevant for this research (English, Spanish, and Norwegian), which is a valuable asset in terms of good understanding of the information from primary and secondary sources written in the three languages. This is an advantage in the research, as it allows cross-checking of information, and offers a broader perspective on the topic.

2. Norway as a Peacebuilding Nation

Scholars offer several explanations of Norway's involvement in peace processes arising from international conflicts. The result of a pragmatic foreign policy, it combines idealist and realist elements in a seemingly contradictory policy which, in fact, accommodates different domestic interests and maintains inter-party foreign policy consensus (Riste, 2001; Ekengren, 2022).

From a constructivist perspective, the notion of Norway as a nation for peace partly comes from its conception of its role as a small, rich, peaceful state, with a clear focus on human rights and humanitarian assistance (Leira et al., 2007). While it is true that the so-called *value-oriented* (idealist) *diplomacy* was strengthened, above all in the 1990s, with the increased involvement of Norway in several peace processes, its self-image as a peacebuilding nation has always been present (Leira, 2015). The Norwegian peace activist and later Foreign Affairs Minister, Halvdan Koht (1873-1965), argued in 1902 that, although the fact of its being a small state could limit its flexibility in foreign policy actions, Norway could and should secure its status by promoting peace and development. More than 80 years later, in 1989, Jan Egeland, who would become State Secretary in the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs from 1990 to 1997, argued that a small, rich country like Norway could be more effective in promoting human rights and peace than old colonial powers or superpowers with their historical baggage and policies based on self-interest and dominance (Sørbø, 2018).

Moreover, the notion of *status*, which is closely linked with the concept of identity, has been prominent in Norway since the nation's beginnings. Leira (2015) describes the pursuit of status as a peace-making nation in the 19th and early 20th century as a way of achieving independence (through moral authority), a means of saving money (as the policy for peace was cheaper than power politics), and as sound *realpolitik* for a small state. He also refers to the words of Ole Jacob Broch in 1864 when he argued that, when small states need to "engage in the strife of other states", they should do it decisively because, "for them, honour and prestige are even more important than for the greater powers" (Broch cited in Leira 2015, p.22).

The *role performance* of Norway, or its behaviour with, and approach to foreign policy actions is, according to

Gulbrandsen (2022), influenced by the *logic of appropriateness* (March & Olsen, 1998), dictated by the image the state has of itself, and constituting a basis for adopting a role in any specific context. In Holsti's view (1970), the main explanation for the role performance of a state arises from policy makers' conceptions of the role of the nation in a system (National Role Conception), but adoption of a role is also influenced by what he calls *role prescriptions*, which come from the external environment. In this case, if the Norwegian government and the Norwegian people have an image of Norway as a nation for peace, and if the external image they project in other countries is also that of a nation for peace, the logic of appropriateness and the role prescription will dictate that Norway will have to behave as a nation for peace, and thus engage in peacebuilding policy.

For Skånland (2010) the Norwegian involvement in peace processes is the result of a discursive construction, amplified by the media, above all after 1993. Media coverage of the Norwegian involvement in the Middle East peace process gave a very positive picture of Norway in general, an image that was strengthened thanks to the perceived successes in the peace processes of Sri Lanka, Guatemala, and Mali. All this crystallised into three main discursive constructions: (1) the decisive significance of the Norwegian contribution for the outcome of peace processes, (2) the importance of peace promotion as a foreign policy tool, and (3) Norway's distinctive approach for peace promotion.

Other authors emphasise Norway's peace engagement efforts from a more realist perspective and, in particular, as a policy instrument in its own right (Touval, 2003). Some, like Matlary (2002) argue that mediation is used as an institutionalised strategy for dealing with some of the challenges of being a small state, as well as for promoting Norway's interests in the international arena, and having some influence in international relations. As Stokke (2014) notes, although it has a small population, Norway has a disproportionate importance in other areas (fishing, oil and gas, shipping etc.), thus implying interests beyond its borders as well as influence in other domains because of this prominence. According to Matlary (2002), some Norwegian interests identified from a *realpolitik* standpoint are security (addressed through NATO), economic interests *vis-à-vis* the EU, access to political decision-making power in the EU and, outside the West, considerable economic interests in oil prices and oil export. Matlary, who collected data through a series of anonymous interviews with diplomats and politicians, alludes to the effects of value-oriented diplomacy in matters of matters and concludes that, apart from a good image and profile, what value-oriented diplomacy provides is *access* to other arenas where one needs the best possible entry. Her interviewees referred, above all, to access to the leaders of the U.S. Department of State through the policy of peace engagement, especially in the Middle East and, to a much lesser extent, to leaders of EU states. However, she says, it was difficult to collect specific insights into the effects of such access, a perspective shared by Stokke (2010, p.166) who argues that "the extent and manner in which recognition is translated into international influence is complex and may vary from one policy field to another and between different arenas of international relations. This

means that it is notoriously difficult to detect and measure the direct benefits from peace engagement". Finally, another interesting perspective is that provided by Neumann (2011). For him, the peace and reconciliation efforts of medium and small countries are a means to maintain a system with which they are reasonably satisfied, because they are not as well equipped as bigger powers to deal with other (more violent) types of conflict resolution methods, and he refers specifically to the institutionalisation of peace and reconciliation efforts by Norway.

To conclude, Norway's peacebuilding policy may be understood as apparently idealist (value-oriented diplomacy) and based on a self-image as a nation for peace, which includes both idealist (moral responsibility) and realist (influence in the international arena and security) motivations. Until now, there have been no major conflicts between those two angles (Stokke, 2014), but in an increasingly polarised world, it is becoming more and more difficult for Norway to maintain a balanced policy in peacebuilding processes.

3. Theoretical Framework

This study draws on the theory of constructivism to explain Norway's national role conception and considers the notions of idealism and realism to explain mediation as its foreign policy. A theoretical framework based on such apparently antagonistic ideas is, perhaps, not very common but, as Barkin (2003) puts it, a constructivist epistemology and a classical realist theory are, in fact, compatible and, moreover, this kind of framework can be useful in International Relations (IR) theory, as it can specify the relationship between the study of power in IR and the study of IR as social constructions. Indeed, constructivism and perceptions can—and are—often applied to fulfil or justify realist objectives and policies. For the purposes of this study, I consider that mediation as foreign policy is a result of idealist (value-oriented) and realist (power) motivations arising from a constructed national identity and role conception.

3.1. Constructivism and national role conception

For Barnett (2018), *constructivism* as an international relations social theory is "concerned about how to conceptualise the relationship between agents and structures, but it is not a substantive theory" (p.88). The basic premise is that the world is socially constructed, which means that "social reality is a product of human consciousness. Consciousness is created and constituted through knowledge that shapes meaning and categories of understanding and action; such knowledge and meanings can be institutionalised in social life; and this

institutionalisation, in turn, shapes the construction of social reality" (p.88). These categories shape not only external reality but also its actors, which is an indicator of the importance of the social construction of interests and identity. For example, Norway's identity may shape its national interests, and one of those interests might be security, but the concept of security and how it can be achieved may be linked to Norway's identity.

National Role Conceptions, a concept first developed by Holsti (1970), is defined as "the policymakers' own definitions of the general kinds of decisions, commitments, rules, and actions suitable to their state, and of the functions, if any, their state should perform [...] in the international system" (p. 245-246). These are, as mentioned in section 2, the main explanation for the role performance of a state, understood by Holsti as the "general policy behaviour of governments" (p. 245). Role performance is also influenced by what he calls *role prescriptions*, which come from the external environment and have, as some of their sources, system-wide values, the structure of the international system, and the traditions, rules and expectations of states expressed through various legal instruments (p. 246).

The notion of national role conception is related to that of *politics of identity*, which, in Aggestam's words (1999), is a set of ideas that policymakers use to create a sense of solidarity and cohesion and thus to legitimise general trust in a nation's foreign policy. She argues that speeches sometimes reveal subjective we-feelings of a cultural community related to territory, myths, rituals, institutions, and customs, and she refers to the "institutionalisation" of national identity, which makes identity constructions relatively resistant to change. Moreover, citing March & Olsen (1998), she indicates that certain practices and rules of behaviour that legitimise and explain specific identity constructions are reinforced by such institutionalisation.

The starting point of the present study is, therefore, the idea that Norway's national role conception is that of a small, rich, peaceful, democratic state, whose official discourse in peace engagement, especially since the 1990s, emphasises its altruistic contribution as a "peaceful nation that has the values, competences and economic resources" for such an endeavour, but whose work is also "beneficial for Norway's own interests" (Stokke, 2014, p.8).-

3.2. Idealism, realism, and mediation as foreign policy

There is no generally accepted definition of idealism because there is no settled ontology of the term but, according to Wilson (2012), it generally refers to any goal, idea, or practice that is considered impractical from a state perspective, for example the prohibition and disarmament of nuclear weapons, or global eradication of poverty. In IR it is normally

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used in both the broad and narrow senses. Broadly speaking, idealism seeks to transcend anarchy to create a more harmonious world order while, in the narrow sense, it is a doctrine tied to the inter-war period (1919-1939) and seen as emphasising the growing interdependence of mankind. I shall focus on the first meaning, which refers to “an approach to international politics that seeks to advance certain ideals or moral goals, for example, making the world a more peaceful or just place” (Wilson, 2019).

Realism is a substantive theory of IR that considers states to be the main actors in the international arena, and mainly concerned with the pursuit of their own national interests, security, and struggle for power. Realists view the international arena as a sphere without justice, and with active or potential conflict among its members. They show scepticism about the relevance of ethical norms (*Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, 2017). This theory has a variety of ramifications but in this study I consider, first and foremost, classical realism because, although idealism is usually heavily criticised by realists, according to Barkin (2003), classical realism perceives the art of international politics as “the practical balancing of the demands of power on the one hand and morality on the other—a dialectic between power and morality [...]. Idealism, for the classical realist, is necessary to inform our actions and underlie our interests in the pursuit of international politics, but realism will always remain a necessary part of relations among states” (p.333). Also relevant is the perspective of neoclassical realism because, while classical realism focuses on the system-level factors, neoclassical realism considers domestic-level factors as variables that can shape foreign policy, which is highly pertinent if NRC theory is used to explain Norway’s behaviour in the international arena. Neoclassical realism considers that “objective reality exists, but decision making is impaired by uncertainty and the complexity of the environment” (Rathbun, 2008, p.296).

According to Touval (2003), *mediation as foreign policy* needs to be understood as a policy instrument, as distinct from mediation theory. He argues that it derives from the mediator’s perception of the international system, its foreign policy objectives and strategies, and domestic needs. I would also argue that it stems from the mediator’s own national role conception and self-perception. Touval (2003) considers that ending a conflict is no longer the main concern of the mediating state, but only a part of a broadly conceived foreign policy as the mediation is also shaped by affairs that are external to the conflict. He highlights three issues arising from a state’s international and domestic concerns: (1) mediation is perceived by the public and the officials engaged in it as a moral obligation, which is seldom criticised; (2) foreign and domestic motivations, apart from being an incentive for states to engage in mediation, also shape their strategies and tactics of the mediation; (3) the mediation is evaluated not only in terms of settlement of a dispute, but also the primary goals motivating the mediation. Beriker (2017) offers an expanded perspective of Touval’s work, arguing that once mediation is proven to be a viable foreign policy tool, engaging in mediation enables medium-sized powers to create a political space that otherwise would not be available.

4. Methodology

This study is both descriptive and explanatory, as it inquires more deeply into the events as well as exploring why and how Norway became involved in the Venezuela peace process from 2017 to May 2023. In a deductive approach, existing theories —NRC, mediation as foreign policy, idealism, and realism— are drawn on to explain Norway’s behaviour in its peacebuilding policy. The epistemology used is empiricism, since the focus is explanation rather than interpretation, and the ontology is pragmatist because, while the world is understood as existing independently from social actors, the influence of these actors to shape social realities should also be taken into account, together with the fact that, in some cases, this may affect realities existing independently of them.

The methods are qualitative, as information provided with quantitative methods would be too superficial for a study that seeks to determine the existence and the characteristics of Norway’s engagement in the Venezuelan peace process. The analysis is primarily based on a range of online primary and secondary sources, including government reports, memorandums of understanding, recorded interviews, articles, and academic publications. I consulted these sources, first, for better understanding of the issues and to organise this material around the research question, as well as to identify possible gaps of knowledge. I then conducted semi-structured interviews, with an official from the Norwegian MFA (Ministry of Foreign Affairs) and a Norwegian academic, to fill some of the previously identified knowledge gaps, to record their perceptions, and to triangulate the documentary information thus gathered.

The first interview, conducted by videoconference on 2 August 2023, was with Professor Benedicte Bull, from the University of Oslo and, *inter alia*, president of the Nordic Institute for Latin American Studies, whose research has been focused on Venezuela in recent years. The second was with David C. Jourdan, who coordinates the Norwegian MFA’s facilitation team in the Venezuelan peace process. This interview was conducted in Oslo on 8 August 2023. Both Bull and Jourdan have given their consent to use their names in the present study. NOREF was also contacted but stated that it could not give interviews on the Venezuelan peace process.

5. Analysis and Discussion

5.1. Norwegian involvement in the Venezuelan peace process

No official documentary information about the specific manner Norway engaged in the Venezuela conflict during 2017 and 2018 has been found, apart from the mere fact stated in the NOREF website that it was engaged in talks on the conflict in those years. According to its strategic plan 2019-2023, NOREF is a “non-state actor that is able to complement formal Norwegian peacemaking efforts [... and] build directly on the Norwegian tradition of informal conflict resolution”. This makes it possible “to support formal peace processes (track I), and informal back-channel conflict diplomacy (track 1.5 and 2)” (NOREF, 2019). This institution

has a permanent staff of professionals, experts in conflict resolution, and is governed by a board whose director is appointed by the Norwegian MFA, and whose members come, in general, from different areas of the public sector. In the interview with David C. Jourdan of the Norwegian MFA (2023), he confirmed that NOREF's engagement consists of track 2 approaches. Moreover, he stressed that, although NOREF receives public funds and works closely with the Norwegian state, it is a separate, independent institution. Norway's involvement in the peace process after 2019, when it became public, is described in some detail below.

2019: the first official talks

According to the Norwegian MFA (2023), Norway has been involved in Venezuela since 2018. However, it was only in May 2019 that talks between the Venezuelan parties, facilitated by Norway, first became public. In this early stage, the negotiations between the delegations of Nicolás Maduro and Juan Guaidó lasted until August 2019, and although significant progress was made, no agreements for solving the political conflict were reached. However, the Norwegian MFA (2023) stresses that these negotiations were a stepping-stone for further talks between the parties, which signed a collaboration agreement in June 2020, with the objective of using frozen funds in the U.S. for a joint response to the COVID-19 pandemic, with support from the Pan American Health Organisation. Several newspaper articles describing the negotiations during that year provide additional information that has been used in this study.

In May 2019, Juan Guaidó sent a delegation to Oslo to participate in exploratory talks with representatives of Maduro's government to try to find a solution to the political crisis the country had faced since Guaidó declared himself acting president of Venezuela at the beginning of that year (NRK, 2019a), information that was confirmed by Jorge Valero, Venezuela's ambassador to the UN in Geneva, and the UN spokesperson in New York, Stephane Dujarric. The Norwegian Broadcasting Corporation (NRK) reported the talks for the first time on 15 May but, according to an anonymous source, this was the second time that the parties had been in Oslo, and negotiations had previously been taking place in Cuba.

Shortly afterwards, on the night between 16 and 17 May, the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs issued a press release confirming that there had been contacts between key political actors in Venezuela as a part of an exploratory phase aiming to find a solution to the country's situation. The Maduro government representatives present at the talks were Héctor Rodríguez, governor of the province of Miranda, and Jorge Rodríguez, minister of Communication. The opposition representatives were Gerardo Blyde, member of parliament, and Fernando Martínez Mattola, who had been minister during the government of President Carlos Andrés Pérez.

In the last week of May 2019, the Norwegian minister of Foreign Affairs confirmed that the parties would travel again to Oslo during the following week to continue with the process (NRK, 2019b). Almost at the same time, Juan Guaidó insisted that the meetings in Oslo were not part of a dialogue or negotiation, but a mediation in Norway (*El Nacional*, 2019). According to *Voice of America/Voz de América* (VOA) (2019a), Nicolás Maduro appeared a few days later on the Venezuelan public TV channel after the opposition declared that the conversations in Oslo that week had ended on 29 May without any agreement being reached. Maduro stated that conversations had been taking place in secret during the three previous months, that he was proud of his delegation, and that dialogue with the opposition had been constructive. Moreover, he insisted on his wish to find a peaceful solution for Venezuela. Indeed, VOA pointed out that Dag Nylander, a Norwegian diplomat who would become chief facilitator of the Venezuelan peace process, had been travelling to Caracas and meeting with the political actors involved in the crisis since January 2019.

The peace talks resumed one month later in Barbados. On 11 July 2019, after three days of conversations, Norway announced that the negotiations would continue (Reuters, 2019). Yet, only a few weeks later, the Maduro government

Despite the Maduro government withdrawal from peace talks in 2019, Norway emphasised that the facilitation process would continue as long as the parties wished, and provided there was a realistic position on a solution in the best interests of the Venezuelan people.

withdrew from the talks when the U.S. president, Donald Trump, announced his decision to block U.S. citizens from engaging in business in Venezuela and to freeze the country's assets in the U.S. According to the Venezuelan government, this had been instigated by Juan Guaidó, while the opposition accused the government of renegeing on its commitment

to dialogue. Norway's facilitator, Dag Nylander, took note that the planned meetings would not take place and emphasised Norway's role as a facilitator acting at the request of the parties and planning the meetings according to their availability. He added that the facilitation process would continue as long as the parties wished, and provided that there was a realistic position on a solution in the best interests of the Venezuelan people (VG, 2019).

According to Bull (2023), Norway, as the facilitating country, was displeased when the talks went public in May, believing that this was premature and that it would complicate the peace process. She also stresses that the Trump administration had no clear strategy for ending the conflict and that, when the U.S. sanctions were announced, there had not been any proper coordination with Norway. She also notes that mentions of the U.S. seem to refer to a single homogeneous actor, when the reality is that there are many actors involved, among them the Pentagon and the Department of State, and these actors may work in different directions, sometimes disrupting a given policy. The Norwegian MFA (2023) confirms it was not aware of the U.S. sanctions that were announced in early August 2019. Both parties and facilitator were taken by surprise.

2021: The signing of a Memorandum of Understanding and negotiation rounds in Mexico

A year and a half later, in March 2021, new exploratory talks began after the Biden administration's position on Venezuela allowed the parties to negotiate a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU), which led to the launch of a new negotiation process, starting in August that year. On 5 August, the Mexican President, Manuel López Obrador confirmed that Mexico would host talks between the government of Venezuela and the opposition (Reuters, 2021) and, a few days later, the Norwegian government confirmed its involvement with a tweet (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2021a). The new negotiation process was launched in Mexico City on 13 August, with Dag Nylander as chief facilitator, Jorge Rodríguez representing the Venezuelan (Maduro's) government, and Gerardo Blyde representing the Unitary Platform (the opposition). A MoU—which I refer to in more detail in section 5.3—was released, defining the objective, agenda, method, and composition of the negotiation team. The Norwegian minister of Foreign Affairs, Ine Eriksen Søreide, declared in a press note that the parties were ready to negotiate constructively and that, in the process, they would consult members of civil society as well as political actors. She also noted that there was mutual agreement on the sensitive nature of the negotiations, which was necessary for giving the parties space to make progress (Norwegian MFA 2021b).

A second round of negotiations took place at the beginning of September 2021. The parties released a joint statement reporting that two agreements had been reached, the first being to act jointly in the claim of Venezuelan sovereignty over Guyana Esequiba, and the second, a “partial agreement on the social protection of the Venezuelan people”. The parties conveyed that the points to be addressed in the following round of negotiations would be “respect for the Constitutional Rule of Law”, protection of the national economy, and measures for the social protection of the Venezuelan people.

Between the second and the third rounds of negotiation, Erna Solberg, the Norwegian Prime Minister, spoke at the UN General Assembly on 21 September, referring to Venezuela as a country where human right violations were occurring. Her comment was criticised by Dag Nylander as it could, he said, damage the credibility of Norway's role. In a tweet on 25 September, the MFA reaffirmed its commitment as an impartial facilitator in the negotiations and declared that the statement in the UN should not be interpreted as being inconsistent with that (NRK, 2021). The Venezuelan government responded to this diplomatic hitch with a slight delay in proceedings when its representatives arrived one day late at the negotiation round scheduled in Mexico from 24 to 27 September, but which finally took place after 25 September (Euronews, 2021).

After this third round of negotiations, the parties released a new joint statement, focused this time on the issue of inclusion and, specifically, on the need for a gender focus in the negotiations, identification of inclusive consultation mechanisms for political and social actors, and condemnation of xenophobic attacks on Venezuelan migrants that had recently occurred in Chile. According to an article by Diego Santander in the Spanish newspaper *El Mundo* (2021), this third round was so fraught with problems that no specific agreements were reached. Maduro's delegation insisted on its plans to include Alex Saab in the negotiation. Saab, a Venezuelan businessman, was accused of being Maduro's front man, and a key figure in the international economic and financial activities to circumvent the U.S. economic sanctions against his government. However, Saab had been arrested for money laundering in June 2020 in Cabo Verde and was extradited to the U.S. on the weekend of October 16.

Negotiations, set for 17 October, were suspended on 16 October when the Maduro government decided not to participate in the next round of negotiations, because of Saab's extradition, which Jorge Rodríguez referred to as a “kidnapping” as it had been carried out “without a warrant and without due process” and accused the U.S. of trying to prevent the dialogue (Gilbert, 2021). The Norwegian government then tweeted

that it was still convinced that the negotiations were the only solution for Venezuela, and that it would keep working to encourage the parties to continue (Norwegian MFA, 2021c). In Bull's opinion (2023), while the U.S. system may have its faults, the legal proceedings are independent from political powers so, on that occasion, there was little that U.S. politicians could do

to stop the extradition.

2022 – 2023: talks after the beginning of the war in Ukraine

In March 2022, a new chapter of the dialogue began after the Russian invasion of Ukraine. A U.S. delegation formed by members of the Department of State visited Caracas to meet with the Venezuelan government and discuss an eventual isolation of Vladimir Putin. Some analysts also indicated that Venezuela was seen as a possible alternative oil supplier if the U.S. opted to restrict oil exports from Russia, which meant that removal of the sanctions on Venezuela could be considered (VOA, 2022a). Indeed, in May 2022, the U.S. announced that economic sanctions against Venezuela would be eased as a gesture in favour of reactivating the dialogues and also allowing the U.S. company Chevron to negotiate potential future activities with the state-owned oil and natural gas company PDVSA (Agobian, 2022). According to the Norwegian MFA (2023), these actions were a catalyst for the reactivation of the negotiations.

Immediately after the announcement, Jorge Rodríguez and Gerardo Blyde met to discuss renewal of the talks (Ocando Alex, 2022a) but, by the end of May, according to Reuters, the

In March 2022, a new chapter of the dialogue began after the Russian invasion of Ukraine. A U.S. delegation visited Caracas to discuss an eventual isolation of Vladimir Putin and Venezuela's role as a possible alternative oil supply to Russian oil exports.

Venezuelan government had demanded the withdrawal of Norway as a facilitator, and the presence of Russia (formally an accompanying country in the negotiations after 2021) as conditions for reactivating the negotiations. However, convinced that the Norwegians were their only guarantee for a successful process, the opposition disagreed (Oré, 2022). Bull (2023) specifies that the stance of the Venezuelan government might have been because it saw Norway as taking an excessively “pro-allies” position after the start of the war in Ukraine. She adds that Norway prefers to involve Russia and other big powers in the negotiations rather than excluding them, as they would provide legitimacy to the Mexico talks as the only acceptable platform for solving the Venezuelan political crisis. When interviewed, David C. Jourdan of the Norwegian MFA (2023), made it clear that Norway was never asked to relinquish its role as facilitator. Management of the process resides with the parties, which have remained committed to the MoU that names Norway as the facilitating country.

On 21 and 22 June 2022, the Norwegian government held the Oslo Forum, an annual retreat focused on conflict mediation and peace processes. Around 100 conflict mediators, experts, peace process actors, and high-level decision makers from around the world gathered at Losby Gods Manor with the goal of sharing their experience on conflict resolution and peace diplomacy (Norwegian MFA, 2022). Among the peace process actors who attended the Oslo Forum were Jorge Rodríguez and Gerardo Blyde. A Norwegian source told VOA (2022b) that it was “probable” that the conversations would be initiated again, but “not immediately”.

On 14 September 2022, a group of 18 countries from the Americas and Europe agreed to call upon Maduro and the opposition to urge a resumption of the negotiations in Mexico (Ocando Alex, 2022b).

Official negotiations began again on 26 November 2022. This time, a joint statement was issued indicating that the main agenda of the meeting would be social protection of the people. A partial agreement was reached, in which the measures agreed upon were: 1) creation of an organism to implement specific actions and programmes for the social protection of the Venezuelan people (Mesa Nacional de Atención Social, or MNAS); 2) creation of an organism auxiliary to the MNAS to evaluate its processes and the effects of implementation of the measurements adopted; 3) definition of the social areas which, requiring the most urgent attention, needed to be addressed through specific programmes, in particular the public health system, the national electrical system, development of the World Food Programme, educational infrastructure, and rebuilding of the infrastructure damaged as a consequence of the torrential rains in the latter half of 2022; 4) requesting from the UN support for the design and creation of a fund for social support of the Venezuelan people; 5) identification

of frozen assets belonging to the Venezuelan state that might be progressively accessed and incorporated into this fund; 6) creation of a commission to assess and verify implementation of the agreement.

After this meeting, the negotiations stalled again when the Venezuelan government accused the opposition of not complying with the agreement reached but, mainly and above all, because the frozen US\$3,000 million that were to be incorporated into the Fund for the Social Protection of the Venezuelan People had not yet been released (August 2023). According to Maduro, this was a condition *sine qua non* for resuming the talks. The Colombian president, Gustavo Petro, organised a conference on 25 April 2023 in Bogotá, with representatives from numerous countries to discuss the Venezuelan situation. The shared positions of the Venezuelan government and the opposition were explained to the international community, in particular regarding the removal of sanctions, free elections, and reactivation of the peace talks. One of the shared positions for renewal of the talks was that of establishing the Fund for the Social Protection of the Venezuelan People (Ramírez Vargas & Alcalde, 2023). The message that came out of the Venezuela Conference of Bogotá was very clear: the UN trust fund for Venezuela should be set up as swiftly as possible. According to a Reuters

report by Spetalnik, Sequera and Armas (2023), on 19 May the Biden administration notified the UN that the money could operate within the U.S. financial system, and that there would be no risk of creditors seizing it to repay the outstanding Venezuelan debt. Accordingly, the UN-administered fund could have been operative at the end of May 2023. However,

the decision to establish the trust fund ultimately lies with the UN Secretariat in New York and some insiders allude to the complexity of the process involved and stress that establishing the fund depends on a number of factors. As of late August 2023, it had not been established by the UN.

5.2. Norway’s distinctive approach to peace diplomacy

In an interview for the Centre of Humanitarian Dialogue, when asked about the distinctive approach of Norwegian diplomacy in international conflicts, Dag Nylander (2020) identified four main elements: (a) collaboration with Norwegian and international NGOs, (b) low-key diplomacy, (c) long-term commitment, and (d) the ability to make quick decisions. In this section, these four elements will be briefly discussed.

Norway’s distinctive approach to its engagement in peace processes and with non-state actors was defined after the decentralisation of its foreign policy in the early 1990s. Humanitarian assistance and development policies called for closer cooperation between the Norwegian MFA and non-governmental actors and, according to Lehti (2014), this approach was extended to the area of peace-making.

Norway’s distinctive diplomatic approach in international conflicts is defined by four main elements: (a) collaboration with Norwegian and international NGOs, (b) low-key diplomacy, (c) long-term commitment and (d) the ability to make quick decisions.

In the 1990s the Ministry responded positively to proposals and initiatives from various NGOs and well-connected individuals with regard to conflictive areas. The range of actors involved in peace-making was broadened, and Norway was then able to act beyond the bounds of government-centred diplomacy with a distinctive, more informal approach to peace diplomacy. Ann Kelleher and James Taulbe (2006) refer to this approach as “Track I½ Diplomacy”, understanding Track I diplomacy as that with official representatives of governments and Track II diplomacy as that involving unofficial representatives and sectors of the civil society. An important feature of the collaboration between the state, NGOs and research institutions is that it is extensively funded by the state (Bandarage, 2011). Indeed, some Norwegian NGOs receive more than 90% of their funding from the state which, in Kelleher’s view (2006), almost makes them quasi-governmental organisations.

As for low-key diplomacy, Nylander (2020) affirms that activities pertaining to peace diplomacy rarely appear in the news, and that they are discreet and unnoticed, often with the involvement of low-level and mid-level diplomats, an approach that allows flexibility in seeking opportunities and in dealing with problems with relative freedom.

Norway’s long-term commitment to peace diplomacy is based on a broad political consensus for the promotion of peace and reconciliation. Hence, changes of government will not influence the country’s engagement in any given conflict. According to the MFA (2000), the goal is not only ending violence but also support for economic, social, and political processes that lead to durable liberal peace in the country concerned.

Finally, the ability of Norwegian diplomats to make quick decisions stems from the smallness of the country, not only in terms of population but also social distance. Dag Nylander (2020) mentions that the distance between a diplomat in the field and the ministry of Foreign Affairs is very short, and that it takes just a quick phone call or a text message, sometimes directly to the Minister, to obtain any clearance that may be needed.

5.3 Norwegian approach to facilitation the Venezuelan peace process

Norway’s approach to facilitation in Venezuela is consistent with its work in other peace processes. It began with secret talks between the parties (low-key diplomacy) and then, having advanced towards a more public and official format, it was formalised with the MoU signed in Mexico on 13 August 2021. In the MoU, the parties defined the agenda and methods for the talks. David Jourdan of the Norwegian MFA (2023) highlighted the importance of this Memorandum, which contains not only the agenda and format for the negotiations, but also a shared vision of the process and the country.

Norway’s approach to facilitation in Venezuela began with secret talks between the parties (low-key diplomacy) and then, having advanced towards a more public and official format, it formalised with a Memorandum of Understanding in 2021.

As for the method, it is important to mention that it is based on a “nothing is agreed until everything is agreed” principle (comprehensive approach), although partial agreements can be reached if the parties consider that a subject has been sufficiently discussed and urgent action is required. This was the case with the two partial agreements on the Guyana Esequiba, and Social Protection of the Venezuelan people signed at the end of the talks in Mexico. This approach has its advantages, such as ensuring “big picture” negotiation, but it also comes with the risk the parties can renege anytime on anything they have agreed to. It was first used in other peace processes including Britain-Ireland in 1995, Palestine-Israel, and in Cyprus and Colombia. The Norwegian MFA (2023) emphasises that understanding the needs of the parties and ensuring that they are in charge of the process, has

been key to making progress throughout the negotiations. The Venezuelan conflict is political in nature and requires political solutions, and the negotiation process provides a confidential space where the two parties have an opportunity to reconcile their interests. David Jourdan, sharing the MFA’s approach to the political process, points out that

Norway has probably been a more active facilitator in the Venezuelan negotiations than in other peace processes.

An essential point of the MoU is *participation*, as it establishes mechanisms of consultation for political and social actors. The aim is for the process to be as inclusive and legitimate as possible. However, there is little information available as to whether this is actually the case and David Jourdan (2023) admits that it is not yet possible to speak of results in this area.

Moreover, it should be noted that the Norwegian approach to facilitation, based on discretion and confidentiality, is one thing and how the parties *actually* behave is quite another matter. On more than one occasion, as can be seen in several documents and declarations, the Norwegian government has emphasised the need for the parties to be careful with their public declarations. In an interview with *El País* in February 2023, Anniken Huitfeldt, Norwegian Minister of Foreign Affairs, wryly acknowledges an anecdote sometimes repeated by high-profile Venezuelan politicians, according to which politicians will normally control themselves in public but, in private, tell someone else what they really think but, in Venezuela, the opposite occurs: what is said in private becomes amplified in front of a microphone (Lafuente 2023). Vicente Díaz, former director of the Venezuelan National Electoral Council, who participated in the talks held in the Dominican Republic, Oslo, and Barbados says that, since the process in Mexico was “very public” (as occurred in the Dominican Republic), it created difficulties for the parties, since national and international expectations were generated, which meant that more attention was given to audiences than to the talks (*openDemocracy* 2022).

5.4 Norwegian interests in Venezuela

In this section and in keeping with the theoretical framework described above, I discuss four possible reasons for Norway's mediation in the Venezuelan conflict: (a) peace and stability (value-oriented diplomacy), (b) reputation, (c) political interests, and (d) economic interests.

Value-oriented diplomacy focused on peace promotion makes sense for Norway, a country whose identity as a peaceful country and peace broker has existed at least since the late 19th century. Those values are so widely embedded that a broad political consensus exists among the population over a peace promotion policy, supported institutionally and by an extensive network of non-state actors coordinated by the state. Norway's constructed identity as a peace broker (especially intensified since the 1990s) means that the country acts as such. Moreover, promotion of such values makes even more sense when security has become globalised, and when a conflict in a faraway country can have humanitarian, political, economic, and ecological consequences in distant parts of the world. In this sense, value-oriented diplomacy may acquire realist motivations although, according to Bull (2023), this is discourse that appeared, above all from the 1980s, to justify Norway's involvement in peace processes. One of its proponents was the diplomat and former Labour Party politician, Jan Egeland.

Ensuring peace and stability in Venezuela could, for example, (1) help to mitigate the external displacement crisis, which mainly affects neighbouring countries like Colombia and Ecuador as well as the U.S. and others in Europe, with all the humanitarian and economic consequences for those receiving refugees; (2) ensure Venezuela's participation, as a democratic state, in international organisations, thus promoting democratic values and human rights; (3) promote social and economic development in the country, which would create value for its nationals as well as attracting international investment and; (4) finally, through social and economic development, reduce the presence of paramilitary organisations in the country, including the Ejército de Liberación Nacional (ELN), which is involved in drug trafficking. During the interview with David Jourdan (2023), we shared these points and he replied that this may well be so, but that such possibilities could also arise as a consequence of a political settlement that includes the removal of the sanctions. He added that the main reasons for Norway's peace diplomacy are the goals of preventing and reducing human suffering, as well as contributing to peaceful societies and stability.

Peace diplomacy does not give rapid results (when it actually gives results), but Norway sees it as a policy consistent with its values, and as one whose long-term effects are sufficiently relevant as to justify investment in it.

When it comes to image and reputation, Norway's approach on peace has been used as a public diplomacy branding tool, together with the country's natural environment and gender equality, to solve one of the image problems of small countries: invisibility. Indeed, discretion and a low profile do not necessarily mean invisibility, and as long as the

right aspects of Norway's peace diplomacy are emphasised in a public diplomacy strategy—for example its role as a facilitator, an engaged partner, and good multilateralist—the discretion that peace diplomacy requires would not be jeopardised (Leonard and Small, 2003). Success in mediation of the Venezuelan conflict would, of course, be positive for Norway's image as a peace broker, although this constructed image is also enhanced through pertinent media coverage mentioning the Norwegian involvement during the Venezuelan peace process. This can be explained by NRC theory since the Norwegian image is constructed not only through *success* in a certain process but also through the mediating process itself. To give one example, the Google search “peace talks Venezuela Norway” offers almost 4.85 million results, while the Spanish search with “mediación de paz Venezuela Noruega” offers 1.28 million results. Moreover, when Norway uses the word “facilitation”² it transfers responsibility for the results to the parties, implying that it has the role of supporting and accompanying them, but it will not be responsible if the parties decide that they do not want to continue with the process. This safeguard for Norway's image as a peace broker applies to the Venezuelan case.

Political influence has also been identified as one of Norway's possible interests. As Matlary (2003) notes, access to key international actors can result from Norway's engagement in peace processes, including in the case of Venezuela, especially in a context of international energy insecurity, and political tensions due to the high-profile conflict between Russia and Ukraine. In my interview with David Jourdain (2023), “close dialogue with key international stakeholders” together with increased political capital were mentioned as benefits that Norway could reap by engaging in Venezuela. He also pointed out that one of the key features of this conflict is the importance of the U.S. as an actor with the capacity to contribute to the outcome of the peace process.

The U.S. is now particularly concerned to find new energy suppliers, and ensuring political stability in Venezuela could provide international legitimacy for oil and gas transactions with its government. Giovanna de Michele, internationalist lecturer at the Central University of Venezuela, told VOA that the best way to extract oil from Venezuela would be through U.S. companies, but the sanctions would have to be eased if this was to happen (Ramírez Vargas & Alcalde 2023). Norway offers an internationally recognised platform for making this possible: the talks in Mexico. It could therefore be a key actor in helping to resolve the political crisis in Venezuela while also supporting an ally, which would contribute to its status as a reliable partner of the U.S. However, as Matlary notes, it is difficult to quantify or define the scope of the access Norway gleans from its peace policy.

Finally, with regard to economic interests, there are currently no Norwegian state-owned companies operating

2. In this study, I use the terms “mediation” and “facilitation” interchangeably. However, mediation normally involves a formal mandate from the parties of a conflict, covering involvement in both the substance and process of the negotiation, while a facilitator is less directive (Greminger 2007).

in Venezuela, although they can be represented through the investments of the Norwegian National Pension Fund³ in foreign companies that do operate in the country, for example, some Colombian companies, among them Bancolombia, Banco Popular, Banco Davivienda, and Cementos Argos. And, at the beginning of 2023, Ecopetrol, which is financed by Norfund, asked the U.S. for permission to negotiate with the state-owned company PDVSA to explore gas imports from Venezuela to Colombia (Quesada 2023). Among Norwegian investments in the U.S. are Chevron and Occidental Petroleum Corp, and the U.S. has recently given permission to Chevron to negotiate with the PDVSA and, at the end of 2022, a United Nations Commission on International Trade Law (UNCITRAL) court found that Venezuela was liable for discriminatory conduct in its payment of dividends from an oil and gas venture and ordered Venezuela to pay US\$105 million to a Barbadian subsidiary of Occidental Petroleum Corp (Ballantyne 2022). If an improved political situation in Venezuela increases the revenues of these companies, it could also be positive for Norwegian investments.

It should be added that, until 2021, Statoil (later Equinor), the national oil company of Norway, was present in Venezuela where it invested more than one billion dollars between 1995 and 2013 and participated in the Sincor heavy crude oil project with Total and PDVSA. However, due to concerns about the workforce and practical difficulties, Equinor pulled out of the project and transferred its 9.67% participation to CVP, a subsidiary of PDVSA, although it did keep its 51% stake in the exploration license of block 4 on Plataforma Deltana off Cocuina (Øye Gjerde, n.d.). Accordingly, Equinor participation in Venezuela is currently on hold but a greater presence in Venezuela of Norwegian companies, in particular from the oil and gas sector is possible if the country's situation improves.

To sum up, although economic links between Norway and Venezuela do exist, they would seem to be limited and not sufficient to explain Norway's participation as a facilitator in the Venezuelan peace process.

6. Conclusions

The core question of this study is *why and how does Norway facilitate the Venezuela peace talks?* The results suggest that, for Norway as a facilitator of the Venezuelan peace process, the main goals of mediation-as-foreign-policy are humanitarian, security (better understood as promoting stability in the

region), projection of its image as a peaceful nation and a peacemaker, and of its status *vis-à-vis* key international actors (especially the U.S.). All these goals can be explained through the Holsti's theory of National Role Conceptions (NRC) and Norway's own role prescription as a small, democratic, and peaceful nation, which means it would promote these values through altruistic (idealist) and non-altruistic (realist) actions and perspectives.

Interestingly, economic factors do not seem to play a major role as a mediation-as-foreign-policy objective. The economic ties between Norway and Venezuela are presently not significant and, thanks to the diversification of the investment portfolio of the Norwegian National Pension Fund, Venezuela only represents a very small part of Norwegian economic interests.

It is therefore relevant to consider the importance of constructivist aspects such as national values and self-conception in shaping the foreign policy of small countries, despite the apparent predominance of *realpolitik* aspects in an international context of increasing competition. These constructivist aspects offer key information for understanding and explaining the behaviour of small countries and should not be overlooked.

The results suggest that, for Norway as a facilitator of the Venezuelan peace process, the main goals of mediation-as-foreign-policy are humanitarian, security (better understood as promoting stability in the region), projection of its image as a peaceful nation and a peacemaker, and of its status vis-à-vis key international actors (especially the U.S.).

Besides, it is worth reflecting on the definition of a mediation *success* in real, and in mediation-as-foreign-policy terms. In the real sense, mediation is successful when it produces long-term reconciliation between the parties, in the eyes of a domestic audience while, for an audience external to the conflict, mediation may be successful simply when a peace agreement between the parties is signed. Meanwhile,

for the mediating country or its allies, a mediation is deemed effective when foreign policy objectives are achieved.

The approach used by Norwegian mediators in the Venezuelan process is similar to that of previous peace processes. It starts with the organisation of secret meetings and then advances towards a more public and official format. However, some distinctive traits of this peace process have been (1) a somewhat more active role of Norway as a facilitator when compared to other peace processes, (2) the weighty influence of the U.S. in causing setbacks or advances in the negotiations, and (3) premature publicity of this process, when the parties have been too eager to share their views with the press and the public, which may have been an obstacle for achieving progress. Despite these challenges, as of November 2023, Norway has continued to honour its long-term commitment to achieving a peaceful solution to the Venezuelan conflict.

This study has created a first timeline of the Norwegian involvement in the Venezuelan peace process by means of consulting information in primary and secondary sources

3. The Norwegian National Pension Fund, the world's largest sovereign fund, has investments in over 9,000 companies in 70 countries (Oljefondet n.d.).

and, when relevant, adding further details obtained in interviews with two experts. This timeline provides an overview of the main milestones of the peace process while highlighting Norway's role as a facilitating country. Possible reasons for its engagement in the Venezuelan peace process have been identified. At a tactical level, the moral and security elements seem to be a high priority for people working in the field. These actors have considerable expertise in conflict resolution and perform their duties diligently. At a more strategic and state-centred level, besides the moral and security components, attention is given to building political capital by means of offering an attractive image to international stakeholders, especially close allies like the U.S. This is, therefore, an excellent example of the importance of peace diplomacy as a soft power tool for a middle-level country like Norway.

The limits of the study arise from the nature of an ongoing mediation process. Since silence sometimes carries more weight than words and as discretion is necessary for the process to move forward, only limited information could be directly obtained from relevant actors in the peace talks. In terms of Norway's interests in certain areas, the limits of qualitative methods have not allowed quantification of the importance of each of these interests. The aim of the interviews was to obtain in-depth information that could confirm that such interests exist, and to provide distinctive details that might enrich knowledge of this peace process, rather than quantifying the results. Finally, now that Norway's possible interests as a facilitator have been identified, future research could be addressed at quantifying the weight of each of them in Norway's peacebuilding policy over the last two decades.

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