

Peace Negotiations at the EU Headquarters

by Simon Meuli



Can we reach a peace agreement in Brussels, or is the country of Discordia doomed to continue suffering from violent internal conflict? Using a fictional case study, the course **‘Negotiating Successfully in International Politics and Development Cooperation’** aimed to improve our active and passive negotiation skills and gave participants the opportunity to gain valuable practical experience in an international setting.

We first received a theoretical and conceptual introduction to the world of negotiation at the University of St.Gallen. ‘Making the pie bigger’ was the name of the game: Negotiations do not always have to be zero-sum games! Armed with new knowledge and tools from the on-campus sessions, and still in good spirits despite hard-fought discussions over the price of a box of apples, we were headed to Brussels in early November. There, we would meet with high-level EU diplomats and officials, learn more about the European External Action Service (EEAS), and of course pave the way for a peaceful future in Discordia.

ECHO Deputy Director General Prof. Dr. Michael Köhler recounted tales of tense negotiations with foreign diplomats and ministers, and highlighted the importance of establishing personal connections and trust with negotiation partners. Marie Lapierre, Chair of the European Commission’s Africa Working Group, discussed her experience as a mediator for the EU, and Philippe Cuisson, former Chief EU trade Negotiator for Ukraine, presented us with a 2000-page trade agreement (endearingly nicknamed “The Beast”) that he had co-authored.

The simulation exercise itself was a great opportunity to put theory into practice and apply the techniques and concepts we had learned in class. Side deals were struck, the pie was made bigger, and an agreement was reached in the end. All parties were content with the outcome and later revealed previously secret information to each other over Belgian beer and fries.

On behalf of all participants, I would like to thank Martin Albani and Valentin Ade for giving us this great opportunity to talk with experts in the field, gain first-hand experience in negotiating, and get to know the EU and its institutions better. Discordia is now observing a ceasefire, and the healing process in the war-torn country can finally begin.