



CONFERENCE REPORT*

EXACT Final Conference

10-12 July 2013, Brussels

Introduction

The EXACT final conference, organised with the support of the Trans European Policy Studies Association (TEPSA), took place in Brussels on 10-12 July 2013. It gathered representatives of the institutions participating in the EXACT consortium as well as the 14 EXACT PhD researchers. The focus of the conference lay on the four roundtables organised by EXACT Visiting Scientist Prof. Brigid Laffan from University College Dublin. In these roundtables, the EXACT researchers presented the progress of their research to their supervisors, to representatives of the EXACT partners and to interested guests. Several public events served to assess the current state of EU external action and to discuss the future and challenges of transnational PhD programmes in the field of EU studies.

Wednesday, 10 July 2013

The EXACT final conference began with an **internal meeting** between EXACT Visiting Scientist Prof. Laffan and the EXACT fellows. The meeting served to discuss and outline the expectations for the next two days of conference. Furthermore, Prof. Laffan encouraged the group to concentrate as much as possible on writing their dissertations beyond other tasks and shared some advice with the group on how to make the writing time most productive.

During the **first roundtable** feedback session, the EXACT fellows Andrew Byrne, Niklas Helwig and Simon Stroß presented their individual PhD projects. Andrew Byrne kicked off by providing a short overview of his thesis on “US Elite Discourse on the EU as an External Actor”. He then elaborated in more detail on the literature review which he had conducted to situate his approach on elite discourse in the literature and to point out its advantages over a public opinion approach. Niklas Helwig subsequently presented a chapter of his thesis, headed “Leader or Laggard? The High Representative and the institutionalization of EU foreign policy”. His main research question inquires into the decision-making discretion of supranational agents in general and of the High Representative in particular. Helwig highlighted his main findings on the institutional process that created the European External Action Service (EEAS). In the third presentation, Simon Stroß provided a condensed overview of his PhD thesis on “Promoting Coherence for Development? EU Policy Formulation and the Role of Governance Regimes” He focused specifically on his case-study selection – the policy areas fisheries, environment and security – and presented the preliminary findings of his analysis. All three speakers received positive feedback from their supervisors and from Prof. Laffan as well as some advice towards the completion of their theses.

* Compiled by Miguel Haubrich Seco and Simon Stroß, with contributions from Dana Depo, Marlene Gottwald, James Nyomakwa-Obimpeh, Leonhard den Hertog, Andreas Raspotnik, Vanessa Boas, Marco Siddi and Nicole Koenig, all Marie Curie fellows in the EXACT programme.

The first day of the final conference ended with the **opening of the poster exhibition** displaying the work of the EXACT fellows. At this occasion, Jolyon Howorth, Jean Monnet Professor at the University of Bath (UK) and a renowned expert in EU security and defence policy, delivered a keynote speech entitled “**Does the EU have a future in security policy?**” In his view, the high expectations that the Lisbon Treaty had created on the Union’s role as an international security actor had not been fulfilled. Prof. Howorth related the Union’s failure to live up to the expectations to the economic and financial crises, the ‘CSDP fatigue’, and to the ‘impossible job’ of the High Representative. Meanwhile, events such as the Arab Spring and the crises in Mali and Syria made clear that there was a continued demand for EU crisis management. Howorth emphasised that the Union’s added value in security affairs was its ability to combine different military and civilian instruments and to provide comprehensive crisis management. However, the lack of a common understanding regarding the use of force remained a key obstacle. In light of the demands for EU crisis management, declining defence budgets, and the US orientation towards the Pacific, the speaker proposed to strengthen the link between the EU and NATO. While the Union should continue to develop its civilian-military CSDP, the member states should learn to ‘ride the NATO bicycle’, in other words: to europeanise NATO and provide leadership in stabilising Europe’s broader neighbourhood.

Thursday, 11 July 2013

Dana Depo kicked off the **second roundtable** with a presentation of her research project on the Eastern Partnership. Vanessa Boas then presented her research on the impact of EU norms and interests in Central Asia and Marco Siddi his thesis on the role of identity construction and history in foreign policy towards Russia. Finally, Anita Şek presented her PhD proposal on EU, US and Russian perspectives on the shared neighbourhood in the East. They all received feedback from Brigid Laffan, who stressed issues such as the limitations of realism, Manners’ Normative Power Europe and the difficulties in operationalizing constructivist approaches. Moreover, supervisors Prof. Wessels, Prof. Rovná and Prof. Peterson commented on all dimensions of the presented projects, ranging from the research design itself to the actual research ‘on the ground’ in such difficult places as Central Asia. Other participating academics, such as Prof. Atilla Eralp from the Middle East Technical University (METU), raised the role of Turkey in some of these areas. The session offered the fellows a good opportunity to showcase their work and collect useful feedback.

The **third roundtable** feedback session comprised presentations by the EXACT fellows Leonhard den Hertog, Marlene Gottwald and Miguel Haubrich Seco. All three fellows gave a short overview of their research and individually assessed their progress. As the first presenter, Leonhard den Hertog outlined the impact of the rule of law on current EU migration policy-making. His supervisors concluded that Leonhard’s research could have profound scientific impact as his preliminary findings scrutinise an often-assumed securitisation of EU migration policy. Afterwards Marlene Gottwald discussed “Europe’s Responsibility to Protect in Libya”. The supervisors stressed the strong empirical content already provided by her and highlighted the well-built interplay with the chosen theoretical framework. The session was concluded by Miguel Haubrich’s presentation which covered preliminary findings on the EU as a region-builder in its neighbourhood and beyond. Both supervisors emphasized the political relevance of his research and the fact that his research provided new empirical data to question some widespread assumptions on the EU’s impact on regional cooperation. The feedback session was concluded by a short summary by Prof. Laffan.

In his **keynote speech**, **David O’Sullivan** (Chief Operating Officer of the European External Action Service) looked at the history of Europe in his speech and critically considered the future role of the EU in a changing world. He emphasised the fact that numerous new powers are rising

which do not share the EU's values. According to O'Sullivan, the EU would inevitably have to choose between integration and irrelevance due to the changing nature of the international system. For it to remain influential internationally it would have to integrate further and learn how to speak with one voice. The Lisbon Treaty and the setting up of the EEAS were seen as a first step towards moving in the direction of that goal. The debate after the speech largely centred on the "three Ds", the combination and balancing between development, diplomacy and defence in EU foreign policy. O'Sullivan argued that, in order to be taken seriously, the EU would need hard power to back its soft power. Syria, Libya and the role of the 'Big Three' (the United Kingdom, France and Germany) in the formulation of EU foreign policy were also discussed. O'Sullivan countered critique on the lack of effectiveness in some areas of EU foreign policy. Instead, he maintained that global actors in general struggled to find solutions to some of the world's most challenging predicaments. He also highlighted the EU's track record in fostering a new foreign-policy architecture, which as he argued was considerable looking back at its beginnings in times of the European Political Cooperation.

Friday, 12 July 2013

The final conference day started with a public roundtable discussion on the "**Future of EU PhD Studies**". The roundtable discussed the academic and organisational priorities for the success of a transnational PhD programme, based on the lessons learned from EXACT. Based on a background paper prepared by him, Wulf Reiners, EXACT Project and Financial Director, assessed what made a good PhD dissertation and a good PhD programme. He emphasized both the need of achieving high academic standards and of creating a strong network in specific research areas. He also argued that international mobility and the combination of professional and academic training constitute important added value in terms of future career prospects also beyond academia. Dr. Christine Neuhold made a contribution based on her experience as one of the Coordinators of the INCOOP Initial Training Network. She noted that in the future universities will attempt to organise more projects such as EXACT and INCOOP due to their increasing dependence on external funding. Both Prof. Laffan and Leonhard den Hertog argued that international mobility should not be an end in itself and should lead to more critical research. Den Hertog also highlighted issues inherent in mobility, such as different styles of supervision or the amount of time lost with bureaucratic procedures. On the other hand, he argued that international projects such as EXACT contribute to the interdisciplinary nature of EU PhD studies. The discussion elaborated lessons learned for future endeavours and reflected on the need for a more sustainable funding for such projects.

In the **final roundtable session**, Nicole Koenig presented her research on coherence in EU crisis management. In her work, she focused on three case studies: Libya (2011), Somalia (2012-2013), and Mali (2012-2013). In particular her presentation concentrated on the Libya case study. The empirical findings showed that diverging interests, norms and principles as well as other contextual factors led to an incoherent EU reaction to the Libyan crisis. James Nyomakwa-Obimpeh carried out research on the negotiation of EU's Economic Partnership Agreements with CARIFORUM and ECOWAS. The preliminary empirical observation was that a low level of integration as well as the existence of a better alternative played a role in the stalemate of the ECOWAS agreement negotiations. The presentation of Andreas Raspotnik summarised his research on the "European Arctic endeavour". From his point of view, the Arctic – as a yet undefined space – represents an ideal case to study the EU's nature as a geopolitical actor. Peter Valant gave a presentation on the new EU Special Representative on Human Rights. In his work, he evaluates the added value of the latest addition to the group of special representatives. He concluded that, as a result of his mandate, the EU Special Representative is likely to play the role of a manager trying to streamline human rights' matters into EU foreign policy. The co-supervisors of the presenters as well as Prof. Laffan reflected on the draft

chapters and highlighted strengths, weaknesses, as well as possible avenues for the future development of the research projects.

Conclusion

The EXACT final conference provided an opportunity for the involved PhD researchers and their institutions to reflect on the strengths and weaknesses of a transnational European PhD programme that has combined an academic track at two universities with professional training at several think tanks. In addition, the final conference allowed for the EXACT fellows to receive a joint feedback on their research projects not just from one of their supervisors but from both. The talks by invited practitioners and academics were not only thought-provoking but also allowed to assess the practical relevance of academic research on EU external action.