

## The MERCURY Plenary Conference Prague, 24-25 March 2011

On 24-25 March 2011 MERCURY partners and practitioners gathered for the second MERCURY Plenary conference at Charles University in Prague. This special issue of the newsletter is a report on this event as well as the activities which occurred in conjunction to it.

An international conference entitled 'The EU in the World: Conflict Resolution, Development, and Cooperation' was held on 24 March 2011, the first day of the conference. The second day of the Plenary was dedicated to in depth discussions on the project's current and future work.

The next regular issue of the MERCURY newsletter will be available as scheduled, in June 2011.

*This special issue was compiled by Simon Stroß, with contributions from James Nyomakwa-Obimpeh, Marco Siddi, Tatjana Petrovic Rava, Miguel Haubrich Seco, Vanessa Boas, Dana Depo, Nicole Koenig, Marlene Gottwald, Niklas Helwig, all Early Stage Researchers of the Marie Curie Initial Training Network EXACT.*

Further information on EXACT can be found on the project webpage: [www.exact-training.net](http://www.exact-training.net).

### What is MERCURY?

MERCURY is a consortium of academic partners formed to examine critically the European Union's contribution to multilateralism. It explores multilateralism as a concept, an aspiration, and a form of international order.

The MERCURY consortium is composed of the following nine institutional partners:

- University of Edinburgh, United Kingdom (MERCURY co-ordinator)
- University of Cologne, Germany
- Charles University, Prague, Czech Republic
- Istituto Affari Internazionali (IAI), Rome, Italy
- Fondation Nationale des Sciences Politiques, Paris, France
- University of Pretoria, South Africa
- Fudan University, Shanghai, China
- Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), Sweden
- University of Cambridge, United Kingdom

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*Read more at [www.mercury-fp7.net](http://www.mercury-fp7.net)*

# MERCURY International Conference

## Organising the MERCURY project: Interview with Mark Aspinwall, MERCURY Coordinator

Dr Mark Aspinwall, University of Edinburgh, is a prominent name in the academic world, but he also has vast practical policy experience as a professional staffer in the US House of Representatives and as a Washington lobbyist. With such a background, it seems that Dr Aspinwall is the right person for coordinating the project, which, amongst other things, has the objective of bridging the gap between the academic and policy worlds.

In a way particular to him, Dr Aspinwall provides subtle and effective leadership of academic and managerial aspects of MERCURY. His sense of timely action and the ability to streamline discussions is impressive and reflects major experience and knowledge. When watching him there is an impression that dealing with the MERCURY project is easy, but is it really so? When asked about his experience in the project, Dr Aspinwall indicates many challenges, but emphasizes coordination of numerous different tasks and their proper integration into the project umbrella as one of the most critical ones. Moreover, he underlines the need for ensuring interaction between all aspects of the project in such a manner that they jointly provide research results of highest quality.

Dr Aspinwall is very enthusiastic about the positive implications of the project. He states that networking is the most obvious benefit, but it is surely the most valuable one; doctoral and post-doctoral students have the opportunity to gain experience, and senior scholars meet and share their most recent academic insights and ideas. Given that MERCURY involves partners from China and South Africa there is an opportunity to tap into resources beyond those in Europe. In addition to that, the MERCURY project will produce numerous research outputs of great value for both policy and academic considerations.

Although very enthusiastic about the project, Dr Aspinwall has no illusions – he knows it is a challenge to have a direct and immediate impact on the policies of the EU. However, in its report on MERCURY, the European Commission noted that impact *is* likely to have an impact, and that reinforces the relevance of the project. Moreover it is highly important that the EU continues to invest in building up of its research capacity.

Furthermore, the EU should continue to provide for critical, academic analysis of its ongoing policies and actions and, hence, receive the feedback necessary for informing new policy initiatives. And in that respect, the MERCURY project is certainly an important step in the in the right direction.

## 'The EU in the World: Conflict Resolution, Development, and Cooperation' Prague, 24 March 2011

The MERCURY conference 'The EU in the World: Conflict Resolution, Development, and Cooperation' was initiated on 24 March 2011 at Charles University in Prague. Jan Michal, EC Delegation in Prague, Ivo Šlosarčík, Charles University and Mark Aspinwall, University of Edinburgh, gave welcoming speeches and outlined the conference programme and topics.



### Panel I: Conflict Resolution and the Neighbourhood

Chaired by Nathalie Tocci, Deputy Director of the Istituto Affari Internazionali (IAI), the first panel focused on conflict resolution and the neighbourhood. The aim of the panel was to assess the degree and effectiveness of the EU's multilateral engagement in conflict resolution and modernisation in its Eastern and Southern neighbourhood.

The first paper presented by Ľubica Debnárová, Charles University –co-authored by Věra Řiháčková, Charles University, and Silvia Colombo, IAI– dealt with the EU neighbourhood and comparative modernisation. The authors assessed the EU's multilateral engagement in the modernization processes in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Morocco, and Moldova.



Tomáš Weiss, Charles University, presented a paper on conflict resolution in the EU neighbourhood, co-authored by Ivo Šlosarčík, Charles University, and Nona Mikhelidze, IAI. Based on case studies of Bosnia and Herzegovina and Georgia, the authors concluded that the EU shows a clear preference for multilateral engagement when contributing to conflict resolution in its neighbourhood. While it readily supports activities of other actors in the region, the EU is more reluctant when it comes to taking over responsibility from them. The

authors question to what extent multilateralism represents a strategy for dissolving responsibility.



Dr Maxi Schoeman, University of Pretoria, then summarized the main findings of her paper on conflict resolution in Darfur. The paper aims at explaining why, despite the scope and scale of involvement in Darfur over the past eight years, the efforts of the international community to resolve this crisis largely failed. The author identified the diverging interests of the actors involved, the lack of shared principles of multilateralism, the absence of a central coordinating mechanism, and the failure to include civil society in the peace process as major obstacles to effective multilateral conflict resolution.

The panel's discussant, Jaroslav Kurfürst, Head of the CFSP department at the Czech Ministry for Foreign Affairs, pointed to the fact that EU multilateralism has two dimensions: an internal one and an external one. Most of the EU's energy is consumed by internal coordination. According to him, the EU could at times be more effective in international fora when speaking with 27 voices

instead of trying to speak with one. The effectiveness of the EU's multilateral engagement generally varies according to the issue at stake. However, much will depend on the European External Action Service, its self-understanding and its ability to define clear strategies and goals vis-à-vis third countries.



## Panel II: Development and Climate Change

The second panel of the conference, chaired by Dr David Camroux, CERI-Sciences-Po, focused on development policy and climate change.

The first contribution on China and climate change was presented by Giulia Romano, CERI-Science-Po, who examined the phases of EU-China relations both at the bilateral and the multilateral level. Whilst these were marked by ebbs and flows, the perceptions of the Copenhagen Summit of both parties also strongly diverged as well as their perceived responsibilities in the field of climate change. It was argued that

## Interview with Tomáš Weiss about the article 'As Multilateral as Envisaged? Assessing European Union's Engagement in Conflict Resolution in the Neighbourhood'

The paper, co-authored by Mr Weiss, Charles University, Dr Ivo Šlosarčík, Charles University, and Nona Mikhelidze, IAI, aimed to examine the European Union's practice in conflict resolution in the Neighbourhood of the European Union having Georgia and Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) as their study cases.

According to Mr Weiss, the choice of case studies was made in order to compare the involvement of the European Union in the Western Balkans and the Southern Caucasus region. Consequently, the paper was also an attempt to identify how the EU behaves in both regions; is it managing bilateral activities, does it opt for non-action, or does the EU prefer a multilateral approach?

The researchers received useful comments on their paper at the MERCURY conference. Mr Weiss emphasised that it would be useful to incorporate an analysis of the actors which were active in the region. As pointed out by one of the commentators, the Russian Federation was acknowledged to be party to the conflict in Georgia, however, it also maintains a proactive position in the area as the regional leader. But what is its interest and level of involvement in the Western Balkans?

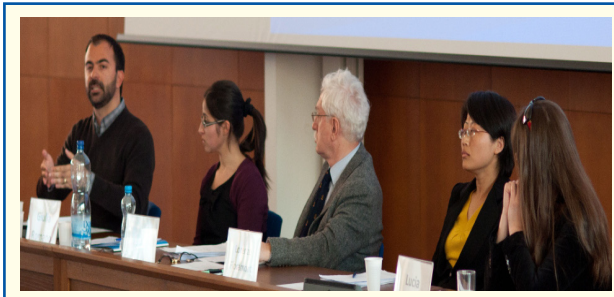
The researchers will analyse the role of other parties which are contributing to the resolution of the conflicts while considering their motivation in the resolution of the conflicts or their prolongation. The experts believe that the research on this additional component will help them to better understand the involvement and interaction of the global or regional actors in the two relevant regions while dedicating special attention to the European Union.

Therefore, having done profound research and after having added the suggested components the researchers might be able to answer the posed question, namely if the EU is as multilateral as envisaged?





engagement with China would only be achieved if a less ambitious package was pursued and the EU spoke with one voice.



Dr Lorenzo Fioramonti, University of Pretoria, moved the focus of the panel to Africa and began with an overview of EU-Africa relations in terms of EU instruments and trade agreements. Whilst the dynamics between the EU and other international organizations in Africa were analysed, the nature of the EU's engagement with individual African states was also scrutinized. The asymmetries which previously characterized EU-Africa relations were also discussed, whilst EU multilateralism was put into question due to its inability to cooperate with regional organizations in Africa.

Finally, Dr Camroux contributed to the panel with a paper on 'the EU in the System of Regions' which focused on the prospects of an EU style community in Asia as well as the role of the US in shaping



regional integration in the aforementioned region. It was argued that the EU should not be a template for Asia as the local realities of the region do not coincide with those of Europe.

A lively debate on the EU's strategic partners, conditionality and ASEAN ensued with the participation of Lucia Najšlová, EUROPEUM Institute for European Policy.

### **Keynote address: Dr Jiří Šedivý, First Deputy Minister, Ministry of Defence of the Czech Republic**

The first day of the MERCURY conference concluded with a keynote address by Jiří Šedivý, First Deputy Minister, Ministry of Defence of the Czech Republic. As a former Assistant Secretary General to NATO, he laid a particular focus on EU-NATO cooperation within the broader framework of his speech on challenges for a Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP).

He considered the EU as a potentially strong actor due to its available tools, arguing that it might even be able to overcome NATO at some stage. In crisis situations, the EU has three assistance mechanisms at its disposal: 1) the country programmes, 2) the stability instrument (particularly used to finance the crisis response mechanism in the Balkans), and 3) the peace-building instruments.

Referring to the latter, the different civilian and military missions implemented and conducted by the EU have demonstrated the EU's relevance in the field of crisis management. But they have also revealed the

### **Interview with Lorenzo Fioramonti and Maxi Schoeman on multilateralism and EU-Africa relations**

Dr Fioramonti, University of Pretoria, presented a paper in the second session of the conference entitled 'The Development Relationship between the EU and Africa: the Economic Partnership Agreement (EPA) with Southern Africa as a Case Study. The Role and Degree of Multilateralism and the Effects of the EPA on Regional Integration, Trade and Resultantly on Development'. This paper formed the backdrop of the interview.

Dr Fioramonti was asked whether the concept of multilateralism as defined in the MERCURY project fits Africa and the case study chosen in his paper. In response, he said that multilateralism has been part and parcel of the African integration efforts from the outset. However, in some sense, multilateralism has not worked in favour of Africa. For instance, the case of the ICC dealing with the Sudanese President has attracted criticism from Africa on how the other partners in multilateral settings ignore the opinion of some African actors.

In response to why he links multilateralism to issues of equality and fairness when the concept could also be interpreted as to refer to only multiple actors operating in a common framework, he answered that there cannot be a discussion of multilateralism if inequality among the stakeholders is not addressed. Addressing asymmetrical issues is embedded in the concept.

Dr Fioramonti mentioned that the EU claims to be promoting regional integration in Africa, yet it divides regions internally by the EPA negotiations. Furthermore, Dr Schoeman and Dr Fioramonti stated that the EU is asking for free trade with African markets while protecting its own vital sectors, such as with the CAP policy.

The so-called compatibility with WTO rules, the major aim of the EPA negotiations, has been interpreted in a way that benefits the EU. This was also due to the fact that enormous asymmetry in knowledge on global trade law existed at the time of the Cotonou negotiations. Moreover, there is a growing risk that the EU is using the 'green revolution' to set environmental standards to African products and thereby protect the EU's competitive advantage in this area.

weaknesses and challenges the EU has to face. On this note, Dr Šedivý identified some of the problematic areas and challenges.



One of the crucial challenges is the internal functioning of the EU's crisis management and conflict prevention mechanism. Although the capacities to plan and conduct civilian and military missions have been improved, a rapid and robust response to crisis on the ground is still lacking.

The Lisbon Treaty points towards the development of a real CSDP, but as reality shows it remains a policy field characterised by intergovernmental bargaining between the member states.

Dr Šedivý related another important challenge to the cooperation of different institutions involved in crisis management, namely between the EU and NATO and the so-called turf wars among the potential partners. Mr Šedivý advocated that both institutions should work "better and closer together" as he sees potential for further cooperation in the area of logistics and civil-military capabilities.

According to him, the EU is one of the key NATO partners and both should have a very strong interest in avoiding duplicity. Thus, both institutions should make an effort to generate more efficiency and savings out of multilateral cooperation, namely via "pooling and sharing" (in the EU jargon). The keyword in the field of the CSDP is coherence, whereas the fundamental condition for achieving greater coherence remains the political will of the member states.



### Interview with Nona Mikhelidze on the CSDP, EU multilateralism and Involvement in Georgia

Ms Mikhelidze, IAI, argued that the EU Monitoring Mission in Georgia (EUMM) was a belated initiative which highlighted the EU's continued preference for post-conflict stabilization over conflict prevention. The EU missed the chance to contribute to peace in Georgia in 2005, when it refused to take over the role of the OSCE border mission there. In addition, EUMM is now under heavy criticism by the Georgian government for its failure to gain access to Abkhazia and South Ossetia.

Concerning the role of the EU in ceasefire negotiations in August 2008, Ms Mikhelidze asserted that French diplomacy was essential. She noted that the outcome of the negotiations might have been less positive if another EU country had been holding the EU Presidency instead of France.

The EU is now making a contribution to multilateral talks in the framework of the Geneva process. According to Ms Mikhelidze, these talks are important because they help preventing a new crisis, even though they do not solve the conflict. Thanks to these negotiations, the conflicts over Abkhazia and South Ossetia were 'frozen' again according to the new status quo.

Commenting on the future of EU policies towards neighbourhood countries, Ms Mikhelidze stated that the real challenge for the EU consists in going beyond rhetoric. The EU should send clear messages and be consistent in its policies towards neighbourhood countries. If it opts for a pragmatic approach to Russia, then it should stop a certain type of rhetoric when addressing the Eastern neighbourhood.

## MERCURY's Current and Future Work

The second day of the MERCURY conference started with a restricted meeting of the project's Advisory Board, followed by a brainstorming session on certain project-related issues such as dissemination strategies.

Chaired by Mark Aspinwall, MERCURY Coordinator, University of Edinburgh, the Work Package III team ("Multilateralism in Practice: Key Regions and Partners") subsequently convened to examine first drafts of papers that will be finished in the next months as well as to discuss and propose new papers to be written during the

third year of the MERCURY project. In the end, the meeting served as a useful occasion to exchange ideas on the different papers, which are still in the initial phase of their writing.

### 'EU Trade Policy vis-à-vis China: Cooperation in the Interest of Multilateralism'

Dr Eliza Patterson, CERI Sciences-Po, presented her draft paper on 'EU Trade Policy vis-à-vis China: Cooperation in the Interest of Multilateralism', which investigates if

and how EU-China bilateralism works in favour of spurring trade multilateralism.

Presenting the preliminary results of her work, Dr Patterson argued that, although China has increasingly committed to trade multilateralism by using the dispute settlement procedure more often, it is difficult to ascertain a specific influence of the EU on China's behaviour in this area. Stronger evidence for EU influence on China could, however, be found regarding China's role as a mediator towards the developing nations in the negotiations of the Doha round as well as on China's pursuit of Preferential Trade Agreements (PTAs). While China's role in the Doha negotiations could be appraised as positive towards the development of trade multilateralism, the endeavour in establishing PTAs could also pose a danger for the WTO system.

The subsequent discussion pointed out several questions related to the paper, including whether the EU was pursuing multilateralism as a goal per se or was acting multilaterally in order to better legitimate its own interests and whether the papers should follow also the aim of providing policy advice or whether this should be left for the planned MERCURY policy brief.

### **'China, the EU and the World Trade System: an Identity Perspective'**

China's identity and roles as a novel member of the WTO lie in the focus of the paper by Dr John Armstrong and Dr Dai Bingran (both at Fudan University) on 'China, the EU and the World Trade System: an Identity Perspective'.

Dr Dai's presentation of the paper put forward a conceptual framework that studies China's and the EU's behaviour in the WTO as the evolution and adaptation of different roles. Seen from this perspective, the concurrence of the EU's and China's role behaviour promotes bilateral exchanges as opposed to discussions in the common multilateral trade system.

While the EU, an actor accustomed to its role as leader, would have difficulties in adapting its role to new realities, China would refuse to take over a more prominent stand as such a role would constrain its freedom in decision-making. Due to this incompatibility, Dr Dai argued both actors would increase bilateral exchanges in order to evade the costs of adapting their roles.

### **'The State of Multilateralism in the EU's Relations Towards the Mediterranean'**

Dr Silvia Colombo (IAI) discussed the current shape and the prospects for EU-Mediterranean relations on energy matters. Together with Nur Abdelkhaliq (University of Edinburgh), Colombo authors a paper on 'The State of Multilateralism in the EU's Relations Towards the Mediterranean' that will focus on energy and migration as

case studies.

As for energy policy, Colombo presented her investigations on the extent of the EU's actorness in the field. Distinguishing between an internal (i.e. relations between EU institutions and EU member states) and an external dimension (relations of the EU and of its member states to relevant third states), Colombo provided an overview of different policy records and scenarios that could be witnessed in the EU-Mediterranean energy policy. While, despite the predominance of bilateral agreements, internal cooperation of the EU and its member states was on a good track and multilateralism increasing, the external dimension of energy policy suffered most from the prevalence of bilateralism, Colombo concluded.

### **'EU-UN Cooperation in Crisis Management'**

Maxi Schoeman and Lorenzo Fioramonti (University of Pretoria) are in charge of a paper on 'EU-UN Cooperation in Crisis Management'. The aim is to explore the types of coordination between the EU and the UN on the local (on the ground) and on the global level. What is the impact of this cooperation on multilateralism in general?

The idea of the paper is to conduct joint work with other MERCURY partners, to which also PhD students can contribute. Therefore, short comparative case studies (2-3 pages each) will be divided among the partners.

Charlotte Rommerskirchen (University of Edinburgh) analyses in her paper the EU's role in the financial crises. Focusing on the EU as an actor in the G20, she concentrates on fiscal multilateralism. Especially the different fiscal cultures of the G20 member states pose a constraint to effective coordination. This explains in particular the difficulties to coordinate the exit-strategies of the financial stimulus packages.

The paper by Dr Brendan Vickers (IAI) will look at EU-Africa relations in the fields of trade, climate change and development policies. The central question of the paper is how Europe can ensure development-friendly trade, while pursuing the goal of climate change reduction at the same time.

Nicoletta Pirozzi (IAI) explores in her paper the case of UN Reform. What was the impact of the EU as an actor in this multilateral forum? How do the changes in the Lisbon treaty regarding the external representation of the Union affect its performance in the UN?

Nathalie Tocci (IAI) has chosen the Middle-East-Quartet for her paper, in order to analyse if this represents an effective approach to multilateralism. It can be questioned if the Middle-East-Quartet is multilateral in the first place. It could be rather a multilateral disguise for a unilateral Foreign Policy of the US. The different interest of the actors involved and the lack of common goals also hamper to a vast degree the effectiveness of the Quartet.