



Final Report

External Evaluation of the Project "Syrian Voices: Exploring inclusive solutions for peace in Syria"

30 October 2016

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1. Introduction

This report outlines the findings of an evaluation of the European Institute of Peace (EIP) project: *Syrian Voices: Exploring inclusive solutions for peace in Syria* (hereinafter, ‘the Syrian Voices project’). The evaluation was commissioned by EIP and conducted by external consultant Hannes Berts, of Sthlm Policy Group AB, between September and October 2016.

1.1 Background

The European Institute of Peace is an independent institute with the mission to: contribute to and complement the global peace agenda of the European Union, primarily through mediation and informal dialogue.¹ EIP engages in multi-track diplomacy and supports EU mediation efforts where the EU and individual Member States may have limited freedom to act. It also strives to be an operational hub for knowledge, expertise, information-sharing and learning on European mediation.

The foreign ministers of Sweden and Finland had brought forward the idea of a European peace institute already in 2010. After series of consultations among governments and international conflict resolution organisations and peace and security professionals, the EIP was finally established in the spring of 2014. The founding members were the governments of Belgium, Finland, Hungary, Italy, Luxembourg, Poland, Spain, Sweden and Switzerland.

The Syrian Voices project aims to support the Syrian peace process by “facilitating regular interactive platforms for key international, regional and Syrian actors to share information and identify ways forward for an inclusive political solution to the crisis.”² In 2015, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) of Finland provided EUR 400.000 for the implementation of the project between 1 August 2015 and 31 July 2016. The project also received funds from Spain (30,000 Euro) for the period 1 January-31 December 2015, and from the Norwegian Centre for Conflict Resolution, NOREF (7,845 Euro).

As part of the grant contractual obligations of the EIP, the Finish MFA has requested that an external evaluation be conducted after the first year of project implementation. As noted in the ToR, from the perspective of the Finish MFA, the evaluation will serve to assess if the objectives of the cooperation have been achieved and understood, and help understand what worked and why, as well as provide an evidence-base for decision-making and continuous improvements of the quality of the cooperation. From the perspective of the EIP, the evaluation will help inform the longer-term strategy for engagement in Syria, as well as draw lessons that can be used to improve programming in other countries, such as Yemen and Libya. The evaluation will focus on the specific evaluation criteria: *relevance, impact, effectiveness, efficiency, sustainability, coherence, and governance structure*.

Sthlm Policy Group AB has been contracted to conduct the evaluation, in accordance with a Terms of Reference formulated by the EIP (Annex 3). Based on the Terms of Reference, the

¹ EIP Statutes

² Syrian Voices project Goal; see European Institute of Peace – Project Proposal to the Government of Finland: Syrian Voices – Exploring inclusive solutions for peace in Syria (August 2015); p. 6.

consultant developed an evaluation framework (Annex 4) and a set of semi-structured interview protocols (Annex 5). This is the final report of the evaluation, after comments and clarifications from the EIP team.

1.2 Evaluation approach and methodology

The evaluation has sought to take a participatory approach – involving EIP management and staff at each step in the evaluation process. The evaluator acknowledges that the real experts on the project and its strengths and weaknesses are the programme staff themselves – and the evaluation will therefore seek to draw as much as possible on the lessons and experiences of these individuals.

An evaluation at its best is a mutual learning process between the client, the evaluator and other key stakeholders. The consultant's approach has therefore been tailored to draw out lessons from the past to strengthen project implementation in the coming project period, or in other projects. This has entailed identifying, understanding and taking into account the specific methodologies, experiences and strategies on which the project is based.

The primary users of this evaluation report will be i) the Finish Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA); and ii) the European Institute of Peace (EIP). The evaluation is meant to fulfil an accountability function as well as be focused on learning lessons for future programming in Syria and in the broader region.

The evaluation has been undertaken with a focus on the context in which the project has been implemented. It is underpinned by an analysis of the Syrian context and the context of international efforts to promote an end to the fighting and an inclusive political process. The evaluation has also taken a theory-based approach, meaning that it has taken the theory of change on which the project is based as its central point of departure for assessing achievements. The evaluator's understanding of the project theory of change has primarily been based on the outline provided in the Project Proposal, but also on the views of EIP management and staff in relation to pathways to change and results at various levels.

Given the context within which the project is implemented – although activities have not been implemented in Syria itself – the evaluation has also been conducted with reference to the OECD/DAC core principles for overcoming risks and challenges associated with evaluations and reviews in situations of conflict and fragility throughout the evaluation process.³ This has involved, assessing the conflict sensitivity of implemented activities, and conducting each step of the evaluation in a conflict-, and gender sensitive manner.

In accordance with the Terms of Reference, the evaluation has applied the OECD/DAC criteria for analysis: *relevance, impact, effectiveness, efficiency, sustainability and coherence*. As noted in the ToR, the evaluation will also assess the *governance structure* of EIP as relates to the project implementation, and assess how this has affected the overall success of the project. Overall, the evaluation will follow and seek to respond to the questions outlined under each of the criteria in the ToR. A detailed evaluation framework developed by the evaluator is included in Annex 4.

³ OECD (2012), 'Evaluating Peacebuilding Activities in Settings of Conflict and Fragility: Improving Learning for Results'. OECD Publishing.

1.3 Data Sources and Means of Verification

The evaluators approach to data collection has sought to ensure that the evaluation is based on relevant and reliable data in order to draw robust conclusions and provide proper recommendations. Two primary sources of data have been used for the evaluation:

1. *Document review* – including all relevant and available project documentation, such as project application, progress reports, final project report, individual activity reports, evaluation forms and other relevant documentation. The evaluator has also consulted other written sources to help contextualize the project.
2. *In-depth interviews* with relevant EIP staff, staff from the Office of the UN Special Envoy for Syria, representatives from organisations that have participated in the EIP facilitated dialogues and Track 2 meetings, as well as focal points for the grant at the Finish MFA.

Interviews have been conducted over Skype or phone in order to reach as many different stakeholders as possible within the timeframe available for the evaluation and limit the need for traveling. The evaluator did, however, travel to Brussels to present and discuss this draft evaluation report with the EIP team on 27 October. This provided an opportunity for more in-depth and face-to-face interaction with the EIP team before finalizing the evaluation report.

In order to promote sharing and to ensure a sense of joint ownership of the evaluation process, the consultant has sought to establish a trustful relationship with stakeholders and an open climate in meetings. The evaluator has therefore strived for generative dialogues with stakeholders rather than formal interviews. While semi-structured protocols have been used to ensure a degree of coherence across interviews (see Annex 5), a high level of flexibility and openness to the ideas and interests of informants has been maintained and allowed to guide conversations.

Great care has been taken to protect the integrity and anonymity of informants. Direct citation has been avoided (unless explicitly agreed with the informant) and opinions expressed by participants in the evaluation process are not attributable to individuals. (To ensure the anonymity of stakeholders, the consultant asks EIP to keep the interview list in Annex 2 internal and confidential.)

1.4 Scope & limitations

The scope of the evaluation, as defined in the Terms of Reference, is quite broad in relation to the resources available for its implementation.⁴ This has inherently led to limitations in terms of the depth to which it will be possible to explore each issue and question of the evaluation framework. However, the relatively long implementation period of the evaluation (two full months - September and October 2016) has created a degree of flexibility and helped ensure the broadest possible participation of stakeholders.

Most interviews have been conducted through Skype or telephone. The only exception was a meeting with the EIP team in Brussels to discuss the first draft report. Whereas this form of distance interviews is an excellent way to save financial and environmental resources, the ability of the evaluator to fully interact and build trust with the individuals he/she is interviewing remotely

⁴ The assignment has covered some 11 consultant-days, including one day in Brussels to discuss the draft report. This limitation, and possible ways to ensure a solid evaluation within this framework were discussed at the outset of the evaluation process.

cannot be compared with the face-to-face meeting. Some nuances, details and 'feelings' are bound to be 'lost in translation'.

As foreseen, it has also been challenging to schedule all the necessary interviews within the timeframe available for the evaluation process. Particularly stakeholders directly involved in the formal process have been difficult to reach. In the end, however, the consultant was able to get input from the vast majority of the planned informants.

The evaluation has gone through available documentation and held a relatively large number of interviews (some 20 individual informants). The project has been discussed in-depth and in an open and constructive atmosphere during the interviews in order to get the most and the deepest information. The consultant is therefore confident that the data obtained is sufficient to provide a good basis for analysis and conclusions for the purposes of this evaluation.

2. EIP in Syria

This section provides a brief outline of the context of the Syrian conflict and peace process, and a description of the EIP project: “Syrian Voices: Exploring inclusive solutions for peace in Syria”. It also contains a sub-section outlining the theory of change underpinning the Syrian Voices project, as the evaluator understands it.

2.1 The Syrian context

The war in Syria broke out in the spring of 2011, in the wake of the uprisings of the so-called Arab Spring. It has since turned into one of the world’s most serious humanitarian crises and constitutes an international security threat.

The conflict has a complex regional, and international, dynamic with direct support from various States across the region and beyond to belligerents on various sides of the conflict. As noted by the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic in August 2016: “Support provided by different States to their respective protégés has had a far more significant effect than support from other sources. Such backing ensures the fragmentation and general decentralization of the conflict, making the potential for a coherent diplomatic resolution of the crisis less attainable.”⁵ The complexity is further enhanced by the prevalence of designated terrorist organisations involved in the conflict and in *de facto* control over large areas of Syria.

Both the Government and its allies, and armed groups of the opposition, are reportedly not only to failing in respect, protect and fulfil the human rights of the Syrian people, but actually engaged willingly in serious violations of these rights.⁶

The war has taken a remarkable human toll, killing hundreds of thousands of people and displacing over half the Syrian population. UNHCR estimates some 8.7 million people to be internally displaced within Syria, and some 4.8 million Syrian refugees outside of the country.⁷ Women and girls have been particularly vulnerable, as levels of sexual violence and discrimination have increased throughout the conflict. Rape and other forms of sexual violence have been used as an instrument of war.⁸

The system of official service delivery – particularly in areas outside of government control – has broken down completely. The Syrian economy has been broken (with a 64.1% drop in GDP since the onset of the conflict) and millions of Syrians have seen their livelihoods lost. Unemployment currently stands at some 52.9%. By the end of 2015, UNDP estimated that some 85,2% of the Syrian population had been plunged into poverty.⁹

⁵ UN Human Rights Council: Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, 11 August 2016 (A/HRC/33/55)

⁶ Human Rights Watch reporting: <https://www.hrw.org/middle-east/n-africa/syria>

⁷ UNHCR: <http://www.unhcr.org/syria-emergency.html>

⁸ UN News Center, 26 February 2013: Displacement in Syria giving way for serious gender-based crimes, warns UN official (<http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=44230#.WA9iYYTEBfi>); See also Human Rights Council: Report of the independent international commission of inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, 13 August 2014 (A/HRC/27/60), and subsequent reporting of the Commission.

⁹ Numbers from UNDP in Syria: <http://www.sy.undp.org/content/syria/en/home/countryinfo.html>

The international community has engaged in numerous attempts at promoting peace and stability in Syria, and establish an environment in which the people of Syria can enjoy their basic human rights and live in safety and security. The last year has seen a continued escalation of the Syrian conflict and various attempts to establish a lasting cessation of hostilities have failed. The fact that international powers are increasingly actively participating in the war has severely complicated international efforts and often prevented constructive action at the UN Security Council.

There are several different streams of the international engagement for peace in Syria and there have been a number of initiatives since the conflict started in 2011. The International Syria Support Group (ISSG) was established in Vienna in the fall of 2015 by 20 states and international organisations (but no Syrian representation).¹⁰ The group is co-chaired by the United States and Russia. The ISSG agreed on a set of principles and a plan for a continued Syrian-led and Syrian-owned political transition, based on the Geneva Communiqué from 2012 and committed to jointly pursue a nationwide ceasefire. In December 2015, the UN Security Council passed Resolution 2254, adopting the ISSG plan. The UN Special Envoy for Syria was called upon to lead the continued peace process and convene the parties to the conflict. The UN Special Envoy in Geneva convened the latest round of Syrian peace talks, this time proximity talks, in February 2016, despite initial suspension of the process.

Amid the escalation of violence on the ground, the ISSG has continued to seek agreement on the conditions for a cessation of hostilities in Syria. After a series of meetings in Munich, a joint statement was issued by the United States and Russia, outlining the Terms of a cessation of hostilities and urged the parties to the conflict (with the exception of “Daesh”, “Jabhat al-Nusra” and “other terrorist organisations”) to indicate their acceptance of the Terms.¹¹ The UN Security Council endorsed the Terms and called on all parties to respect them in its Resolution 2268 on 26 February 2016. The cessations gradually unravelled and fighting intensified again. Another ceasefire was negotiated and agreed between Russia and the United States in September 2016, and the two powers planned to join forces against ISIS and Al-Nusra if the ceasefire held. After a series of events and resumed violence, the ceasefire was officially abandoned.

The ISSG and the UN Special Envoy are continuously seeking entry points to reach an agreement to suspend the violence and resume peace talks, but it has so far not yielded any results. The rift between the backers of the Syrian Government and international supporters of the opposition appears as serious as ever.

2.2 EIP’s Syrian Voices Project

European Governments generally support the UN-led diplomatic process in support of constructive peace negotiations and several of them are members of the ISSG. There are also a large number of international non-governmental groups involved in Track 2 and Track 3 processes to facilitate a process towards peace at the level of civil society and communities. This is the backdrop against which EIP decided to engage in Syria.

A central tenet of EIP’s analysis of the situation in Syria is that there is a need to strengthen international efforts at all levels though enhancing knowledge about the interests and drivers of

¹⁰ The members are: China, Egypt, France, Germany, Iran, Iraq, Italy, Jordan, Lebanon, Oman, Qatar, Russia, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, United Arab Emirates, the United Kingdom, the United States, the Arab League, the European Union, and the United Nations.

¹¹ Joint Statement of the United States and the Russian Federation, as Co-Chairs of the ISSG, on Cessation of Hostilities in Syria, 22 February 2016; <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2016/02/253115.htm>

key actors of the conflict, providing constructive forums for sharing information and exchanging ideas and experiences, identifying individuals who might have a positive influence on the various sides of the conflict, as well as identifying innovative entry points for an inclusive political process.

The overall goal of the project is to: “Contribute to the peace process in Syria by facilitating regular interactive platforms for key international, regional and Syrian actors to share information and identify ways forward for an inclusive political solution to the crisis.”¹²

To achieve this goal, EIP set three key objectives for the Syrian Voices project:

- i) “Convening track 1.5 dialogues to unpack and moderate regional and national interests influencing the crisis;
- ii) Convene track 2 actors to share information, promote light-coordination and explore opportunities for complementarities, thereby enhancing their impact, keeping actors involved in track 1 dialogues up-to-date and formulating policy options;
- iii) Help feed policy options emerging from track 1.5 and track 2 activities into track 1 processes such as that led by the UN Special Envoy for Syria.”¹³

In the following, the idea behind each of these objectives, and the foreseen initiatives and activities associated with them, are briefly outlined

2.2.1 Objective 1 - Convening track 1.5 dialogues to unpack and moderate regional and national interests influencing the crisis

Understanding Syrian political actors

A central tenet in EIP’s context analysis was that there was a weak understanding among the international actors engaged in the Track 1 peace process, of the underlying interests, drivers and red lines of the Syrian leadership and other parts of the Government. The project therefore aimed to convene a series of discrete dialogues with actors close to the Syrian leadership – i.e. people from within Government, the Armed Forces, the Alawite community and centres of power that might be influencing the Government’s perspective on the peace process.¹⁴

Discrete regional dialogues

It is also clear from an assessment of the Syrian context that regional and international powers are part of the conflict and have significant influence on the ground. EIP noted that the UN-led process of implementing the Geneva Communiqué did not have a specific focus on regional actors. A series of dialogues with influential regional figures with ties to their respective governments or other power centres in the region was therefore included in the project, in order to explore ideas for peace in Syria. The regional dialogues were to build on the positive experiences from a regional roundtable organised in cooperation with the Oxford Research Group, the Toledo Institute and the European Council on Foreign Relations (ECFR), in May 2015, where high level specialists and former government officials from Syria, the UAE, Jordan, Egypt, Iran, the US, Europe and Russia had been brought together to discuss the Syrian conflict from a

¹² European Institute of Peace – Project Proposal to the Government of Finland: Syrian Voices – Exploring inclusive solutions for peace in Syria (August 2015); p. 6.

¹³ European Institute of Peace – Project Proposal to the Government of Finland: Syrian Voices – Exploring inclusive solutions for peace in Syria (August 2015); p. 6.

¹⁴ This was complemented with efforts to gain and share understanding of influential Syrian armed opposition groups that remained outside the formal Track 1 mediation process, and to mitigate their potential negative effect on the peace process and decisions taken in its context. These efforts fell outside the scope of the Finland grant, but were in line with the Theory of Change for the project.

regional perspective. The roundtable was held before the agreement was signed with Finland, but is still seen as an integral part of the Syrian Voices project (funded by Spain).

The project was also foreseen to encompass facilitation of talks between Iran, the US and Europe, as a step towards generating convergence for peace in Syria and the region.

2.2.2 Objective 2 - Convene track 2 actors to share information, promote light-coordination and explore opportunities for complementarities, thereby enhancing their impact, keeping actors involved in track 1 dialogues up-to-date and formulating policy options

Scaling up impact by agencies "Light Coordination"

As in many situations where a large number of international actors engage in efforts to promote change in a particular country or context, there is a sense of competition between them and coordination is often weak or lacking. EIP noted in the project proposal that there was no official coordination mechanism for the various international and Syrian non-governmental organisations (NGO) and Think Tanks involved in Track 2 in Syria. Actors had also seen that most efforts relied on the same Syrian interlocutors and that synergies could be found with increased information sharing. The project therefore sought to establish a platform for 'light coordination' for Track 2 actors, with a view to strengthen networking and information sharing between them and avoids duplication of efforts.

The 'light coordination process' was to be organised in cooperation with Search for Common Ground (SFCG) and the Norwegian Peacebuilding Resource Centre (NOREF). The forum was foreseen to enhance effectiveness of Track 2 efforts, as well as contribute with policy options and recommendations for the Track 1 process – including by conveying insights and perspectives from Syrian stakeholders and interlocutors to the international level. A close collaboration was therefore foreseen with the UN Office of the Special Envoy for Syria.

Strengthening the role of Women Peace Activists

The project proposal also noted the need to enhance female participation in political processes and peace-making efforts. Under the project, EIP therefore planned to organise a series of workshops with female peace activists from Syria, Yemen, Libya and Iraq, in order to highlight the role of women in these conflicts. The participants would also benefit from a tailored Peace Fellowship Training to enhance their knowledge and understanding of Track 1 and international human rights instruments, and equip them with diplomacy, mediation and negotiation skills.

2.2.3 Objective 3 - Help feed policy options emerging from track 1.5 and track 2 activities into track 1 processes such as that led by the UN Special Envoy for Syria

Whereas the first two objectives of the project aim to identify and unpack concerns, interests and priorities of various stakeholders in the Syrian conflict and associated regional dynamics, the third objective is focused on integrating lessons from this work into the political peace processes, in particular that of the Office of the UN Special Envoy for Syria. The project proposal outlines the plan to create forums for Track 1 actors to interact directly with stakeholders involved in the networks established under the Project.

2.3 Theory of change

As outlined in the methodology section above, this evaluation has taken the theory of change on which the project is based as its central point of departure for assessing its achievements. EIP outlines a theory of change for its overarching Syria programme in an annex to the Syrian Voices

project proposal.¹⁵ The theory is based on the three project objectives, outlining the chain of results under each work stream that are foreseen to lead to desired outcomes and impact.

Under objective 1, it is foreseen that facilitated dialogues with various targeted actors will lead to:

Short-term	Increased understanding of the views, motivations, interests, and relationships of i) the Syrian opposition; ii) the Syrian government; and iii) regional powers, respectively, as well as red lines, points of division and convergence between parties;
Medium-term	A greater understanding by unheard Syrian opposition groups of the Track 1 process; a sensitization of Syrian political actors on human rights (incl. of women and minorities), humanitarian principles, governance; and increased sharing of regional experiences of identifying and utilising early opportunities (already during conflict) for local governance and reconciliation; and
Long-term	Political will being generated and skills increased for implementation of policy options for a settlement of the Syria conflict.

These outcomes will then lead to a set of interim opportunities for decentralised peaceful coexistence, governance, service delivery and access to humanitarian assistance – and ultimately to the impact: Syrians enjoying a sustainable and inclusive political solution to the crisis.

Under objective 2, it is foreseen that the convening of ‘light coordination’ meetings for Track 2 actors, exploiting opportunities for complementarity with other work streams and keeping Track 1 actors up-to-date with Track 2 processes, and formulating policy options, will lead to:

Short-term	Better coordination & synergy between on-going Track 2 efforts; increased complementarity between Track 2 and Track 1; sharing of policy options from regional & Syrian political actor dialogues, and Track 2 actors; as well as sharing of the opinions of Syrian population, civil society, influential individuals through Track 2 to Track 1 actors; and
Medium-term	Increased mutual understanding between Track 1 & 2 actors and a more conducive environment for the peace efforts. ¹⁶
Long-term	Outcomes under Objective 2 are to feed into the work-streams under Objective 3. ¹⁷

Under objective 3 EIP foresees that the feeding of policy options and information emerging from Track 1.5 and Track 2 work into Track 1 political peace processes will lead to:

Short-term	Track 1 actors (especially the UN- OSE and lead Governments) being informed through lobby and informal dialogue and direct exchange of information with Track 2 and Syrian actors;
Medium-term	Views and policy options from facilitated dialogues informing strategies for Track 1 diplomacy process; and
Long-term	Track 1 process being rendered more effective.

¹⁵ It is not clear to the evaluator how the outline of the ‘overarching programme’ differs from the Syrian Voices project itself. EIP has explained that the Syrian Voices proposal is the outline of the overarching programme. The evaluator is aware of a work-stream outside of the Syrian Voices project, but this does not seem to be included in the ToC.

¹⁶ The Theory of Change diagram on p. 23 of the project document states that the medium term outcome under Objective 2 is: “Increased mutual understanding between Track 1 & 1.5 actors”, but the consultant assumes that this is a typo, and that it should actually be “between Track 1 and 2 actors”.

¹⁷ No long-term outcomes are mentioned in the ToC diagram under Objective 2, but EIP explained to the consultant that results were to feed into efforts under Objective 3.

The outcomes under objectives 2 and 3 are seen as directly contributing to the overall impact: Syrians enjoying a sustainable and inclusive political solution to the crisis.

Conversations with EIP management and staff have largely confirmed the fundamental thinking behind the theory of change outlined in the project proposal (at least as far as outcomes).

The link between the planned interventions and foreseen outcomes are seen as logical and largely realistic given the project original ambition level. There is undoubtedly also a link between the outcomes described and the foreseen impact, but the causal chain between them is rather weak. The step between outcomes and the foreseen impact is so long, under all three objectives, that it becomes very difficult to measure impact within the framework of the project.

Linear planning models are well suited for activity planning, and long-term development programmes with clear and tangible expected results. They are less suitable for intangible change processes in highly complex and rapidly changing operational environments. This is not to say that the project should not have a structured planning model and system for measuring and monitoring results. Such a system should, however, build on a theory of change that is more focused on the types of change that EIP wants to see, how change happens, and the mechanisms through which such change can be achieved. The project can then maintain the flexibility to define activities and intermediary results depending on developments in the context and opportunities that arise along the way.

It might be worth exploring innovative monitoring and evaluation methodologies such as 'outcome mapping'/'outcome harvesting'. Any such model would, however, need to be adapted and tailored to the specific organisational and contextual factors of each project or programme.

It was noted by informants that have experience from similar donor-funded projects, that a close dialogue with the donor could provide an effective supplement to the formal planning, monitoring and reporting. This can contribute to building the trust needed to enable a more flexible results framework. It was pointed out that a close relationship with donors has the added benefit of providing opportunities for informal reporting and briefings through which sensitive information – not suitable for written reports – can be shared.

3. Key Findings

This section outlines the key findings of the evaluation. The first sub-section deals with general findings related to the implementation over the project period and outlines the reported achievements in relation to targets set at the outset of the project. The following sub-sections are structured around the seven evaluation criteria/themes that have guided the evaluation process: *relevance, impact, effectiveness, efficiency, sustainability, coherence, and governance structure.*

3.1 Project implementation and reported achievements

3.1.1 General findings

The Syrian Voices project sets an ambitious agenda for the first year of operation in a new context. In this regard, EIP seems to have slightly underestimated the time and effort needed to establish the necessary relationships and build sufficient credibility for the organisation in the Syrian context. Whereas the Executive Director, and a number of other key staff members were among the most experienced and recognised individuals in the world in relation to the Syrian conflict and peace efforts, the EIP as such was relatively unknown and lacked a track record in the context. Constructive engagement and smart partnerships with actors that have supplementary comparative advantages (such as the Common Space Initiative) seems largely to have remedied this challenge already within the first year, but it is clear that project implementation was stalled because of these factors in the first half of the year.

Particularly the difficulties to approach and build relationships with Syrian Government stakeholders proved to be more difficult than expected in the first phase of the project. The first half of the implementation period was spent chasing potential entry points. The Biannual report outlines the attempts to reach out to Syrian actors with little results. One of the difficulties of gaining access to Syrian interlocutors close to the government has been the political and security risks that Syrians face in engaging with western actors, as the Government and/or other powerful interests might object to such engagement.

The partnership with the Lebanese Common Space Initiative (CSI) and its Syria Initiative (CSI-SI), and the Finish Evangelical Lutheran Mission (FELM) that was formalised towards the end of 2015 seems to have helped in this regard. EIP had access to a number of Syrian interlocutors relevant for the Track 1.5 efforts already – as evidenced by the roundtable organised in May 2015 – but the partnership with CSI was useful for broadening networks and gaining access to individuals with great respect among targeted Syrian stakeholders. The relationship strengthened EIP's network within Syrian civil society actors. This was also helpful for EIP in moving forward with its work on Track 1.5 dialogues. The first Syrian-Syrian dialogue meeting was held in June 2016.

The partnership with CSI has been further strengthened by a 'secondment' from the CSI Syria Initiative working with EIP in Brussels one week per month. The partnership has increased EIP's ability to base its strategies and initiatives on perspectives of the 'final beneficiaries' of the project, i.e. the Syrian population, through a closer relationship with civil society on the ground. It has also helped better understand the situation and perspectives of Syrian women.

The 'light coordination' meetings for Track 2 actors, organised together with Search for Common Ground, have yielded the most tangible results over the project period. The meetings have been highly appreciated by Track 2 agencies, demonstrated by the continued high attendance at the meetings. The meetings have also received high scores in immediate post-meeting surveys/evaluations.¹⁸ This speaks to a successful positioning of EIP as an actor within the Syrian context. Given the time available for the evaluation, the consultant has only been able to reach a small number of the NGO's involved in promoting the peace process in Syria – and it is acknowledged that the selection is skewed towards those with whom EIP has had constructive engagement. From the perspective of these organisations, however, EIP has been a welcome addition to the scene and not seen as competition.

As will be outlined below, however, there is a range of planned results that have not materialized within the first project year. This, in most cases, seems to be more a result of overambitious planning than lacking effort or capacity for implementation. Given the fact that EIP had not previously worked in Syria, it would have been natural to design a pilot project to identify gaps, explore entry points and test approaches, while at the same time building the brand of the organisation in the specific context, rather than a traditional project. Seen as a pilot project the results of the first year are highly impressive.

Project implementation has also been greatly affected by external factors and the developments in the Syrian context, including the intensified military involvement of Russia, and political changes across the region, such as the political reshuffling in Saudi Arabia in April 2015, the US-Iran nuclear deal the same year and Iranian elections in 2016. The emergence of the International Syria Support Group (ISSG) also made it important for EIP to adjust its strategy to encompass targeting the members of the group in its networking, advocacy and dissemination of information.

Stakeholders have generally described the comparative advantage and unique added value of EIP as embedded in its proximity to European governments (without being tainted with their political past), which enabled EIP to gain trust and recognition in Syria, and to engage with actors that Governments could not. EIP's close relationship with the OSE is also often mentioned as an added value of the organisation. Another of the key strengths of the organisation has no doubt been the experience and contacts of the Executive Director in mediation in general and within the context of the Syrian peace process in particular. This strength is reinforced by the skills and commitment of EIP management and staff. It will be important for EIP to continuously work to institutionalise these strengths and build credibility for the organisation itself. The first year of implementation in Syria seems to have moved EIP significantly in this direction.

3.1.2 Reported achievements per objective

The project proposal outlines a number of foreseen results for each of the objectives of the Syrian Voices project. In the following, the reported results and the perspectives of interviewed stakeholders are assessed against the plan in the project proposal.

3.1.2.1 Objective 1 - Convening track 1.5 dialogues to unpack and moderate regional and national interests influencing the crisis

Objective one has two associated work-streams: i) Understanding Syrian political Actors; and ii) Discrete regional dialogues.

¹⁸ It should be noted, however, that the response rate on average only seems to have been some 20%.

Understanding Syrian political actors

The target for this work-stream was for EIP to: i) facilitate at least 3 dialogues with the purpose of better understanding the Syrian government and inform Track 1 and Track 2 Strategies with an average of 8-10 participants (male and female); ii) reacquaint itself with entities such as the Government, the Syrian Armed Forces, the Alawite community and other power centres; iii) make an active effort to identify women to participate in consultations; and iv) use understanding gained to inform EIP's engagement strategy and formulate policy options for the Track 1 process.

Whereas the implementation of this work-stream has taken off in the later part of the project period, the challenges experienced in the early stages of the project period have had an effect on the overall performance against targets. Only one dialogue meeting (out of three planned) was facilitated in the project period. This meeting was held in Brussels in June 2016 and gathered eight participants – three closely associated with the Syrian Government and five individuals affiliated with different Syrian opposition groups. This initial meeting is considered by stakeholders consulted for this evaluation to have been an important first step towards establishing a platform on which to build for the future. An agenda for continued engagement was formulated. It was also noted that more work is needed to identify and develop a targeted approach for the continued process, building on EIP's comparative advantages.

EIP also highlighted that the group generated a list of issues that were deemed important to help advance the peace process, thereby enhancing EIP's knowledge of potential entry points to peace from a Syrian perspective, and possible points of convergence between Syrians from opposing sides. The reports do not contain gender-disaggregated data or information about efforts to promote women's participation.

Discrete regional dialogues

Under this work-stream EIP planned to convene 6 regional roundtables, with at least 10 high-level participants (at least 33% women), to improve the understanding of regional powers' underlying positions and interests in the Syrian conflict, and to enhance prospects for regional alignments, and formulate recommendations to be integrated in Track 1 and Track 2 strategies.

Only one regional workshop has been held, in May 2015. This was before the Finish-funded project was initiated, and the grant from Spain – which was recognised as a source of co-financing for the project during project negotiations – was utilized. Nevertheless, it is relevant to report in connection with the programme, as it forms the basis for the planned intervention. The workshop was organised in cooperation with Oxford Research Group, the Toledo Institute and the European Council on Foreign Relations (ECFR). It gathered high-level specialists and former government officials from Saudi Arabia, Iran, Egypt, Jordan, Syria, Israel, Russia, Spain, the U.K. and the US, with close ties to their respective governments. No gender-disaggregated data has been reported.

Stakeholders who were in the room have described the meeting as highly constructive and useful. The mere fact that stakeholders from some of these countries could engage each other in direct dialogue on political issues is an achievement. The meeting also reached agreement on the principle that any peace effort in Syria must take as its point of departure the interests and needs of the Syrian people. It is not possible, however, to fully measure the medium- to long-term effect of these types of dialogues, as we cannot know what measures participants take once they are back in their respective countries and organisations. This is an example of an area where the theory behind the intervention needs to be trusted.

After the successful regional Track 1.5 meeting in May 2015, a number of political developments made dialogue between regional powers (particularly Saudi Arabia and Iran) much more

complicated. EIP sought opportunities for a new round of dialogues, but interlocutors from Saudi Arabia explicitly asked to hold the process in light of increased regional tensions. The strategy was then modified to continue to nurture relationships and look for new entry points and wait for opportunities to reengage in the process.

EIP also organised a high-level international meeting in September 2015 to engage Track 2 actors, governments and multilateral institutions on the issue of regional alignment. The meeting resulted in an analysis of the dynamics in the region and recommendations for Track 2 engagement.

The project was also foreseen to encompass facilitation of talks between Track 1.5 stakeholders from Iran, and a select number of Western Governments, as a step towards generating convergence for peace in Syria and the region (outlined in the project proposal but not specifically listed in the results framework). Over the past year, EIP has engaged with partner InterMediate to prepare the ground for these dialogues and securing entry points for discussions with Iranian officials. Despite the political changes and regional tensions, these contacts have been maintained. This is rightly reported as an achievement in its own right.

So far, the political situation in Iran has not been favourable to moving forward and start the dialogue process. As noted in the Final Report: “momentum for the roundtables stalled due to a conservative backlash following the nuclear deal and the Iranian elections. Engagement with Western actors is viewed with great suspicion by several influential individuals in the Iranian centres of power [...]” EIP is confident, however, that the relationships built will enable a ‘quick-start’ once an opportunity emerges.

3.1.2.2 Objective 2 – Convene Track 2 actors to help scale up their impact by greater information-sharing, light coordination, exploiting opportunities for complementarity, updating of leading actors involved in Track 1 (OSE), and formulating policy options

The second objective is where the most tangible progress has been made and EIP has even exceeded quantitative expectations of the results framework. The objective comprises three work-streams: i) ‘light coordination’ of Track 2 actors; and ii) Strengthening the role of Women Peace Activists; and iii) An independent Syrian women’s track to augment the formal process.

Scaling up impact by agencies “Light Coordination”

EIP set out to organise at least 2 workshops for Track 2 actors (at least 20 Track 2 agencies and up to 10 Government representatives per meeting) to promote coordination and the UN OSE Track 1 process. EIP also planned to ensure that 33% of participants in the ‘light coordination’ meetings were women and to seek to discretely promote female participation by encouraging women to take the floor and involving them in side-meetings.

Under this work-stream, three ‘light coordination’ meetings have been organised together with Search for Common Ground (and NOREF) – September 2015, February 2016 and June 2016. The meetings have gathered some 25 Track 2 and Track 1 actors to exchange information and discuss various topics related to the Syrian peace process and on-going efforts of participating organisations.

The meetings are reported to have contributed to an enhanced interagency coordination and collaboration among Track 2 actors. The original group of agencies have continued to participate in meetings and regularly ask about when the next meeting will be held. Interviews with stakeholders confirm the value perceived by participants. The participation of the UN Special

Envoy (participated in the September 2015 meeting) and members of his staff in all other meetings was seen as particularly important, as well as the participation of ISSG member states. There were questions, however, as to the role of governments in the setting – are they there primarily as donors or as political Track 1 actors. The answer is likely to be both, but there might be a need to consider more targeted invitations depending on the theme of each meeting and perhaps organising sub-committees for specific themes and purposes.

EIP highlights the value of the Track 2 meetings in light of the absence of a functioning Track 1 process. It is also highlighted that the meetings have served to bridge a gap that existed between Track 1 and Track 2 actors and processes. An example noted is that Track 2 actors advised the Special Envoy to be more specific in condemning Syrian use of barrel bombs in heavily populated urban areas, and a subsequent public statement by the SE including such condemnation. The views expressed in EIP's reporting is echoed by stakeholders and participants in the meetings that have been interviewed for this evaluation.

Strengthening the role of Women Peace Activists

EIP set out to identify and support the enhancement of skills of at least 6 female peace activists from the region, in thematic areas such as Track 1 processes, mediation and negotiation, International Conventions and human rights law, humanitarian principles, UNSCR 1325 etc. The activists were then expected to lobby their respective national Parliaments and the UN OSE.

The Women in Conflict Fellowship was set up in August 2015, in partnership with Beyond Borders Scotland. EIP reported that 7 female peace activists from Syria, Yemen and Iraq – active in conflict mediation, dialogue or gender-based violence issues – took part in a 5-day residential peace fellowship programme, exploring and highlighting the role of women in conflict mediation and resolution with a particular reference to UNSCR 1325. The evaluation has not been able to fully explore the profiles of the Fellows, and therefore cannot speak to the relevance of the selection.

There were a number of opportunities for the participants to engage with senior mediators, high-level UK politicians, EU parliamentarians and international decision-makers during the five-day fellowship. A constructive exchange of letters with Scottish First Minister Nicola Sturgeon has also been highlighted as a result, in which she reassured her commitment to supporting women's active involvement in the respective peace processes.

Whereas the fellowship has been described as useful and an interesting exercise, the planned follow-up has not fully materialized. The difficulty of keeping the group active after the Fellowship itself is also outlined in EIP reporting as one of the challenges of the work-stream. This seems like a missed opportunity. Even if the work-stream is not to be continued, the fellows that have already gone through the programme should be utilized to the greatest extent possible.

An independent Syrian women's track to augment the formal process

As part of the overall approach to broaden the space for Syrian voices in the peace process, a separate work-stream focusing on promoting women's participation in political processes and peace-making efforts in Syria was included under the project (although it is not in the project proposal). Direct interventions were planned to dedicate a number of sessions led by female peace activists from Syria, focusing on the role of women in conflicts and conflict resolution.

It has been described to the evaluator that EIP realized, in the preparation for these sessions that the same groups and individuals tended to be involved in several initiatives and that it would not make sense for EIP to provide yet another gathering for Syrian women. The UN OSE had also enhanced its efforts to work on female participation and established a Women's Advisory Board

(WAB) in early 2016. When a number of women from the WAB who were to participate in EIP's first 'women's roundtable' were invited to participate in a UN meeting in New York at the same time, it was decided not to move forward with the sessions at that time.

There are somewhat split views on this decision among stakeholders. Whereas some focus on the need to avoid duplication, others argue that it would have been possible to go beyond the 'usual suspects' and organise meetings and capacity building exercises with Syrian women who were not already working within Syrian civil society. The point was made that many Syrian women are highly educated and that it would have been interesting to explore cooperation with women who might not otherwise come into contact with the peace process.

The evaluation finds merit in both lines of argument. It is an important part of EIP's role in Syria to avoid duplicating the efforts of others and to engage in supplementary work. At the same time, there should not have been impossible for EIP to go beyond the obvious groups and identified alternative participants for its activities. The question then is whether EIP is the best actor to engage on that issue as a stand-alone strand of its programming. This will have to be answered within the broader discussion of EIP's strategic role in Syria.

It should be noted in this regard, that in EIP's assessment, the mechanisms and forums that have now been established to promote the inclusion of women in the peace process have not been sufficiently empowered or 'listened to' by formal actors. This is one of the reasons EIP decided to re-launch its planning for a broad-based consultation of Syrians on their country's future, in order to make these voices heard and known, including a specific focus on the voices of women and girls. This will be a central feature of the new Syria programme.

3.1.2.3 Objective 3 – Feed policy options and information emerging from Track 1.5 and 2 work into Track 1 political processes such as that by the UN Special Envoy for Syria to increase prospects for inclusive peace

Lobby and Public Diplomacy on priority issues emanating from objectives 1 and 2

The work-stream under objective three seeks to draw on outputs from objectives 1 and 2, and integrate lessons from this work into the political peace processes, in particular that of the Office of the UN Special Envoy for Syria. It is foreseen that EIP should engage in lobby activities (informed by HRBA), targeting the diplomatic community, regional powers, and government of key states. An indicator of achievement is seen as Track 1 actors act on policy recommendations put developed under the project and put forward by the EIP or partners.

EIP also committed to organise at least one public diplomacy effort to raise public awareness of the Syria peace process.

The results framework also foresees that EIP should engage to facilitate interaction between Track 1 actors and Syrian civil society or well-informed citizens, thereby increasing the relevance of the Track 1 process. Also under this work-stream, the results framework notes that EIP is expected to promote women's representation and participation in dialogue meetings.

In its Final Report, EIP highlights the many engagements of the Executive Directors and other members of the team with the UN OSE, key government officials and other high-level stakeholders. It is also highlighted that the various engagements have provided EIP with opportunities to channel messages from Track 2 actors to the Track 1 process through the UN

OSE. The Executive Director has also continuously advised these actors on policy and strategy in relation to the peace process and ceasefire negotiations.¹⁹

EIP has also engaged in public diplomacy efforts to raise awareness and impact policy making on Syria. The most notable example that is highlighted in reporting is an in-house media event that was organised together with FELM and CSI at EIP's premises in Brussels in April 2016. The event was titled "Syria in Global Media" and explored the international media's portrayal of the Syrian conflict with a view to uncover conflict narratives and journalism and the challenges of war/peace reporting. The event was attended by journalists, INGO representatives, EU policy-makers and Syria desk officers. CSI shared its global media review at the event and were appreciative of the opportunity to launch the study in Brussels.

3.2 Relevance (and aid effectiveness)

The project objectives sought to cover identified gaps in the context of international actors at different levels supporting the Syrian peace process – enhancing the understanding of the real interests and drivers of the Syrian government and people close to it, creating links between the Track 2 (and Track 3) efforts and the UN led Track 1 process, enhancing the opportunities for women to participate in the peace-making efforts, and promoting more effective information-sharing and light coordination of Track 2 actors engaged in support of peace in Syria.

These objectives – and the fact that they have been based on a gap analysis and an ambition to complement on-going efforts – are all fully consistent with EIP's overall approach and ambition to support the peace process.

Continuous analysis and engagement with the international community engaged in the Syria peace process, as well as regional and national actors, is part of the overall methodology of the project. This is important for continuously ensuring relevance of initiatives in relation to the changing needs and opportunities of the context. Over the first project period, EIP has had to be highly agile and adaptable to changing circumstances.

The ToR asks the evaluation to explore the extent to which the project purpose and methodology has enabled ownership by project stakeholders and/or beneficiaries. The project has several layers of stakeholders and beneficiaries. As outlined Annex 3 of the project proposal, the immediate beneficiaries of the project activities are Track 1-, Track 1.5-, and Track 2 actors participating in meetings and consultations. The final beneficiaries of activities targeting the Track 1 process are the Syrian population; for Track 1.5 processes the final beneficiaries of target group are political actors on all sides of the conflict; and in relation to Track 2 processes the final beneficiaries are the partners and rights-holders affected by the work of these agencies.

EIP has taken a careful approach to its engagement in the Syrian context and had a high emphasis on not duplicating or competing with other actors. Give the perception of EIP expressed by external actors in interviews, this approach seems to have been successful. Seeking of an auxiliary role to other actors, and not pushing an agenda on other stakeholders, is a good way to ensure that the immediate stakeholders retain the ownership of a process.

It is inherently difficult to ensure meaningful direct participation and ownership of the final beneficiaries in these types of projects. As noted in previous sections, however, the partnership with Common Space Initiative has helped EIP better understand and shape its strategic choices on the voices of Syrian communities and civil society actors. It has also been noted that the Track

¹⁹ The consultant has seen a number of e-mail exchanges providing examples of this type of advise.

2 coordination meetings have enabled EIP to gather perspectives of local actors from other Track 2 agencies that engage directly with Syrians. The overall approach of seeking to fill gaps and address identified needs is also conducive to listening to signals from the grass-roots level.

3.3 Impact

The impact level goal of the project is formulated as: “Contribute to peace process in Syria by facilitating regular interactive platforms for key international, regional and Syrian actors to share information and identify ways forward for an inclusive political solution to the crisis.” The indicators that were set for measuring progress towards this goal were: i) the integration of priorities and interests of the Syrian population in interim peace agreements; ii) a more constructive role played in Syria by regional powers; iii) Syrians enjoying increased levels of security, access to services and good governance; and iv) Syrians enjoying greater individual protections guided by international principles of human rights. There is no available evidence that any of these indicators have been fulfilled through the project, or that EIP has had significant influence on the factors that might lead to fulfilling them. Neither are there any available baseline values against which to measure change. This, however, says very little about the actual project performance. It rather points to the difficulty of using this type of results framework and indicators for a project that aims to gradually affect the mind-set of individuals and groups, find entry-points and opportunities for peace, and establish platforms for inclusive political processes.

The type of changes that the project was designed to inspire are part of long-term complex processes that cannot be measured in a meaningful way immediately after the first year of operation. It is, of course, possible to argue that several of individual activities under the project are likely to have contributed to the overall peace process – a view that is confirmed by key stakeholders in interviews. The significance of these contributions in relation to the stated impact goal, however, is not yet possible to assess. The nature of the goal itself – and the theory of change on which it builds – requires a sustained effort for a longer period of time than one year.

From available reporting the EIP Syria team also seems to have revised its expectations on the project throughout its implementation, noting under *‘Impact of the Project’* that EIP had managed to establish an EIP niche on Syria within the first year, that it had constructive initial engagement with potential Syrian stakeholders for a Track 1.5 process, and that it had enhanced the understanding of regional powers and laid the groundwork for future dialogues.

Whereas these are all important achievements – and frankly all that can be expected from this type of pilot project – they do not correspond with the impact level indicators outlined in the results framework. As outlined in the section on theory of change above, the project would need a system for monitoring and measuring results that takes into account the fluidity of the context of operation, and the fact that maintaining a process and/or a partnership is often a result in its own right.

In relation to the Track 2 coordination meetings and enhanced exchange and coordination between Track 2 and Track 1 actors, EIP rightly notes that it has had a significant effect that is likely to have strengthened the overall international efforts to support the Syrian peace process. It is also noted that the Track 2 coordination process has been a vessel for the voices of the Syrian people in relation to the peace process. This is an important contribution – partly confirmed by interviewed stakeholders. The same is true, to some degree, for the seven female peace activists that were trained as Women Peace Fellows in Scotland, and engaged in lobbying activities with European actors. This result does not seem to have been sustained, however, over time.

The most important impact that is noted in the Final report, however, is: “Building a strong foundation for the next phase of our strategy on Syria.”²⁰ The initial steps towards a Track 1.5 process, in which actors close to the governments and power centres in Syria, seems to hold a particularly important potential. Several stakeholders confirm that not enough focus is placed on understanding the interests and drivers of key Syrian actors, including the Government. There are also several potential areas where intensive work will be needed in order to prepare for and implement a peace agreement once a breakthrough is reached in the peace process. Building the national ‘support structures for peace’, as one stakeholder put it, will be incredibly important and EIP is well placed to support such processes.

The investments made in laying the groundwork for renewed dialogues between regional powers and other countries with interests in and influence over the conflict dynamics also hold an important potential. Over the project period, EIP seems to have built a strong basis for further engagement.

In the current situation of intensified deadlock in negotiations, this type of process may prove immensely important to explore and promote new angles and approaches to the overall peace efforts. Whereas the quantitative target was clearly not reached in the project period, the work that has been done to lay the foundations for a continued process may prove to be even more valuable to the bigger picture.

3.4 Effectiveness and Efficiency

In a strict sense, the project has not been very effective in terms of delivering on the results outlined in the results framework – with the exception of the ‘light coordination’ of Track 2 actors and the Women Peace Fellowship under objective 2, and some aspects of objective 3. As noted under impact above, tangible contributions towards the overall goal of the project are difficult to find. However, taking a broader view of the project and its function for EIP and its key donor, there is reason not to be too hard in the assessment of project performance. It is the assessment of the evaluator that the problem is rather an overly ambitious project document than a lacking effort or capacity in implementation.

The project period under review constituted EIP’s first year of operating in the Syrian context. The project was implemented with a great deal of caution and flexibility, focusing on establishing and nurturing relationships with key actors and building a brand in the context. In many ways the project has the characteristics of a pilot initiative, exploring where EIP can add value and how EIP’s comparative advantages can best be leveraged. This is perfectly natural approach during the first year of engagement in a particular context.

The project document, however, is not formulated as a pilot project. Targets are rather ambitious and there is little recognition of the fact that EIP had not previously as an organisation engaged in the Syrian context. Instead, focus was placed on the extensive experience that EIP’s senior management and staff had from the conflict and with key actors in the peace process. This experience has proved invaluable for EIP’s ability to operate and take the important steps that have been taken in the first year – but it has not been automatically translated into organisational credibility.

Slow progress or non-achievement of targets have typically caused by dramatic changes in the operational context and EIP adapting its approach accordingly. Some activities have been

²⁰ Final Report to the Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland: Syrian Voices – Exploring inclusive solutions for peace in Syria (31 August 2016), p. 22.

postponed or cancelled as EIP realised that others were already engaged in similar activities with the same stakeholders, others have been postponed because changes in the political context and dynamics have changed and dialogue has not been feasible. These considerations have been outlined and explained in reporting. In some instances, the lack of progress towards objectives can also be explained by an overly ambitious project document and to some degree unrealistic targets.

It is reasonable to see the first project phase as a pilot through which a solid basis has been laid for future programming. This has been further outlined under *impact* above.

3.5 Sustainability

The first year of implementation has been very important as a foundation for continued EIP engagement in Syria. EIP has built relationships and credibility with key stakeholders and learned more about where the organisation fits in the context of the Syrian peace process.

Particularly the steps taken towards establishing a Track 1.5 process in relation to the Syrian peace process, both Syrian-Syrian dialogue and regional/international dialogues, seems to hold an important potential. A number of stakeholders noted that the stalemate in the formal peace process called for innovative approaches and exploration of new entry points and paths towards peace. The groundwork laid by the project may well prove to be sustainable if these partnerships are continuously nourished.

It is clear that the 'light coordination' meetings for Track 2 actors organised together with Search for Common Ground (and in the early stages NOREF) have been appreciated and a welcome forum for sharing information and perspectives. This forum could be utilized for different purposes in a future programme. Whereas it seems important to maintain a forum for international Track 2 actors, the network could also be further used as a platform for dialogue with local Syrian actors and interests, to strengthen links with the Track 1 peace process, and to interact with Track 1.5 actors and or government representatives.

The invitation of ISSG members to the meetings have been a good start – but there seems to be a need for further clarity on the specific purpose of the participation of state actors in order to fully utilise potential. Are they primarily there as donor representatives, or as target groups and/or stakeholders in the Track 1 process? This will, of course vary from time to time, but it is important that the invitation is sufficiently targeted to get the right persons involved.

The work under objective 3 seems to have made important contributions to the flow of information and for raising awareness in relation to the Syrian peace process and possible pathways forward. By its nature, these types of actions will need to be sustained in order for the results to be sustainable. There does not yet seem to have been any 'breakthrough story' that has come out of the project and taken on a sustained life of its own.

Under the heading of *Sustainability*, the terms of reference asks the evaluation to answer the question to what extent the inclusion and gender approach of the EIP will have a positive effect on the Syria peace process and the follow-up to a political settlement. Given the limited tangible results of the EIP project on the overall peace process to date, and the fact that no specific gender or inclusion approach has been identified (beyond the specific work-stream on Women Peace Fellowship), the answer to this question is that the project is not at this stage likely to have any effect in this regard. The project documents sets a number of specific targets for female representation and participation, but these targets do not seem to be followed up in reporting.

There is an argument to be made, however, that the continuation of the project could well have such effects in the future. This would require a serious and concentrated focus on this objective throughout EIP's programming. It is the view of the evaluator that a solid mainstreaming approach, ensuring gendered analyses and promoting women's participation in all activities, is a more constructive way forward than specific women-centered activities.

3.6 Coherence

There is a myriad of international peacebuilding organisations engaged in various processes in support of the Syrian peace process. The conflict had been going on since 2011 and several organisations had been involved for years when EIP entered the stage. Acutely aware of this fact, EIP has taken a careful approach to its engagement in Syria, seeking complementarity with actors and initiatives already underway. It has worked hard not to be seen as competition by others. From what has emerged in this evaluation, this seems to have been a successful strategy.

Stakeholders have noted that the main reason that the work-stream on women's participation has not been more aggressively pursued, was that EIP realized that other actors (including the UN OSE) were already pursuing similar projects. Whereas this leaves a hole in the results matrix, it can easily be argued that the decision to postpone activities in this area was a responsible response to changing facts on the ground.

EIP has sought out partnerships that have been mutually beneficial for stakeholders. An example is the cooperation with Search for Common Ground on the Track 2 'light coordination' meetings. These Track 2 meetings have in themselves been designed to ensure enhanced coherence among Track 2 actors and avoid duplication. The meetings have been welcomed by key peacebuilding and mediation organisations.

Another example is the work conducted with Common Space Initiative (CSI) on Track 1.5 and other outreach activities. The partnership has been mutually beneficial as CSI has gained access to EIP's networks in Europe and Brussels.

3.7 Governance structure

The Syria project was to be managed by a Programme Manager, supported by a Programme Assistant and a Trainee. For much of the project period, however, the Programme Manager and trainee positions have been vacant. The current Programme Manager did not join EIP until March 2016. Whereas the project has been supported by external consultants, and for parts of the period by a part-time advisor from CSI, the sustained vacancies have meant that the Director of Programmes have had to step in to support the management of the Syria project, diverting her attention from other parts of the organisation. A lesson is therefore that vacancies cannot be allowed for any prolonged period of time.

Staff turnover has clearly been a distraction, but overall, there is nothing to indicate that the project implementation and performance have suffered from lacking human resources. There also seems to be broad agreement that the current setup (with all positions are filled) is sufficient to take on the workload of the project going forward. The character of the new project, will likely require more cooperation with and utilization of the resources of external actors.

The project has clearly benefited from the extensive experience and vast network of the Executive Director, Martin Griffiths, and this is often noted as one of the major comparative advantages of EIP. The support from senior management in the implementation of the Syria project has clearly

been very important. The experience and dedication of EIP staff is also often mentioned as one of the organisations strengths. This is a good thing. It will be important, however, to make sure to build structures and processes to ensure institutionalization of these qualities and reduce the reliance on key individuals.

4. Conclusions & Recommendations

This evaluation set out to assess the project's overall effectiveness and achievements and identify factors influencing the achievement of results. The following section outlines the key conclusions of the evaluation, based on the findings presented above, and provides recommendations for future EIP programming in Syria.

4.1 Conclusions

The key conclusion of this evaluation is that the Syrian Voices project has been an important starting point for EIP's engagement in Syria. It should be kept in mind that the agenda that was set in the project document was very ambitious considering that the project period was the first year of operation for EIP in Syria – and that EIP itself had just become operational as an Institute. Whereas progress in several areas of the project has been slow – and in some cases plans have not materialised at all – a solid foundation has been laid for continued constructive engagement for peace in Syria.

This evaluation has held that the slow progress and absence of tangible results in some areas of the project is mainly due to over-ambitious planning, and the use of a linear planning model, rather than lacking effort or capacity of the EIP Syria team. Delays and/or non-achievement of targets have typically been caused by dramatic changes in the operational environment and EIP adapting its approach accordingly. The considerations behind decisions to postpone or cancel activities have been outlined and explained in reporting.

EIP appears to have been a constructive and appreciated partner, and managed to stay true to its ambition to seek a complementary role and not to duplicate the efforts of others. It has navigated a complex environment with multiple international actors and built a niche for its future programming in the context.

Whereas EIP has been an appreciated partner, the one-year project cycle has sometimes been confusing for external actors. Some noted that EIP seemed overly focused on activities rather than the long-term process. Even if funding is limited in time, it is advisable to have a longer-term strategic plan, outlining the long-term vision for the organisation's engagement in a particular context – building on identified comparative advantages. An overall Syria strategy, reaching beyond the current funding period, would signal to partners and stakeholders that there is a long-term commitment and direction. Such a strategy would of-course have to take into account the fluidity of the context and must be flexible enough to adapt to changes on the ground and in the regional and international dynamics.

In terms of achievements during the project period, the Track 2 'light coordination' has been highlighted by stakeholders as the most tangible result of the project period – providing a much needed forum for Track 2 actors to exchange information in order to reduce the risk of duplication and a potential platform for joint advocacy initiatives. The inclusion of the UN OSE in these meetings was highly appreciated by participants. The idea to include government representatives in the meetings has also been seen as constructive. It was noted, however, that the role of the different types of actors at these meetings might need to be more clearly defined.

The planned targets were also mostly reached in relation to the Women Peace Fellowship under objective 2. Some important outreach was conducted in connection with the fellowship itself. After the participants went back to their home countries, however, there does not seem to have been any structured follow-up activities. This appears to be a missed opportunity in terms of keeping the network alive and promoting the participation of the fellows in key processes.

Whereas the engagement for women peace activists have most likely been a positive experience for the participants and some constructive public diplomacy efforts have been recorded, this does not appear to be an area where EIP has a particular comparative advantage. It would make more sense for EIP to seek to thoroughly mainstream gender into its analytical frameworks, partnerships and interventions, and endeavour to include women in all its activities. In this role, EIP could have an auxiliary effect in relation to actors engaged specifically on empowering women and building women's capacity.

Gender mainstreaming in general, and the promotion of women's representation and participation, is an area where more could have been expected from EIP's first year of implementation in Syria (at least according to available documentation). The ambition to actively promote representation and participation of women is noted in relation to all work-streams in the project document. However, the final report does not follow-up on any such efforts and no gender-disaggregated data is provided in relation to sponsored activities.

The most important result of the first year of operation in the Syrian context appears to be that the foundation has been laid for a continued engagement. There is broad agreement that one of the key comparative advantages of the EIP is its proximity to European governments (without being tainted with their political past) and its close relationship with the OSE. Associated with this is EIP's ability to navigate naturally among both Track 1 and Track 2 actors, making the organisation uniquely positioned to promote Track 1.5 processes to explore pathways forward. This is becoming increasingly important as the Track 1 process has stalled. Stakeholders (internal and external) have highlighted the great potential in continuing both the regional/ international Track 1.5 efforts and efforts targeting Syrians specifically.

The Syrian-Syrian Track 1.5 meeting in June 2016 has been highlighted as an important first step in a long-term process. This should be taken forward in one or more structured processes shaped around the group's conclusions and lessons from the first meeting. It will be important in this regard, that EIP continues to seek opportunities to fill gaps, utilize its unique comparative advantages and avoid duplication with other actors. There are, for example, important potential synergies with EIP's work with Syrian armed oppositions groups. It is also important to maintain the progress made in relation to regional actors – awaiting a change in the political situation that will allow for continued dialogue.

Diplomacy and promotion of peace takes time and it is often necessary to wait for the right time to act. It is therefore often difficult to plan these types of projects along linear log-frame and theory of change models. Whereas this type of model may be helpful in planning activities and explain how they relate to the overall objectives, relying on them to encompass the overall effort will often lead to unattainable expectations and/or limitations of the flexibility needed to continuously rethink and tailor approaches to the needs in the context. EIP would therefore benefit from designing a theory of change and results framework that is more focused the changes that the project aspires to achieve and the mechanism by which such change can be affected, maintaining the flexibility to define activities and intermediary results depending on developments in the context and opportunities that arise along the way. It might be worth exploring innovative monitoring and evaluation methodologies such as outcome

mapping/harvesting. Any such model would, however, need to be adapted and tailored to the specific organisational and contextual factors of each project or programme.

4.2 Recommendations

Based on the findings and conclusions of this evaluation, the evaluator offers the following recommendations for EIP's continued programming and implementation in Syria.

- 1) The evaluation recommends that EIP continues its engagement in Syria with a maintained focus on playing an auxiliary role in relation to on-going processes and filling gaps in support of more inclusive political processes in Syria – building on the foundation that has been laid during the first year of implementation.
- 2) EIP is recommended to continue its efforts to seek a better understanding of the interests and drivers of various Syrian actors (Government and opposition) and pursue intra-Syrian Track 1.5 dialogues – drawing on the lessons of the process so far and seeking to utilize its unique comparative advantages. Synergies should be sought between all EIP work-streams in the Syrian context.
- 3) It is further recommended that EIP also continues its networking and consultation with regional and international actors with interests in and influence over conflict dynamics, with a view to identify opportunities to reengage in Track 1.5 dialogues at the regional and international levels.
- 4) The evaluation recommends that the Track 2 'light coordination' meetings continue and be further developed. Continued and enhanced linkages with UN OSE and the Track 1 process should also be considered. The specific purpose and role of non-Track 2 actors that are invited should be more clearly defined and communicated.
- 5) Particularly the efforts within the framework of the Track 2 coordination processes to bridge gaps between Track 1, 2 and 3 processes and promote sharing of information and perspectives across these levels should be continued and further strengthened.
- 6) EIP is recommended to strengthen its efforts to mainstream a gender perspective into its analytical models and interventions, and efforts to actively promote representation and participation of women in the various tracks of the peace process. Gender disaggregated reporting is recommended to ensure effective monitoring and follow-up of these efforts.
- 7) EIP is further recommended to develop a multi-year strategy that goes beyond the current funding period, building on identified comparative advantages and setting out principles and priorities for continued engagement (not necessarily work-streams and activities), reassuring partners and stakeholders that EIP is committed to a long-term engagement in support of peace in Syria.
- 8) The strategy should encompass the totality of EIP's work in and on Syria and focus on drawing upon potential synergies between its work-streams. It should focus on the bigger picture rather than specific processes or activities.
- 9) It is further recommended that EIP seeks to develop a new model for project planning, monitoring and evaluation to more clearly allow for flexibility and responsiveness to the changing external factors and lessons throughout the project implementation (see point on theory of change above). 'Outcome mapping'/'outcome harvesting' might be an interesting approach to explore, but any model or approach needs to be adapted and tailored to the specific characteristics of EIP and its project/programmes.
- 10) In connection with the recommendation above, it is also recommended that EIP engage in a close dialogue with its key donors explaining the unpredictability of EIP's work in Syria and agree on a workable planning and reporting framework for the project. A closer dialogue with the donor(s) could supplement written reporting and give a fuller picture of the rationale behind decisions and changes in project plans. Regular briefings also facilitate reporting of sensitive information that should not be put into written reporting.

Annex 1 – List of interviews

<i>Name</i>	<i>Title</i>	<i>Organisation</i>
Martin Griffiths	Executive Director	European Institute of Peace
Monique Vanes	Programmes Director	European Institute of Peace
Manu Bargues	Programme Manager	European Institute of Peace
Maria Chalhoub	Programme Assistant	European Institute of Peace
Antonia Potterprentice	Senior Adviser	European Institute of Peace
Mahmoud Ramadan	Senior Adviser	European Institute of Peace; and Syria Initiative, Common Spaces Initiative
Jussi Nummelin	First Secretary, MENA Unit	Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Finland
Janne Oksanen	Desk Officer, Mediation Team	Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Finland
Mark Brakel	Desk Officer, Syria & Lebanon	Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands
Niklas Kebbon	Ambassador, Special Repr for the Syria Crisis	Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Sweden
Christina Shaheen	Programme Specialist	Office of the UN Special Envoy for Syria
Sara Hellmüller	Senior Programme Officer	Swisspeace
Claudia Maffetone	Programme Manager	Search for Common Ground
Minna Saarnivaara	Project Coordinator	Finish Evangelical Lutheran Mission
Aziz Hallaj	Expert	Syria Initiative, Common Spaces Initiative
John Bell	Director ME&Med Progr	Toledo International Centre for Peace
Shaza Shannan	Director, Middle East	1001 Inventions
<i>Consulted via e-mail</i>		
Jukka Halkilahti	Desk Officer, Syria	Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland
Mariano Aguirre	Director	NOREF

Some names are not disclosed at the request of informants.

Annex 2 – List of documents

European Institute of Peace

Biannual Progress Report to the Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland: Syrian Voices – Exploring inclusive solutions for peace in Syria (29 February 2016)

Final Report to the Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland: Syrian Voices – Exploring inclusive solutions for peace in Syria (31 August 2016)

Grant Agreement (November 2015) – Finland and EIP – Syrian Voices – Exploring inclusive solutions for peace in Syria

Project Proposal to the Government of Finland: Syrian Voices – Exploring inclusive solutions for peace in Syria (August 2015)

The Women in Conflict Initiative – Peace and Recovery Fellowship Programme: Report (With Beyond Borders)

Various meeting agendas, notes and minutes from EIP sponsored activities, including regional roundtable 15 May 2015 and Syrian-Syrian dialogue 16-20 June 2016; as well as Track II coordination Meetings in September 2015, February 2016, and June 2016; and letters exchanged between the Women Peace Fellows and the First Minister of Scotland

UN Documents

UN Human Rights Council (11 August 2016) – Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic (A/HRC/33/55)

UN Security Council Resolution 2254; S/RES/2254 (2015)

UN Security Council Resolution 2268; S/RES/2268 (2016)

Other Sources

Joint Statement of the United States and the Russian Federation, as Co-Chairs of the ISSG, on Cessation of Hostilities in Syria, 22 February 2016; <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2016/02/253115.htm>

“Mediator’s Summary of the 13-27 Round of UN Facilitated Intra-Syrian Talks

OECD (2012), ‘Evaluating Peacebuilding Activities in Settings of Conflict and Fragility: Improving Learning for Results’. OECD Publishing

The Geneva Communiqué” - Action Group for Syria – Final Communiqué, 30 June 2012

“The Vienna Communiqué” - Statement of the International Syria Support Group Vienna, 14 November 2015

Annex 3 – Terms of Reference

Terms of Reference for the External Evaluation of the Grant by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Finland of the Project “Syrian Voices: Exploring inclusive solutions for peace in Syria”

I. Overall context and programme background

The European Institute of Peace (EIP) is an independent institute founded in 2014 in Brussels and focuses on mediation, facilitated dialogue and diplomacy for the prevention and resolution of violent conflict. It works on a number of violent conflicts in Europe’s periphery, including Syria.

In November 2015, the European Institute of Peace (EIP) received the amount of 400.000 Euros for the project entitled “Syrian voices – Exploring inclusive solutions for peace in Syria” which was implemented from 01 August 2015 to 31 July 2016. The grant was dedicated to contributing to peace efforts in Syria by facilitating regular interactive platforms for key international, regional and Syrian actors to share information and identify ways forward for an inclusive political solution to the crisis.

1. Programme context

The Syrian war broke out in early spring of 2011. More than four years after the start of the war, various actors were actively engaged in efforts to support a political solution for the conflict but did so with minimal coordination between them. The EIP’s stand point relied on the fact that there was potential to enhance effectiveness of the peace efforts by increased dialogue and information-sharing, and by bringing Track 2 and 1.5 closer to the Track 1 political process.

This project approach was to benefit the UN Special Envoy’s Track 1 diplomacy efforts, as the European Institute of Peace (EIP) and its allies would feed it with information and policy recommendations to inform its strategy for peace in Syria. The Track 1 actors could not possibly link with the full plethora of Syrian groups. Agencies such as the EIP could serve as intermediary and provide much-needed analysis of groups (rights holders) which were not yet being heard or understood. The project would create the necessary bridges between actors nationally and in the region. Decision-makers and influential individuals were convened to develop options for peace and assess these integrated into Track 1 diplomacy. The project would also support the UN Office of the Special Envoy’s (OSE) efforts to consult with a wide spectrum of Syrian actors by facilitating contacts between actors engaged in Track 1, Track 1.5 and Track 2 diplomacy for Syria.

2. Description of the programme

The overall goal of the programme was to contribute to peace process in Syria by facilitating regular

interactive platforms for key international, regional and Syrian actors to share information and identify ways forward for an inclusive political solution to the crisis.

To attain a peaceful solution in Syria, the Track 1 diplomacy process needed to be supported. To this effect, the EIP had pursued a three-pronged approach:

I. Contribute to a more favorable environment for peace by *convening Track 1.5 dialogues to unpack and regional and national interests* influencing the crisis in Syria.

II. *Convene Track 2 actors to help scale up their impact* by greater information-sharing, light coordination, exploiting opportunities for complementarity, updating of leading actors involved in Track 1 (OSE), and formulating policy options.

III. *Feed policy options and information emerging from our Track 1.5 and 2 work into Track 1 political processes* such as that by the UN Special Envoy for Syria to increase prospects for inclusive peace.

The various stakeholders that we worked within the framework of the programme were following: Syrians, including former ministers, diplomats, heads of political movements and former ambassadors, close to the centers of powers with influence over the Government or the opposition; Syrian women involved in Track 1 and Track 3 processes; Senior personalities close to Governments of Saudi Arabia, Iran, Egypt, Jordan, Syria, Israel, Russia, Spain, the U.K. and the U.S.; Members of the Government of the International Syria Support Group; and the Office of the Special Envoy for the Syria crisis (OSE).

II. Objectives of the evaluation

01 August 2015 to 31 July 2016 constituted the first year of programming for what is expected to be a longer-term EIP approach to support the peace process in Syria; as such, it required relationship-building and set-up to enable the EIP to begin implementation towards its objectives. This is the first Syria related project by EIP that the Government of Finland has funded. As it is relatively nascent, it has not been subject to any previous evaluation. However, the Finnish government has requested that there be a final evaluation to assess the project's overall effectiveness and achievements. An amount of 10,000 Euros has been allocated within the funds provided to carry out this evaluation by 5th September 2016 at the latest.

The primary users of the evaluation will be:

- The Finnish Ministry of Foreign Affairs which provided the funds;
- The EIP (grantee) who has delivered the project.

From the perspective of the Finnish Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA), the external evaluation will serve to assess if the objectives of cooperation have been achieved and understood, assessed what worked and the reason why. In addition, this evaluation is expected to produce evidence and

recommendations for decision making for continuous quality improvements of development cooperation.

For the EIP, the evaluation of this first year of the Syria programme will help inform the EIP's longer-term strategy of intervention in Syria. The lesson learnt of this programme will also be useful for the EIP's programme delivery in other countries, such as the support to the peace processes in Yemen and Libya.

The evaluation aims to also assess specifically, the **relevance, impact, effectiveness, efficiency, aid effectiveness, sustainability and coherence and the governance structure** of the project.

For each of the criteria a series of questions will be addressed:

- **Relevance:**

1. To what extent were the objectives of the programme consistent with the EIP's overall ambition of supporting the peace process in Syria?

- **Impact:**

2. To what extent has the overall goal of this project been achieved?
3. One year into the programme implementation, to what extent has the project contributed to wider peace efforts in Syria and to the potential for a peaceful settlement of the crisis?
4. To what extent the achievements attained of this project will contribute to the overall peace process?

- **Effectiveness:**

5. To what extent the results contributed to reaching the overall goal of the project; if any results have not been attained within the given time frame of this project, could these results be achieved in the future? Assess and analyse the external factors which are beyond EIP's project teams' control that affected the results of the project.
6. Are there any unexpected results which have not been identified in the project (if so, which ones are they)?

- **Efficiency:**

7. Were the activities implemented as planned? In case any have not been implemented as planned, assess the rationale for adjustments, and to which extent the EIP sought to address challenges to implementation.

- **Aid effectiveness:**

8. To what extent the project purpose and methodology enabled ownership by

project stakeholders and/or beneficiaries (including ownership by women, representatives of minorities and/or excluded groups)?

- Sustainability:

9. To what extent did year 1 of the project lay the foundations for a multi-year theory of change for Syria by the EIP? (What can be built on, going forward?)

10. To what extent the inclusion and gender approach of the EIP will have a positive effect on the Syria peace process, and, if appropriate, the follow-up to a political settlement?

- Coherence:

11. To what extent this project reinforces other past and ongoing initiatives with the aim to reinforce the Syrian peace process?

- Governance structure:

12. What are the lessons from the implementation of the project, which could inform organisational learning and future programming by the EIP?

III. Methodology

The consultant who will be selected for the evaluation, is expected to design the overall methodological approach for the evaluation during the inception phase, including but not necessarily limited to desk review and stakeholder interviews. Once it has been drafted it will be shared with EIP for its feedback for final endorsement.

The evaluation will be a participatory process, promoting maximum input from the project team. The interviewees to be conducted should target: staff from the Office of the Special Envoy for the Syria crisis, independent representatives and staff from organisations that have participated in the EIP facilitated dialogues and track 2 meetings, EIP staff, focal points for the grant and the project in the Finnish Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Most of the interviews will be carried out via phone or Skype.

The assessment will use qualitative and quantitative methods to evaluate the impact and effectiveness of the project

IV. The evaluation time schedule

Here is an indicative time line which will have to be followed by the consultant and adjusted to the his/her availability:

Actions to be undertaken	Indicative time frame
---------------------------------	------------------------------

Receive the offers based on the advertised ToR, and review of the bids by internal selection committee	Week 33
Inform the selected evaluator	Week 34
Start of the evaluation	Week 35
Inception report/Fine-tuning of methodology and work plan which will be used by the evaluator	Week 36
First Draft of the evaluation	By week 39
EIP provide feedback	By week 40
Second draft ready	By week 41
EIP provide final round of comments	At the latest by Week 42
Evaluation sent to the Finnish MFA	Week 44

V. Expected deliverables

1. The main output

One report in English (excluding annexes). The report should present the findings, conclusions and recommendations of the evaluation. For the evaluation, the EIP team will provide additional project documents and progress reports. The following elements are required to be included in the report:

- **An executive summary which briefly describes the subject, purpose and methods of the evaluation, and summarises the main findings, conclusions and recommendations.** Findings should be based on analysis of the data, and must be relevant to the evaluation questions. Conclusions should be evidence-based, logically connected to the findings, and highlight the strengths, weaknesses and outcomes of the intervention.
- An introduction
- Description of the context and the evaluated project/programme
- Key findings
- Conclusions

- Recommendations
- Annexes

VI. Organisation and conduct of the evaluation

- The first and final draft of the final evaluation report will be reviewed by the EIP. The focal points at the EIP who will review the report are the programme's director, Mrs Monique van Es (monique.vanes@eip.org) and the Syria programme manager, M. Manu Barges (manu.barges@eip.org).
- The EIP will send the final evaluation report to the Finnish Ministry of Foreign Affairs.
- The conduct of the evaluation should conform to *Evaluation Manual of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Finland* and the *MFA Guidelines for the Development of Development Cooperation*.
- As the evaluation is a requirement by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Finland in the grant document, and since it serves an accountability objective, it is imperative that the evaluators are independent of the activities that are to be evaluated. No person on the evaluation team should have a stake in the outcome of the evaluation.

VII. Oversight and quality assurance

The EIP Program Director will ensure that the process passes two levels of review. The primary aim of quality assurance will be to verify (i) that the report conforms with the ToR, and (ii) that it provides the required evidence to ensure that its findings are credible and linked to its findings conclusions and recommendations.

The procurement will be conducted via a process whereby consultants would be invited to bid. The process will be managed by the Programme directorate with support from the directorate for Finance, Administration and Human Resources. The EIP will set up an internal selection committee to review the the received bids and select the best offer.

The EIP office in Brussels, which will oversee its commissioning and execution, will ensure that the selected entity develops an Inception Report/Work Plan for the evaluation that is in line with the ToR and that the final evaluation report provide evidence based findings, conclusions, and recommendations.

VIII. Guidelines for the submission of the evaluation of the proposal

Evaluation manual of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Finland:

<http://formin.finland.fi/public/default.aspx?contentid=288455&nodeid=15145&contentlan=2&culture=en-US>

IX. Expertise required

The selected consultant must comply with the below mentioned requirements:

- A minimum of 7 years of proven track record in conducting external evaluations of grants being funded by institutional donors, including in particular evaluations of actions by non-governmental organisations, and evaluations of projects focussing on peacemaking and/or conflict transformation;
- Experience in conducting evaluation of projects funded by the Finnish MFA would be preferred;
- Experience in using quantitative and qualitative evaluation methods;
- Experience working with a wide range of stakeholders particularly working with diplomats, officials of Governments and EU- and UN-Institutions, civil society organisations, international organisations is preferred;
- Knowledge of the regional geopolitical context is preferred;
- Discretion in dealing with confidential and sensitive information.

X. Submission of the offer

The offer would include the following:

1. A cover letter recapitulating the understanding of the context and describing suitability to conduct the evaluation.
2. A technical offer providing the following information:
 - Detailed methodology indicating the approach which will be used;
 - How the evaluation will be completed based on the ToR; and
 - A detailed work plan outlining precisely when the various deliverables will be completed.
3. A financial offer with a detailed budget for the various activities proposed with the corresponding cost.
4. At least three examples of external evaluations of projects funded by an institutional donor that you have conducted.

All of the above mentioned documents are to be submitted in English electronically before **21/08/2016** to info@eip.org (for each of the sent files please ensure that your family name is indicated on the title)

Annex 4 – Evaluation Matrix

Overarching evaluation principles and approach	
<p>The evaluation should be seen from the perspective of its two primary stakeholders. For the Finish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the evaluation will serve to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Assess if the objectives of the cooperation have been achieved and understood;- Help understand what worked and why; and- Provide an evidence-base for decision-making and continuous improvements of the quality of the cooperation. <p>From the perspective of the European Institute of Peace, the evaluation will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Help inform the longer-term strategy for engagement in Syria,; and- Draw lessons that can be used to improve programming in other countries, such as Yemen and Libya. <p>The evaluation will be undertaken with a highly i participatory approach, involving EIP management and staff in each step of the evaluation process. The evaluation will also be conducted with a context focused and theory based approach.</p> <p>The evaluation team will use two primary sources of data:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">Review of relevant and available project documentation; andIn-depth interviews with key project stakeholders, primarily through Skype and telephone. <p>The evaluation will focus on the OECD/DAC criteria: <i>relevance, impact, effectiveness, efficiency, sustainability, and coherence</i>, and also assess the <i>governance structure</i> of the EIP as relates to the implementation of the project. The evaluation will also be conducted with reference to the OECD guideline: 'Evaluating Peacebuilding Activities in Settings of Conflict and Fragility: Improving Learning for Results'.</p>	
Criteria and key evaluation questions	Approach and sources of verification

<p><i>Relevance (and aid effectiveness)</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - To what extent were the objectives of the programme consistent with the EIP's overall ambition of supporting the peace process in Syria? - To what extent the project purpose and methodology enabled ownership by project stakeholders and/or beneficiaries? 	<p>In determining the extent to which project has been relevant, and consistent with the overall ambition of supporting the peace processes in Syria, the evaluator will first examine the measure taken by EIP to ensure relevance in this regard– i.e. its contextual analyses and analysis of ongoing processes, and the degree to which this analysis has shaped the theory of change underpinning the project. The analysis of EIP's theory of change will be conducted on an overarching organisational- as well as on a project specific level.</p> <p>To the extent possible within the tight timeframe of the evaluation, the evaluator will also make its own assessment (based on available open-source documentation) of the regional and national contexts in relation to the Syrian conflict and on-going peace processes, in order to properly assess the analysis of EIP and contextualise the project for the purposes of the evaluation.</p> <p>For the assessment of the extent to which the methodology has enabled ownership by project stakeholders and/or beneficiaries, interviews with these stakeholders will be the most important source of information. In this regard, the evaluator will also look specifically at how gender aspects and the perspectives of potentially marginalised groups have been integrated into programming, implementation and reporting.</p> <p>Whereas programme documentation and reports will be an important source of information in this regard, meetings with programme stakeholders will be equally important. Interviews will be structured in a manner that will allow stakeholders to make their own reflections and speak to the project's strengths and weaknesses from their own perspectives.</p>
<p><i>Impact</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - To what extent has the overall goal of this project been achieved? - One year into the programme implementation, to what extent has the project contributed to wider peace efforts in Syria and to the potential for a peaceful settlement of the crisis? - To what extent the achievements attained of this project will contribute to the overall peace process? 	<p>It is difficult in any evaluation to show impact and prove the contribution of a project at this level, particularly in projects aiming to affect change in highly complex political processes. Impact also refers to long-term results of project activities and might therefore not be visible directly after the project has been implemented. Nevertheless, the evaluator will seek to identify any incremental progress towards impact level goals or indications of EIP contributions to goals at that level. Another way in which the evaluation will approach <i>impact</i> is to assess the likelihood of project results leading to the planned impact in the medium- to long-term perspective (looking at the intervention logic and Theory of Change on which the project has been based).</p> <p>The evaluation will actively seek linkages between identified changes at impact level with the various activities and results achieved under the project. In its analysis of the project contribution to changes, the evaluator will consider other contextual factors and other key actors that have been promoting change in relevant areas.</p>
<p><i>Effectiveness</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - To what extent the results contributed to 	<p>The evaluation will assess if the EIP has a system in place for monitoring change at the overall level and linking such changes to implemented activities.</p>

<p>reaching the overall goal of the project; if any results have not been attained within the given time frame of this project, could these results be achieved in the future? Assess and analyze the external factors that are beyond EIP's project teams' control that affected the results of the project.</p> <p>- Are there any unexpected results, which have not been identified in the project?</p>	<p>The team will seek to establish the degree to which outputs and outcomes foreseen in the project's results framework have been achieved. The data sources will be programme reports as well as in-depth interviews with key stakeholders (partners and beneficiaries). In assessing results, the team will also seek to identify process-results and incremental progress towards objectives, as well as any unintended effects of programme interventions.</p> <p>The team will seek contextual factors that have been driving the achievement or non-achievement of planned results. Interviews with key stakeholders as well as the context analysis will be important sources in this regard. As noted in the ToR a central point of departure will be the knowledge and experience of programme stakeholders, particularly the staff of EPI staff and key partners.</p>
<p><i>Efficiency</i></p> <p>- Were the activities implemented as planned? In case any have not been implemented as planned, assess the rationale for adjustments, and to which extent the EIP sought to address challenges to implementation.</p>	<p>Based on available project documentation, the evaluator will assess the degree to which activities have been implemented as planned, i.e. the degree to which project activities have <i>transformed</i> available resources into intended outputs (quantity, quality and time).</p> <p>The project's flexibility to changing circumstances and adjustments made throughout the year of project implementation will be assessed in this context. To the extent possible, the evaluator will also (through interviews with EIP staff and partners) explore how decisions have been made and if alternative ways of achieving the same results have been considered.</p> <p>As efficient project implementation requires systematic work processes and clear roles and divisions of responsibility, these factors will be also used as indicators of efficient operations.</p>
<p><i>Sustainability</i></p> <p>- To what extent did year 1 of the project lay the foundations for a multi-year theory of change for Syria by the EIP? (What can be built on, going forward?)</p> <p>- To what extent the inclusion and gender approach of the EIP will have a positive effect on the Syria peace process, and, if appropriate, the follow-up to a political settlement?</p>	<p>As noted in the key evaluation question relating to sustainability, the primary focus of the assessment will be on the degree to which the results, experiences and lessons of the first year of implementation can be used to formulate a theory of change for continued programming in the Syrian context (and/or beyond). A central part of this assessment will focus on the systems and/or mechanisms in place within EIP to draw lessons from its project implementation and integrate these lessons in the refinement of projects and programmes.</p> <p>The views of EIP staff, as well as the perspectives of external stakeholders, will be the key source of information in this regard. The degree to which there is a sense of ownership of the project and its achievements, as well as alignment with local priorities and initiatives, is also highly important for the overall sustainability of project achievements.</p> <p>The assessment of sustainability will also assess the effects of EIP gender approach on the overall Syria peace process. This will be assessed both through discussions with project stakeholders and an overarching analysis of EIP's theory of change in this regard.</p>

<p><i>Coherence</i></p> <p>- To what extent this project reinforces other past and ongoing initiatives with the aim to reinforce the Syrian peace process?</p>	<p>The assessment of coherence is closely linked with the analysis of project relevance above. The evaluator will identify EIP's analysis of the Syrian context and ongoing peace initiatives, and assess the overarching theory of change of the project in that context.</p> <p>The views of international and national external stakeholders will also be highly relevant in the assessment of the project's coherence with other processes and initiatives.</p>
<p><i>Governance structure</i></p> <p>- What are the lessons from the implementation of the project, which could inform organizational learning and future programming by the EIP?</p>	<p>In order to contextualize the project, not only in the context of the Syrian conflict, but also organizationally, the evaluator will assess the governance structure of EIP generally and the Syrian Voices project specifically. The assessment will include an analysis of how the governance structure has influenced project implementation and performance and seek to identify lessons for future programming and implementation. The views and experiences of EIP management and project staff will be particularly important for this assessment.</p>

Annex 5 – Draft Interview Protocols

The following semi-structured protocols have been developed for the various stakeholder groups to be interviewed in the evaluation process. The protocols will serve as a basis for interviews and ensure a degree of consistency across interviews. The interviews will, however, be shaped as generative dialogues seeking to draw as much as possible on the individual experiences and perceptions of stakeholders. The evaluator will therefore maintain a high level of flexibility and openness to the ideas and interests of stakeholders will be maintained in conversations.

EIP management and project staff

Describe the Syrian Voices project from your perspective, and how it has evolved from planning through implementation.

How do you think the project fits with the overall context and links up with on-going initiatives and processes in Syria?

How would you describe the added value of the project?

How have you ensured local ownership of the project and its processes/results?

In your view, have the key objectives of the project been achieved? What have been the major factors enabling or inhibiting success?

What has been the main achievement of the project, in your view?

What have been the major challenges in project implementation and how have these been handled?

How do you see the project evolving into a new phase – what are the most important lessons learned through the first project period?

How have decisions been made in the process of planning for and implementing the project? Have the structures in place for managing the project been effective?

Project donor (Finish MFA)

Describe the ‘Syrian Voices’ project, from your/the Finish MFA’s perspective, and how it has evolved from planning through implementation.

Describe Finland’s involvement in the project beyond funding?

Has the cooperation with the EIP lived up to your expectations? If not, what more had you expected?

Do you feel that you have received sufficient, credible and high-quality reporting?

In your view, have the key objectives of the project been achieved?

How would you describe the added value of the project?

What, in your view, have been the major challenges in the implementation of the project/relationships with EIP?

How do you see the project evolving into a new phase – what are the most important lessons learned through the first project period from your perspective?

How does the support to the ‘Syrian Voices’ project fit within the overall Syria portfolio of the Finish MFA?

Partners / Participants / External stakeholders

Describe your involvement with the Syrian Voices project (or specific project activity depending on respondent).

How did you come into contact with the EIP/the project/the activity?

How would you describe the relevance of the project/activity within the context of the Syrian peace process?

How did you experience the partnership/participating in the activity?

What has been the most important added value/achievement of the project/activity?
How would you describe the added value of the EIP organizing project/activity?

Has there been any negative effects of the project/activity? If so, what mitigation measures were taken to counter balance these negative effects?

What are the main risks associated with the project/activity?

How does the project/activity link with other on-going initiatives and/or processes?

How would you like to see the project/activity evolve in the future? How can EIP continue to constructively support the Syrian peace process?

Do you know of – and/or have you participated in – other similar initiatives/projects/activities?
If so – how does the ‘Syrian Voices’ project compare?