

Welcome to MERCURY Multilateralism and the EU in the Contemporary Global Order

Dear readers, welcome to this, MERCURY's first newsletter. We are proud to highlight our early achievements, and bring you on board as we move into the next stages of our research programme.

MERCURY was launched in February of this year to examine the EU's commitment to multilateralism, and especially its record in pursuing "effective multilateralism", an essential part of the European Security Strategy.

MERCURY's first research deliverables are about to come on stream, and they include a paper on conceptualizing multilateralism written by some of the best-known academics in the world working on EU external affairs: John Peterson, Wolfgang Wessels, and Christopher Hill. Watch this space: we'll include information on this and other deliverables.

But one of MERCURY's most important elements is the inclusion of junior academics, such as Caroline Bouchard (from Edinburgh), who is also part of the team writing the conceptual paper. I am also very proud to emphasize the participation of Nadia Klein, Tomas Weiss and Jian Junbo on our early research deliverables, which focus on understanding multilateralism as a concept and a practice, and how it fits with other understandings and practices in International Relations.

In fact, MERCURY widens participation not simply by including junior academics and PhD students, but also by including institutions from China (Fudan) and South Africa (Pretoria). Their participation will be critical to the success of MERCURY's efforts.

Finally, I would add that some energetic extra activity is already taking place in the margins of MERCURY's "official" deliverables. Seminars, panels at conferences, specially-branded "MERCURY lectures" and other events are linking our work to other academics, to students, and to interested stakeholders.

Stay tuned,
Mark Aspinwall,
MERCURY Co-ordinator,
University of Edinburgh

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.

Policy relevant objectives

MERCURY's policy relevant objectives are to:

- develop 'best practice' criteria to guide choices about how multilateralism should be pursued as a strategic goal of EU external policy
- specify how resources – both EU and state-based – may be best combined in the pursuit of effective multilateralism
- inform media and public debate and engage policy stakeholders and decision-makers through (inter alia) MERCURY public lectures, an E-letter, and press engagement

Mission Statement

MERCURY is funded through the EU's Framework VII programme, with a total budget of €1.963 million. It includes nine institutional partners in Europe and beyond and will run for 3 years from February 2009.

Multilateralism is defined in many ways, but common to all are the importance of rules, institutionalised cooperation and inclusiveness. Demand for multilateralism increases as new international challenges arise. Globalisation connects the world in ways both positive and negative. Trade, capital, ideas, people, technology, information, diseases and crime all flow more freely. Patterns of interaction between world regions are changing. New powers are rising. Alternative development paths and models of capitalism are being debated. International terrorist networks constitute a new and profound security challenge. New sources of conflict, over global warming, migration and resource scarcity, are emerging.

The EU itself has recognised the importance of multilateralism in (for example) the 2003 European Security Strategy and Lisbon Treaty. It claims actively to promote multilateralism in all of its policies, especially those with an external focus. MERCURY's primary research questions flow from the EU's commitment to multilateralism:

1. how should we understand multilateralism, both historically and in contemporary terms?
2. does the EU live up to its ambitions to contribute to effective multilateralism globally?
3. what lessons can be drawn from Europe's experience of promoting multilateralism?

MERCURY is emphatically interdisciplinary, drawing on expertise in law, politics, economics, and international relations. It advances a clear intellectual agenda to explore, explain, and evaluate different conceptions of multilateralism but also seeks maximum, practical policy relevance.

Our cooperation partners



EU-GRASP is a 3-year research project on Changing Multilateralism: The EU as a Global-Regional Actor in Security and Peace. EU-GRASP aims to contribute to the analysis and the articulation of the current and future role of the EU as a global actor in multilateral security governance, in a context of challenged multilateralism, where the EU aims at "effective multilateralism".



EU4Seas is about the EU and sub-regional multilateralism in Europe's sea basins: neighbourhood, enlargement and multilateral cooperation. An FP7 collaborative research project (2009-2011) conducting an analysis of sub-regional multilateralism in the four maritime areas (Baltic, Black, Caspian and Mediterranean)

Partner Institutes

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



1. University of Edinburgh, United Kingdom (MERCURY co-ordinator)



2. University of Cologne, Germany



3. Charles University in Prague, Czech Republic



4. Istituto Affari Internazionali (IAI), Rome, Italy



5. Fondation Nationale des Sciences Politiques, Paris, France



6. University of Pretoria, South Africa



7. Fudan University, Shanghai, China



8. Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, Sweden



9. University of Cambridge, United Kingdom

Work Packages

- I – theoretical/conceptual.** WP I explores and elaborates the conceptual and theoretical approaches to multilateralism.
- II – institutional/policy.** WP II will explore systematically how the EU ‘machinery’ and policy externalisation equips it to contribute to a multilateral order.
- III – regional/strategic partners.** WP III analyses interactions with external regions and strategic partners in the Neighbourhood, Asia and Africa, including those conducted by individual EU member states.
- IV – international organisations.** WP IV assesses the EU’s performance in a multilateral context by focusing on major international organisations and informal groups of which it is part.
- V – dissemination.** WP V will ensure the inter-linkage of different activities of the project in the form of work package deliverables as well as dissemination to stakeholders.
- VI – management.** WP VI is the management and communications hub of MERCURY.

Structure

The research carried out in the framework of MERCURY focuses on the following central question: does the European Union deliver on its commitment to effective multilateralism?

To answer this question, the work of the consortium has been structured on the basis of four research and two horizontal work packages.

First, a theoretical work package (“Mapping Modes of Multilateralism”) will establish a historically-based understanding of approaches to multilateralism. Second, building upon the insights generated within the theoretical work package, three empirical work packages will systematically analyse key aspects of EU multilateralism. These key aspects are

- (a) EU institutional and policy dynamics (“Architecture of EU External Relations”),
- (b) interactions with external regions and strategic partners (“Multilateralism in Practice”) and
- (c) the EU’s performance in a multilateral context, focusing both on major international organisations and informal groups of which it is part (“Organised Multilateralism”).

The two horizontal work packages are responsible for the management of the project and the dissemination of research results, respectively.

MERCURY Research Output

MERCURY will produce three types of written output: Working Papers (also referred to as Joint Papers where more than one Work Package is involved), e-papers and policy briefs.

DATEX Database

MERCURY will set up a database collecting legal acts on external relations instruments in the framework of the European Community (EC) and the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP). A first version of DATEX will be launched in January 2010, a final version will be available in December 2010.

Glossary of Multilateralism

MERCURY will also set up a glossary of multilateralist terms to be posted in November 2009.

MERCURY’s Scientific Objectives

Our main scientific objectives are to:

- exploit general theoretical approaches to international relations for theory-building and to develop new, enhanced, refined, operational definitions of multilateralism
- generate innovative empirical knowledge that sheds new light on multilateralism by linking (thus far) disparate literatures on international relations, international law, international economics, and EU external action
- pinpoint the effects of the EU’s external relations by gauging – comparatively and according to specified metrics - how and how much the EU contributes to building effective multilateralism through:
 - promotion of international law
 - widening the membership of international organisations
 - encouraging domestic reforms that lead to better governance

MERCURY’s Strategic Goals

The project’s most important strategic goals are to:

- contribute to building a European research area with strong international links through engagement with participant institutions in International Cooperation Partner Countries
- solidify and expand an already developed and thriving research network, especially by training the next generation of researchers by integrating them into our work
- take forward previous relevant research funded through FP VI to build a sustainable future research agenda

Calendar of events

9 July 2009 MERCURY

Lecture by Prof. John Peterson, Cologne

9 and 10 July 2009

Joint workshop Work Packages I (“Mapping Modes of Multilateralism”) and II (“Architecture of EU External Relations”), Cologne

February 2010 Plenary meeting plus joint workshop Work Packages II (“Architecture of EU External Relations”) and III (“Multilateralism in Practice”), Brussels

July 2010

Kick-off meeting Work Package IV (“Organised Multilateralism”), Rome

July 2010

Stakeholder conference, Brussels

January 2011

Workshop Work Package III (“Multilateralism in Practice”), Prague

February 2011

Workshop Work Package IV (“Organised Multilateralism”), Rome

October 2011

MERCURY joint conference with the projects EU4Seas and EU-GRASP, together with Stakeholder conference, Brussels

Launch of MERCURY

The MERCURY kick-off meeting took place in Edinburgh on 12-13 March 2009, with Steering Group and Advisory Board meetings, and a plenary session with both academic and policy presentation. Partners also held workshops to open Work Packages I, V and VI



From the left: Mark Aspinwall, Gunilla Herolf, Christopher Hill, Wolfgang Wessels, Chad Damro, Irena Brinar, Udo Diedrichs, Andrea Birdsall, John Peterson, Nathalie Tocci, David Camroux, Roland Dannreuther, Alberta Sbragia, Christina Boswell. Picture was taken at an early MERCURY team meeting before all members had joined.

What will MERCURY do?

MERCURY tests the proposition that the EU is pursuing effective multilateralism by establishing a set of understandings of the concept of multilateralism and by testing and comparing the EU experience in distinct settings, both internal to the EU and in specified regions, organisations and bilateral partnerships. The case studies employed in the MERCURY project will complement each other and so will increase our understanding of the central research questions behind the project. Thus, though MERCURY will create numerous case studies, together they form part of a cross-sectional design aimed at providing answers to broader questions than those that may be answered via investigation of each isolated case. In short, we aim to generate a rich variety of comparative, historical and interdisciplinary cases focused on specific EU or European external policy actions