UNIVERSITÉ DE GENÈVE

ETH zürich

PRESS RELEASE

Geneva | 8 October 2021

A new Lab for Science in Diplomacy in Geneva

ETH Zurich and UNIGE establish an interdisciplinary unit dedicated to science in diplomacy in the heart of international Geneva. This joint lab will bring scientific insights and methods into diplomatic, international conflict resolution and help address the global challenges our societies are facing.

New technologies offer scientists unexplored avenues for solving complex problems with quantitative methods. This also applies to the field of diplomacy, where methodologies have remained essentially qualitative. In order to develop and make the best use of these new technologies, ETH Zurich and the University of Geneva (UNIGE) are creating a Lab for Science in Diplomacy (SiDLab). The two institutions are strengthening the academic contribution to bringing science and diplomacy closer together and thus contribute to the development of international Geneva. They aim at improving governance and respond effectively to global challenges such as health, politics or climate change.

Science and diplomacy work hand in hand. Diplomacy stimulates research by setting common political goals, for example when addressing climate change, and science in turn provides tools that will improve the understanding of the mechanisms of multilateralism.

The work of the SiDLab will be based on the efforts of two chairs. The first chair at ETH Zurich (full professorship), concentrates on negotiation engineering, the scientification of negotiations and conflict analysis. The second chair, a Chair in Computational Diplomacy, developed jointly by the Global Studies Institute (GSI) and the Department of Computer Science of the Faculty of Science of the UNIGE, will bring together two complementary profiles (two assistant professorships). One is specialized in data science, particularly machine learning and the other focuses on data categorisation in relation to complexity theories and global studies.

This joint project, initiated in 2019 by Micheline Calmy-Rey, then visiting Professor at GSI, and Michael Ambühl, Professor of Negotiation and Conflict Management at ETH Zurich, benefits from the collaboration with the Geneva Science and Diplomacy Anticipator (GESDA). It will strengthen Switzerland's position as a centre for scientific excellence and Geneva's position as a hub for multilateralism.

Swiss Scientific Excellence and International Geneva

"The establishment of the Lab contributes to Switzerland's reputation for scientific excellence and strengthens its position in the international multilateral arena", states Joël Mesot, President of ETH Zurich. Whereas Yves Flückiger, Rector of the UNIGE, underlines the role of international Geneva where "academic skills will bring new tools to global governance for the emergence of multilateralism 2.0.».

High resolution pictures

According to Prof. Ambühl, «Negotiation Engineering will contribute to the solving of complex negotiation problems by means of quantitative methods such as mathematical optimization, game theory and statistics." It is inspired by the established solution-oriented discipline of engineering. The mathematical language helps to increase logical accuracy in negotiation and to de-emotionalize underling conflicts.

Computational diplomacy will improve our understanding of global issues by developing a new theoretical framework for international relations, using new algorithms and mobilising computing power to develop scenarios.

"Artificial intelligence (AI) and machine learning (ML) could be used first and foremost to assess the integrity of data and detect fake news, easily created thanks to modern technologies. It is essential that a diplomatic process is based on reliable information», explains Bastien Chopard, Director of the Computer Science Department at UNIGE.

"Science-based Diplomacy, with Negotiation Engineering and Computational Diplomacy as important drivers, is one of the key emerging topics identified in GESDAs Science Breakthrough Radar", says GESDAs Chairman Peter Brabeck-Letmathe, "this is why we are proud to partner with the ETH Zurich and the University of Geneva for the set-up of their joint Lab for Science in Diplomacy".

Defining a New Multilateralism

The recent climate and health challenges our societies are facing have exposed the weaknesses of current multilateralism, especially when it comes to finding solutions to global crises. «We note that the current theories according to which academics model and analyse the behaviour of actors no longer correspond to reality, particularly with regard to the perception of the sovereign State defending its interests,» emphasises Nicolas Levrat, Director of the GSI. Advances in academic research will enable the implementation of new models that will provide innovative tools to diplomats and other international actors and will allow them to improve negotiation processes and the resulting collaborative solutions.

contact

UNIGE

Nicolas Levrat
Director of the Global Studies Institute (GSI)
+41 22 379 37 21
Nicolas.Levrat@unige.ch

Bastien Chopard
Director of the Computer Science Department
Faculty of Science
+41 22.379 02 19
Bastien.Chopard@unige.ch

ETH

Michaël Ambühl
Professor of Negotiation and Conflict Management
+41 44 632 98 87
mambuehl@ethz.ch

UNIVERSITÉ DE GENÈVE
Communication Department
24 rue du Général-Dufour
CH-1211 Geneva 4

Tel. +41 22 379 77 17

media@unige.ch
www.unige.ch