

When Political Scientists meet EU Negotiation and Negotiators: Francesco Marchi

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An introduction from our contributor

Since the beginning of the Fifties, the European Union has developed through successive rounds of negotiations in which Member States were sitting around the table to take common decisions and address joint problems. Negotiation thus represents an essential element of the EU process of integration and an inbuilt feature of the EU institutional system.¹ Negotiations take place within the EU institutions, between EU institutions and its Member States, and also between the EU and third countries or international organisations. The EU is also exposed to challenges of the “age of negotiation”,² in which the global systems of rules are constantly put into question, ideological barriers have progressively faded away and sovereign states have to address joint problems such as trade, climate change, terrorism, migration fluxes, and regulatory issues. In today’s world, negotiation is such a diffuse activity that international organisations and public administrations need to rely on an important number of experts on policy content. However, they also need experts of the processes through which these issues have to be negotiated. Content expertise is no longer sufficient for finding an agreement; it is necessary to have some professional figures who are able to steer the effective processes of dialogue and negotiation that aim to reconcile divergent interests across the table. The recent “Brexit” case will certainly require some additional negotiation expertise from the EU.

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IPS: Could you please briefly describe your professional role and your main responsibilities?

My work consists in helping the EU institutions increase the negotiation capabilities of their officials by organising a series of actions that range from training seminars, workshops and conferences, to the development of e-learning tools and a community of practice. At the Institute for Research and Education on Negotiation

¹ Brunazzo M. & P. Settembri (2012) *Experiencing the European Union*, Rubbettino Editore, Soveria Mannelli.

² Zartman W. (2007) *Negotiation and Conflict Management: Essays on Theory and Practice*, Routledge, London.

– IRENE,³ based at the Department of Public Policies of the ESSEC Business School, I am the Director of the “Negotiators of Europe” Research and Training Program. Within that framework, in collaboration with EIPA (European Institute of Public Administration, Netherlands) and the College of Europe (Belgium), I have responsibility for undertaking training needs analysis in close cooperation with the EU institutions and their Human Resources Departments. My task is then to elaborate and propose training activities specifically designed for the target audience of different EU institutions such as the Commission, the EEAS, the European Parliament or the General Secretariat of the Council.

Since 2008 our institute IRENE has progressively created the “*Negotiators’ Learning Path*” in cooperation with the DG HR of the European Commission.⁴ This training curriculum is structured around seven seminars dedicated to negotiation skills development, covering the following thematic areas:

Basic Courses	Advanced Courses
Negotiation skills	Difficult and complex negotiations
Multilateral negotiations	Cross-cultural negotiations
	Legislative negotiations between Commission, European Parliament and Council
	Negotiating with the USA
	Negotiating with China

The seven seminars represent a total amount of teaching hours that amount to 120, divided into 14 full days of training. The Negotiators’ Learning Path is organised through a system of compulsory courses (Negotiation Skills and Multilateral Negotiations) that give access to the advanced courses dealing with specific thematic areas. The pedagogy used in the seminars is strongly based on an inductive approach consisting of three sequential steps:

- **Experiential Learning through Simulations.** In each of the half-day thematic sessions, participants engage in an exercise or a simulation pertaining to a key aspect of negotiation in the EU.
- **Debriefing, Feedback & Self-Examination.** After the practice, the instructor leads a debriefing discussion for analyzing participants’ performance, so that the class can identify the relationship between different negotiation strategies and outcomes and learn from everyone’s experiences. This stage is a key instrument for stepping back from daily practice and understanding the driving factors that influence the negotiators’ behaviours and negotiation outcomes.
- **Discussion of research findings.** During the last part of each session, the instructor discusses with participants the relevant research findings connected with the key learning points of the seminar. The aim of this part is to look at how those findings may help to identify solutions applicable to real situations of negotiation in which the participants are involved.

³ Since 1996, and following operations in 72 countries to date, ESSEC’s [Institute for Research and Education on Negotiation](#) (IRENE Paris, Singapore & Brussels) has developed as a centre of expertise in negotiation, conflict resolution and mediation.

⁴ Directorate General of Human Resources – European Commission.

IPS: Have you ever thought of doing your current work while you were a PhD student?

While I was a Master student at the University of Catania, I attended a Summer University in Cluny (Burgundy) in which I had the chance of following, for the first time, a *negotiation workshop* led by Prof. Stephen Goldberg (Dispute Resolution Research Centre of the Kellogg School of Management, Northwestern University). That experience exposed me to a series of new concepts and analytical perspectives⁵ that I found useful to complement my master's thesis on institutional reform of the EU. I then decided to continue this research with a PhD, focusing on the European Convention on the Future of Europe and the impact of this new institutional context on the negotiation behaviour of Member States' governments. Deepening my knowledge of negotiation theories also gave me the opportunity to become familiar with new pedagogical tools based on an inductive approach and the use of simulation exercises. I then started to progressively introduce some of these elements of negotiation analysis into the courses on EU policies and institutions that I was teaching at my university in France. The combination of my expertise in the EU system, negotiation theories and active learning methodology gave me the opportunity to join the IRENE Institute while I was still doing my PhD studies. This was a unique chance to discuss my research findings and refine some of the hypotheses of my PhD research at that time. The regular contacts with EU negotiators and officials were a sort of reality check for what I was trying to demonstrate in my research.⁶

IPS: Have your Political science studies influenced your career? What can be the competitive advantage of a background like yours in your profession?

Training EU officials and diplomats is a very challenging job because you need first to have a deep understanding of their daily working environment and then you need to provide concrete answers to their problems.

Today, the great majority of negotiation skills seminars rely heavily on the classic Harvard Program on Negotiation approach of "*principled negotiation*", whose famous manifesto is the textbook "Getting to yes" by Fischer and Ury.⁷ This approach is certainly one of the most operational and highly efficient for teaching negotiation skills; however, it needs to be adapted by taking into consideration the specific aspects and features of the negotiation environment in which participants in the seminar will have to operate, if this is a public, international organisation such as the EU.

The first challenge I encountered for this adaptation is that negotiation is not an autonomous discipline in itself, but is rather a field of research to which different disciplines are contributing with their theoretical and research traditions:⁸ disciplines such as game theory, bargaining analysis, organisational studies,

⁵ Lewicki R., D. Saunders, et al. (1997) *Essentials of negotiation*, Irwin/McGraw-Hill: Boston; Hopmann, P.T. (1996) *The Negotiation Process and the Resolution of International Conflicts*, Columbia, SC: South Carolina University Press; Fischer W. and R. Ury (1981) *Getting to Yes*, Harvard University Press: Boston.

⁶ Marchi F. (2015) *The Convention on the future of Europe: how states behave in a new institutional context of negotiation*, Peter Lang, Brussels.

⁷ Fischer W. and R. Ury (1981) *Getting to Yes*, Harvard University Press: Boston.

⁸ Druckman, D. (2010) *Negotiation*, in N. Young (Ed.) *The International Encyclopaedia of Peace*, New York: Oxford University Press.

international relations and political science. However, in the last few years a growing scientific literature has started blending together negotiation analysis traditions with political science for analysing the functioning of the EU system,⁹ with interesting results. My knowledge of this body of literature was an extremely important asset because it allowed me to integrate EU specific aspects into my negotiation training and teaching activity.

The second challenge was that exercises and simulations need to be in line with the principle of the “*right distance*”.¹⁰ This means that you cannot train EU officials with simulation exercises that are about the selling of a restaurant or a real-estate transaction; this scenario would certainly be too distant from their real professional life. At the same time, it would be of relatively low utility to train EU officials with a simulation exercise that repeats precisely the kind of situations and procedural rules they are exposed to on a daily basis; this would simply reproduce their routine, in an artificial way, without giving them the possibility to challenge their practices and reflexes. The “right distance” consists of working with scenarios that are fairly similar to the daily practices of the participants but at the same time present relevant differences that may stimulate changes in their reflexes.

IPS: What kind of interaction do you think there can be between your professional community and the academia?

Many scholars have emphasised how important is the distance between those who practice negotiation and those who study it. Researchers have no direct access to negotiations, and they often have to rely on interviews, questionnaires, official documents or experimental work carried out in a laboratory with students. For example, experimental research findings are certainly valuable, but one question remains open: how would these findings change if the participants in these experiments were real diplomats or EU officials? Would they have the same reflexes as the students? What would be the effect of their professional EU experience? Moreover, researchers do not necessarily make the effort to translate their findings into operational and applicable solutions for real life negotiators.

Practitioners, for their part, are often trapped in severe time constraints, and they do not necessarily take the time to look at the interesting findings that research is producing. Academic research is perceived as complicated, not operational and too theoretical to bring any concrete help to their professional life.

A more effective dialogue between these different worlds would certainly benefit both sides: researchers could reinforce their contacts with the field and its actors; practitioners could learn many lessons from research findings. The way forward would be a circular approach helping researchers, practitioners and trainers to profit from each other’s’ experience by breaking the existing glass walls.

IPS: From your perspective, what skills would you recommend should not be missing in a political scientist curriculum nowadays?

In today’s world, any political science curriculum should include activities based on active pedagogy that stimulate the problem-solving skills of students such as simu-

⁹ Dur A. , G. Mateo & D. Thomas (2010) Negotiation theory and the EU : the state of the art, in ‘Journal of European Public Policies’, Vol. 17:5, pp. 613-618.

¹⁰ Colson A. (2013) L’usage des simulations de négociation, in Balzacq T. and Ramel F., *Traité de relations internationales*, Paris : Presses de Sciences Po, pp. 1081-1095.

lations, group projects, international exchanges and workshops with practitioners. The acquisition of knowledge represents the bedrock of any curriculum at the university. But what makes the difference is the development and acquisition of soft skills. We have to acknowledge that the most prestigious European Universities have integrated, in their political science programs, a few key principles around which they have built their reputation:

- A compulsory period to be spent abroad that ranges from 6 to 12 months;
- Some group project or simulation to stimulate creativity and active learning skills;
- The introduction of a compulsory internship of 6 to 12 months;
- Contact with practitioners or professionals that share their experience with students;
- Increased use of English as a teaching language;
- The introduction of “clinical programs” in which students have to advise professionals;
- Investment in the “high-technology literacy” of students.

This may not be possible everywhere, and we know that costs, in terms of human resources and mentality change, may be high for teachers as well as for students. However, the effort is certainly worth trying.

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