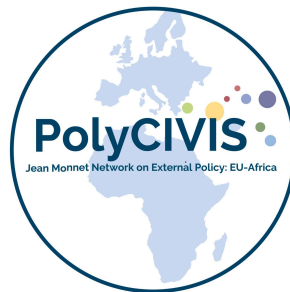


DEVELOPING AFRICAN-EUROPEAN JOINT TEACHING PROGRAMMES

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**“NEGOTIATION SIMULATIONS ARE A GREAT WAY FOR STUDENTS
TO UNDERSTAND THE COMPLEXITIES OF THE POLYCRISIS”**

Interviewee

Dr. Markus Gastinger, Postdoc at Paris Lodron University of Salzburg (PLUS)

Interviewer

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INTRODUCTION

Dr Markus Gastinger, a political scientist at Paris Lodron University of Salzburg in Austria, shares experiences from his teaching on the European Union's external policies, and how they relate with policies by African regional organisations. He elaborates on interactive and practical teaching methods used in the course, including negotiation simulations, and the importance of giving voice to hands-on experts and guest lecturers that are familiar with negotiations at EU level.

THE INTERVIEW

[Q1.] Which topics are you teaching within "EU External Action", and to which kind of students?

Markus Gastinger: We explore how the EU engages in foreign policy, focusing on how EU member states reconcile their diverse national interests to formulate a unified European position through negotiations in the Foreign Affairs Council (FAC). The key part of our course are three negotiation simulations, where students represent EU member states, the High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, and the European Commission. The simulations aim to be as realistic as possible.

The topics we focus on in the FAC simulations depend on real developments occurring at the time of the course and are not set in stone at the beginning of the semester. Instead, we try to discuss the same issues that the FAC discusses at the time of our negotiation simulation. Last year, for example, we dealt with issues such as Russia's war against Ukraine, the UN Climate Change Conference in Dubai (COP28), or negotiations for an EU-India Free Trade Agreement. We always try to reflect the breadth of issues discussed in the FAC, such as trade, security, and development cooperation.

The course is part of the MA program in EU Studies and is attended by about 20 students from diverse academic backgrounds, including law, political science, economics, and sociology. We are particularly happy that our student group is highly international, representing around 10 different countries from various continents incl. Africa and with a gender balance of

approximately 50% female students. This diversity enriches the course, allowing for a wide range of perspectives during simulations and discussions.

[Q2.] Which teaching methods and formats are you using (lectures, group work, case studies, field trips...)?

Markus Gastinger: We use a mix of interactive and practical teaching methods, with a strong focus on hands-on learning through our negotiation simulations. The core element of the course is the simulation of FAC meetings, where students step into the roles of different EU actors. This gives them the chance to immerse themselves in the complexities of EU decision-making and apply their theoretical knowledge in real-world scenarios.

We first discuss three current topics pressing the EU to respond one way or another. These are the three topics that students negotiate over when we simulate the FAC about a week later. To prepare for the simulation, students prepare a “position paper”, in which they try to define what their member state wants to get out of the negotiations. To do this, they can look up government positions they find in newspapers, public speeches of key politicians such as the country’s foreign minister, or hard data such as official statistics. Based on these positions, we then meet for 2-3 hours for the negotiation simulation and really take the time to work through the different topics being discussed. Two students always take on the roles of the High Representative and the European Commission, which means they need to plan and coordinate the negotiations with their peers. The negotiation simulation is thus entirely led by students. We lecturers only observe the negotiations and discuss with students afterwards what worked well and what they could have done better. The goal is not just to teach them about the EU but also to help them develop critical skills like negotiating, thinking analytically, and understanding complex political situations.

To prepare our students for the negotiation simulation, we invite practitioners to share their real-world insights. For example, last year we had a Relex delegate from Austria’s Permanent Representation to the EU and a Head of Unit from the European Parliament to discuss how the EP influences EU foreign policy, both joining us virtually from Brussels. We were also joined by Prof. Ilze Rūse, who is a former Latvian diplomat working in Brussels and the current Latvian ambassador to Sweden. She spends an entire day with students on how to prepare negotiation

strategies and draft actual compromise texts to overcome conflicting positions among EU member states. That is another crucial skill as far as our course is concerned.

[Q3.] Which European and African actors are you mainly analyzing within the course?

Markus Gastinger: The primary focus of our course is on European actors, given the aim of understanding how the EU crafts a common foreign policy through negotiations in the FAC. Still, many of the topics discussed naturally depend heavily on understanding the African position. For example, from the African side, we also sometimes touched on the position of the African Union (AU), which collaborates with the EU on various initiatives, and other African regional organizations such as ECOWAS or the SADC. We also discussed the position of individual African countries, such as South Africa, Nigeria, or Egypt, which have significant political and economic relationships with the EU and are key actors on the global stage.

Another key element is the EU's involvement in Africa through its CSDP missions, which support peacekeeping, conflict prevention, and capacity-building efforts. Examples include Operation Atalanta around the Horn of Africa, the EU military training mission in Mali, which ended in 2024, but also civilian missions such as EUCAP Sahel Mali, which continues to this day. These missions also demonstrate the EU's commitment to try and stabilize Africa, particularly at a time when there is heavier geopolitical competition from the autocratic leaders currently in power in Russia and China.

[Q4.] How do you explain or understand the term "polycrisis" in the context of your courses? Are there any similar or related terms (complexity, fragility, tipping points, etc)?

Markus Gastinger: I understand the term "polycrisis" as the simultaneous occurrence of multiple interconnected crises that amplify each other's effects. For example, the EU currently faces a combination of challenges such as climate change, irregular migration, economic weakness, or external security threats. None of these crises exists in isolation, instead interacting and exacerbating one another. This makes crafting an effective response more complex.

This complexity is something we also try to explicitly discuss in the course throughout the semester. This is particularly true during the negotiation simulations, where the three topics discussed are often interconnected. Perhaps one upside of this complexity is that it allows students to link topics in the negotiations, sometimes making it easier to overcome conflict.

Either way, the modern-day complexities of global politics are key to understanding the EU's external action and require the EU to respond in multifaceted and coordinated ways that students truly learn to appreciate by the end of the course.

[Q5.] *Have you been cooperating with CIVIS partners previously and if yes, how?*

Our cooperation with other CIVIS partners for this course has thus far been limited. Still, this may well change in the future – and I am genuinely excited about the opportunities that CIVIS brings for cross-border cooperation!



Dr Markus Gastinger

Postdoc at Paris Lodron University of Salzburg (PLUS)

Markus Gastinger is Lise Meitner Fellow and Postdoc at the Salzburg Centre of European Union Studies (SCEUS) and Chair of International Politics. Moreover, he leads the [working group on European integration](#) at the School of Education. He holds a PhD from the European University Institute in Florence

(2010–2014). Before that, he completed the master program in European Union Studies at the SCEUS. From 2014–2019, he was Research and Teaching Associate at the Technical University of Dresden.

His research centers on international relations and EU external relations drawing on rational choice institutionalism. Furthermore, he has acquired practical experience during a traineeship (“blue book stagiaire”) at the European Commission in Brussels and at the Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik in Berlin.

PolyCIVIS: confronting the polycrisis in Europe and Africa

PolyCIVIS is a Euro - African collaboration that brings to the forefront the global polycrisis, allowing a better understanding of the impacts of several concurrent major societal crises challenging the world in the form of a polycrisis.

In the wake of the global polycrisis, urgent challenges have emerged, prompting PolyCIVIS to take action. Our initiative is dedicated to addressing these pressing global issues and their interconnected consequences.

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