



Negotiating an “international negotiation platform”? Exploratory talks

Graduate Institute, 7 February 2020 - 09:00 to 10:45

Draft guiding questions

Geneva is a global hub of negotiation, working round the clock across sectors, from multilateral negotiations in various fora in the United Nations, to negotiations and mediations for specific peace processes, to the World Trade Organization or trading in commodities. Yet, these different worlds rarely interconnect.

The idea of an “international negotiation platform” was launched in September 2019, at the World Negotiation Day. As we mark 100 years of multilateralism and reflect on the future of global cooperation, it has generated much interest. To explore this proposal further, negotiators and interested parties from international organizations, governments, business and civil society are invited to an informal round of “exploratory talks”.

The talks will test the traction for an “international negotiation platform”. They will begin with an introduction by Jerome Bellion-Jourdan (former European Union negotiator and Senior Fellow in Residence at the Graduate Institute), who will provide the background and frame the discussion. Participants will be invited to share their views on the opportunity to develop such a platform, its possible objectives, functions and format through 2-3 minute “opening bids”. The talks will be held under the Chatham House Rules¹.

To stimulate the discussions, “Draft guiding questions” have been developed. They are, however, not meant to be exhaustive and should not prejudge the outcome of the talks. To avoid unnecessary duplication of efforts, the “exploratory talks” can also feed into the mapping of existing initiatives with a view to ensuring complementarity. It would inter alia build on the experience of existing platforms².

The “Draft guiding questions” are presented under two headings:

- **“Identifying the problem”**: possible rationale for an “international negotiation platform”
- **“Exploring options”**: possible functions of an “international negotiation platform”

¹ When a meeting, or part thereof, is held under the Chatham House Rule, participants are free to use the information received, but neither the identity nor the affiliation of the speaker(s), nor that of any other participant, may be revealed.

² For instance, the platforms for cooperation supported by Switzerland are presented on: <https://www.genevaplatforms.ch>

I – “Identifying the problem”: possible rationals for an “international negotiation platform”³

- Isn’t there a need to better **recognize the role of negotiation and negotiators** in addressing global issues⁴? To **build bridges between the different worlds of negotiations and negotiators** from governments, business and civil society in Geneva, and elsewhere⁵?
- As we mark a century of multilateralism and reflect on the role of global cooperation as the UN turns 75, to what extent would negotiations be best served if **negotiators engaged with a “win-win-win” mindset**⁶, and how could there be progress in this direction?
- Is there a growing realization that all **negotiators are increasingly committed/expected to deliver on global agendas** such as “*Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*”? That all negotiators need to be aware of fast-paced developments in “infotech” and “biotech”?
- Would negotiations in specific sectors benefit from **bringing in negotiators/experts from other areas**? How can we ensure that all relevant parties are brought to the table of negotiation and/or are duly informed and consulted?
- How can negotiations be better conceived to ensure a **more effective implementation of negotiated agreements and better impact**?
- While recognizing that some negotiations need to be held behind closed doors, how can open negotiation processes become **better known to the public**?
- Is there a shared anticipation that **new and emerging technologies** bring new opportunities/challenges to negotiations and negotiators?

II – “Exploring options”: possible functions of an “international negotiation platform”

Building bridges between the worlds of negotiations and negotiators

- Could the platform be a space for negotiators from across sectors to contribute **think through and experience new forms of multilateralism and global cooperation** e.g. in terms of format of negotiation and actors at the table⁷? To showcase the connection between negotiation and new forms of collective action⁸?

³ Negotiation is understood in a generic way. One could also consider an explicit mention of mediation e.g. “an international negotiation and mediation platform”.

⁴ This was a key objective of the first World Negotiation Day convened by UNITAR and ADN in Geneva on 25 September 2019: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oUGhA16QHYQ>; <https://worldnegoday.com>. The idea of an “international negotiation platform” was mentioned publicly on this occasion: <https://graduateinstitute.ch/communications/news/what-impact-do-un-negotiations-have-real-world>

⁵ Beyond governments, one would look at regional and international organizations, but also the Secretariats of intergovernmental processes; business refers both to individual business companies and business organizations, and can encapsulate a range of actors from sport bodies to financial institutions; civil society is also a generic term which can be understood as covering Non-Governmental Organizations as well as trade-unions or even more broadly “affected groups”.

⁶ William Ury’s proposal: “Getting to ‘yes’ with yourself makes possible three kinds of wins — a win within, a win with others, and a win for the whole.” <https://www.williamury.com/winning-within-and-with-others/>

⁷ Building on initiatives such as the “All In Roundtable on Inclusive Multilateralism, SDGs and Business” convened in May 2019 by USCIB in partnership with the International Organisation of Employers and the International Chamber of Commerce <https://www.ioe-emp.org/index.php?eID=dumpFile&t=f&f=135581&token=1e9f706d2d75f95ec96fa86aa6f36dda8059c716>

⁸ Building on experiences such as the Mega-Sporting Events Platform <https://www.sporhumanrights.org/en/about/overview>

- Drawing on limited past experience, could the platform showcase the benefit of **cross-sectorial delegations of negotiators** with some “pilot” negotiations?
- Building on existing systems⁹, could the platform help **mapping current/foreseen negotiations** in Geneva? Could the mapping be enhanced to **highlight crosscutting issues**? Could there be means to better connect to other centers of negotiations such as New York?
- Could the platform prepare and provide **“briefing papers” ahead of selected negotiations** linking the issues to negotiations/processes in other fora? Would this be particularly for negotiators of Least Developed Countries and other Low and Middle-income Countries, or could it also be useful for other stakeholders e.g. business, civil society?
- Would it be useful to have a space for **sharing documents and best practices on rules of procedures and other process related material** – notably from the Secretariats of international organizations and intergovernmental processes – but also drawing on new forms of negotiations and collective actions?

Rethinking negotiations and the role of negotiators

- Drawing on other initiatives¹⁰, how could the platform help negotiators anticipate the **potential impact, opportunities and challenges, of new technologies on negotiations**?
- Would there be practical means to **better connect the (real or perceived) Geneva “bubble” of negotiations to the “outside” world**¹¹? Sharing experience on ways to maximize impact?
- Are there ways to **enhancing the voice of business and civil society, separately or through joint business-civil society initiatives**, prior to or during multilateral negotiations? Can new forms of collective action provide models for the future of multilateralism and global cooperation?
- Would it be possible to **“delocalize” negotiations** when there is a need to unblock dynamics? **“Walking the negotiation”** as a possible concept in the Ariana park, the nearby Jura mountains or indeed further away¹²?

Strengthening negotiation skills and techniques

- Would a **larger scale training of negotiators towards a “win-win-win” approach** affect positively the dynamics of negotiations?
- Would it be useful to centralize information on **existing providers of training/executive courses** in negotiation skills and techniques to make it more accessible to current/future negotiators?
- To what extent can one draw on the **experience of the Harvard Program of Negotiation or other models**? Can trainings/courses and training material be offered in **languages** other than English?

⁹ For instance, UNOG program of meetings:

<https://www.unog.ch/80256EE600586F34/httpCalendarInternal?ReadForm&day=21&month=1&year=2020&type=conferences&view=monthly>

¹⁰ For instance: <https://www.giplatform.org/>; <https://www.diplomacy.edu/cybermediation>

¹¹ A complementary approach to “Frontline Negotiations” which facilitates peer exchange and learning among frontline negotiators: <https://frontline-negotiations.org/>

¹² For instance on trails such as offered by the Abraham Path Initiative: <https://abrahampath.org/>; <https://unitar.org/about/news-stories/news/unitar-and-abraham-path-initiative-launch-outdoor-experiential-course-negotiation-southern-jordan>

- Drawing on recent innovative experiences, is there space to **train simultaneously and more systematically negotiators of different sectors** to build bridges and enhance synergies¹³?
- Could the platform provide a **system of mentoring** between experienced negotiators and new negotiators?
- Could the platform enhance the **negotiation capacity of specific audiences**: youth; migrants/refugees?

Possible way forward: process and format

- What are the options for an **inclusive process** to further develop the concept of an international negotiation platform, and to test its feasibility?
- Is there a way to **combine a mix of “virtual” and “in person” activities**?
- How to best define the **potential “users”** of the platform? A mix of activities tailored to negotiators, and information for a wider audience?
- What options could be envisaged as a **“business model”** for the platform? Ensuring a balance between the need for external funding and the potential to be self-sufficient?
- How to ensure that the platform remains **independent** when it comes to defining content and activities?
- Would there be interest in **expanding the platform to a global level** e.g. in the framework of the discussion on UN75 and the role of global cooperation?
- Would there be better ways to present the project e.g. “global negotiation hub”, “world negotiation hub”?

¹³ For instance : <https://www.francofonie.org/quelles-passerelles-entre-les-negociations-sur-le-climat-le-commerce-et-le-numerique-862>