

Review of: "The Failure of Diplomatic Mediations in the Syrian Conflict – A Comparative Analysis"

Yiannis Laouris¹

¹ Cyprus Neuroscience & Technology Institute

Potential competing interests: No potential competing interests to declare.

In satisfactory depth, the paper reviews and analyses the history and characteristics of the Syrian conflict and mediations and interventions by the most relevant actors. My review will not focus on what is "included" but what "is not included" in this paper. My comments should not be read as a criticism of the article because the author already sets the boundaries in the title by using the term "mediation." I would like to invite readers interested in "resolving" this (and other conflicts) and not in "understanding or analysing" them to ask the more general question of why many (if not most) "mediations" fail. Even when they do not "fail," why do they end up in painful compromises and enter a different state in which the conflict might be considered "sleeping" or "cold" but not resolved? Could the answer have to do with the fact that these conflicts are too complex, while the methods used to approach them are designed for more straightforward problems? Could the answer lie in the lack of knowledge and skills at the levels of those involved in mediation? Or do we not yet have methodologies or tools to address complex societal challenges? I would argue that the answer is "yes" to all these questions. Complex problems require complexity science to be addressed. More importantly, complex societal issues involve peoples' emotions, perceptions and experiences, translating into solid positions, stereotypes and refusal. Finding the "middle line" is not a mathematical challenge. There is actually no middle line when we talk about complex problems. Unfortunately, merely using the term "mediation" kills every possibility of finding a long-lasting solution.

What is required is "authentic" dialogue between the conflicting parties. The term "authentic" implies that the methodology applied to manage the dialogue must be carefully designed to allow everyone around the table to speak freely and share their views while at the same time creating the conditions for everyone else to engage in active listening. The stakeholders need to actually listen, acknowledge, understand, and hopefully reach a point in which they are more willing to explore options that satisfy their enemy (without hurting their interests). The methodology of Structured Democratic Dialogue (SDD: Christakis and Bausch, 2006; Flanagan and Christakis, 2010; Laouris, 2012) creates conditions for such dialogue, but it has rarely been applied to resolve complex conflicts. In the case of Cyprus, SDD used by and within civil society has supported peacebuilders to create, first, an embryonic and gradually strong movement for reunification (Laouris 2004; Laouris et al., 2009a,b, 2015). The fact that those in charge have not used this approach is partly the reason for not converging into an agreement. Of course, there are also political interests at much higher levels influencing the outcome of negotiations, but, in our opinion, if such instruments are applied correctly, i.e., include also the decision-makers, they have the power to support the conflicting sides in reaching an agreement. The process of an authentic dialogue comprises three stages. In the first stage, the contradictory parties collaborate to construct a joint vision of an ideal future without war and conflict. The SDD supports them to focus their thinking towards the future. Once they manage

to design an agreed future, they are ready to identify and prioritise the obstacles that prevent them from reaching that ideal state. Settling on the *problématique* is instrumental because talking about actions is much easier. Unfortunately, in the real world, actors talk about actions prematurely. This is the main reason they fail!

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