When the EU, under the French Presidency, acted as a peace mediator during the Russo-Georgian war in August 2008, it was widely seen as a sign of the EU’s growing role in issues of war and peace in world politics. The EU acted swiftly and in a seemingly united manner in a difficult situation, and managed to broker a cease-fire between the conflicting parties. The EU also decided to establish a monitoring mission to Georgia and to launch an international fact-finding mission to investigate the origins and the course of the conflict. Together with the UN and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), the EU is also hosting the peace talks between Russia and Georgia in Geneva. Jean-Pierre Jouyet (2009, p. 88), the French Minister for European Affairs, argued that the Georgian crisis was as important for European diplomacy as the Euro was for European economic politics. The EU Council report on the implementation of the European Security Strategy also highlighted the Georgian experience by declaring: “Our Georgia mission has demonstrated what can be achieved when we act collectively with the necessary political will” (European Council, 2008).

The achievements of the EU, particularly as far as the cease-fire was concerned, were often contrasted with the failure of the EU to deal with the Balkan crisis during the 1990s (Whitman and Wolff, 2010). Famously, the EU failed to act as a peace mediator in the Balkans during the 1990s. At that time “the hour of Europe” turned out to be an empty
The cease-fire in the Bosnian war was achieved through NATO intervention and the peace through US-led negotiations at Dayton.

Despite the fact that the EU’s role in the Russo-Georgian war was seen as a success by Solana and many other EU representatives and commentators, there were skeptical interpretations too. First of all, the EU was not able to prevent the war. Second, the EU did not receive all the merit points when mediating the cease-fire, since the conditions remained vague and not thoroughly implemented. Third, the EU has not so far been able to bring the parties toward a more lasting peace. Fourth, the role of the EU in the peace negotiations could not stand the test of the principles that the EU wanted to uphold. Finally, it was unclear to what extent the success could have been attributed to France rather than the EU.

In this chapter we will try to do two things. First, we will critically evaluate the conflicting claims about the merits of the EU’s mediation effort in the Russo-Georgian war. While realizing that it is probably still too soon to present the whole story, we will construct an empirical narrative that helps to conceptualize the role of the EU with regard to the Russo-Georgian war and its peace negotiations. Second, and even more importantly, we will also try to take a closer look at the sources of the EU’s influence in the crisis, based on a theoretical sketch that combines a theory of mediation with theories of the nature of EU power. If the EU was not successful in mediating conflicts in the 1990s but was successful in the 2000s, how can we explain the growing impact of the EU? Based on this analysis, we will draw some conclusions about the diplomatic role and influence of the EU on third parties, particularly with regard to international conflicts.

The concept of “success” is, of course, very slippery and is difficult to pin down in policy analyses (Baldwin, 2000). However, it is imperative at some point to try to evaluate the impact of the EU’s policies, in order to be able to make sense of the EU as an international actor. Jørgensen (1998) suggests that the yardstick of success can be external, internal, or a combination of the two. External criteria mean that we have formed a baseline against which we measure success, whereas internal criteria mean that we take the stated goals and aims of the EU at face value for a yardstick of success. Jørgensen recommends a mixed approach, but how such a mix is best formed varies from case to case. Very seldom does a particular policy constitute full success or a complete failure. Moreover, to state that the EU was a successful mediator in the crisis is not the same as arriving at a conclusion that the EU’s policies in respect to the Caucasus and Georgia have been successful on the whole. What