



## **Launching the UACES Collaborative Research Network on EU-China Relations: UACES 42<sup>nd</sup> Annual Conference at Passau University**

**Sunday, 2 September 2012, 10:00-14:00**

### **Report**

**By Frauke Austermann, Free University Berlin**

After a successful pre-launch event in Shanghai at Fudan University, the official launch of the EU-China Collaborative Research Network (CRN) took place in the framework of the UACES 42<sup>nd</sup> Annual Conference which was kindly hosted by the University of Passau in Southern Germany. About 15 researchers of EU-China relations from institutions all over the world met on a Sunday morning to discuss the latest issues and analytical approaches in EU-China relations as well as to develop a work plan so as to make the EU-China CRN a success.

Professor Shen Wei from the ESSCA School of Management, the CRN's initiator and main coordinator, warmly welcomed the participants and first gave an introduction to the CRN's background and purposes as well as a brief summary of the main CRN events planned.

Thereafter, Professor Men Jing, EU-China Relations Chair at the College of Europe and co-coordinator of the CRN, as well as Professor Mike Smith from Loughborough University enlightened the participants on the state of the art and methodological approaches in EU-China relations.

Professor Smith suggested three main research agendas to highlight the most relevant issues in the current EU-China relationship: firstly, the EU 'external action' agenda; secondly, the 'rising powers' agenda; and thirdly, the 'global governance' agenda. As far as the first agenda is concerned, EU-China relations are a strong test for the EU's new external action capacity which has been institutionally considerably boosted through the Lisbon Treaty, notably with the new position of High Representative and the European External Action Service (EEAS). Given its growing importance and the difficulties between the EU and China over the past few years, the EU-China relationship provides a central case study to understand post-Lisbon European diplomacy conceptually and in practice, such as issues of diplomacy coordination and the EEAS' impact. Professor Smith further explained that the 'EU external action' agenda of EU-China relations is rich in theoretical perspectives as it cuts across Institutional, Realist as well as Constructivist approaches.

Analysing EU-China relations also helps understanding a topic of growing importance in International Relations and for EU Studies in particular: the role of 'rising powers' (China) and their relations to established powers (European countries). This not only links to conceptual questions about power asymmetry but also on the role of different identities and values. The 'rising powers' agenda requires an interdisciplinary approach as it cuts across studying security, development, and political economy. The EU's role and prospects as a player in contemporary global politics is at the heart of this agenda.

Finally, Professor Smith highlights the significance of EU-China relations when it comes to global governance. The respective agenda involves institutional questions of rules and regimes. A central question is how to make multilateral cooperation work whilst there are different conceptualisations in both parts of the world (the EU as a 'compulsive multilateralist' and China as an 'experimental multilateralist' as the latter still pays close attention that its national sovereignty is not compromised). This discrepancy results in tensions in issue areas such as environment, energy security, and human rights.

There are some themes that cut across all these three research agendas such as the question of the EU's (self-) perception, cultural differences, or the role that the US plays as an intervening variable.

Following Professor Smith's excellent analytical intervention, Prof. Men complemented it by giving an overview of EU-China relations over time. The rapid development of the EU-China relationship since the 2000s has stimulated a lot more (needed) publications compared to the 1990s and before. Moreover, more and more European researchers now master Mandarin and more and more Chinese scholars master foreign languages, notably English. This enables both sides to increasingly rely on primary sources. It in turn has boosted the quality of EU-China scholarship.

Professor Men continued to explain the purpose and significance of initiatives like the CRN to stimulate exchange amongst researchers and communication to policy practitioners, too. In terms of topics, EU-China relations research is by definition interdisciplinary and requires the analysis of other players in global politics as well; not only states but also international organisations such as ASEAN. Professor Men finalized her talk by explaining the concrete activities of the CRN, such as conferences, a regular newsletter to inform on publications, CRN members' conferences and even job opportunities.

The subsequent group discussion was lively. The launch event participants discussed both the more theoretical input by Professor Smith and the practical aspects to implement the CRN by Professor Men. They continued this discussion informally over lunch.

In the afternoon, CRN co-coordinator Frauke Austermann from Free University Berlin then wrapped up the discussion by presenting a work plan that has been specified by the CRN management board (i.e. Professor Shen Wei, Professor Men Jing, and Frauke Austermann). This work plan was developed further based on the input given by both CRN launch events, in Shanghai and in Passau. For the following three years that the CRN will run, each year will be subject to a certain theme. For 2013, "Politics and Diplomacy" was chosen. The conferences and workshops that are planned for 2013 will be designed respectively. For the year 2014, the economic dimension of the EU-China relationship is likely to be analysed. The UACES Annual Conference will be the flagship event of the EU-China CRN for each year. In order to improve the visibility of the CRN, the coordinators decided to regularly write op-eds for high quality newspapers in China and Europe. Some details of the implementation still need to be settled, such as the usage of online debates and social media.

Overall, the event was a successful launch of the CRN and it introduced to as many as four panels on EU-China relations which the CRN coordinators organized as their contribution to the UACES 42<sup>nd</sup> Annual Conference. The list of panels and the abstracts of the presented papers can be obtained from this website.