ETHzürich   UNIVERSITÉ DE GENÈVE

Press Release

Lab for Science in Diplomacy

A new Lab for Science in Diplomacy in Geneva

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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 contributing to the development of international Geneva. They aim at improving governance and responding 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, while science, in turn, provides tools that will improve people's 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, 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 specialised 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 played by international Geneva where "academic skills will bring new tools to global governance for the emergence of multilateralism 2.0."

According to Professor Ambühl, "negotiation engineering will contribute to solving complex negotiation problems by means of quantitative methods such as mathematical optimisation, game theory and statistics." It is inspired by the established solution-oriented discipline of engineering. Its mathematical language helps to increase logical accuracy in negotiation and to de-emotionalise underlying 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.

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 diplomats and other international actors with innovative tools and allow them to improve negotiation processes and the resulting collaborative solutions.

Further Information

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