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TEPSA – Trans European Policy Studies Association

PONT Career Skills Training II

11-15 September 2017, Brussels

Report

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Preface by Professor Hanna Ojanen, academic coordinator

Career skills are a funny thing. One needs to have these skills for a successful professional career, but for the most part one only learns them during your professional career.

That is where the PONT Career Skills Training comes in. The goal of the programme is to gather advanced level students, recent graduates and young researchers for an immersive five day training course. The training aims to supplement the participants' theoretical and topical knowledge gained in the classroom with the practical skills that are learned by doing.

This second edition of the PONT Career Skills Training, taking place from 11-15 September 2017, approached the nexus of policy research and communication to attempt to bridge this divide. With today's influx of information readily available to anybody with an internet connection, it is incredibly important for researchers to be able to navigate this abundance of information and to reach their audience, be it policy makers, the media or the broader general public, in an accessible and timely way. To be equipped with the communication skills to complement their research background is a vital tool for young researchers as they begin their careers.

During these intensive five days, the participants prepared a policy brief that served as a basis for several different exercises, including mock presentations at the European Parliament and mock TV interviews.

Immediate feedback is essential for trainings such as this, and the trainings were organised in order to maximise the amount and quality of feedback to the participants. In between the practical sessions, there were also discussions with think tankers and researchers at the EU institutions, and a session on the use of social media as a tool for researchers and academics.

After many experiences in coordinating training seminars, I have always enjoyed watching the dynamics of a small group, with a diverse range of backgrounds and interests, come together with a common goal: to improve their skills to lead a more successful career.

Personally, it was a great pleasure to organise this course with TEPSA and the trainers. To witness the progress of such an engaged and eager group over the course of the week is always particularly gratifying: to see the participants discover their skills once given the chance to experiment. I wish all the participants future success in their careers!

Hanna Ojanen is Jean Monnet professor at the University of Tampere (Finland) and was the academic coordinator of this Career Skills Training.



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Presentation

In the framework of the Professional Training on EU Affairs – PONT project, co-funded by the ERASMUS+/Jean Monnet programme, TEPSA organised a five-day ‘Career Skills Training’ on EU affairs for postgraduate students and young researchers on 11-15 September 2017, with a particular focus on communication skills for researchers.

15 young professionals and advanced level students gathered in Brussels. The PONT project’s objective is to apply a more policy-oriented approach to the participants’ research skills, and to provide them with insights into the world of European policymaking and the Brussels arena. This was the second PONT Career Skills Training, with this edition focusing on how researchers can better communicate their work to both policy makers and the broader public. A diverse group of trainers and speakers from the EU Institutions, think tanks, and media shared practical skills and provided unique insight into their work.

Participants were introduced to think-tank research and the art of the policy brief by Dr Sven Biscop (Egmont Institute), met with analysts from the European Commission and the European Parliament, practiced presenting their policy briefs in a European Parliament committee room with officials from the Directorate General for External Policies and practiced TV interviews with media trainer Luc Hangreefs. There were also visits to the European External Action Service (EEAS), and to the European Policy Centre (EPC).

In their written evaluations, the participants unanimously considered that the training will have a positive impact on their current and prospective careers and evaluated the quality and content of the activities proposed throughout the week as excellent. The training also helped the participants gain deeper insights into policymaking and perfected their writing and public speaking skills.

TEPSA would like to warmly thank all speakers and trainers, as well as all participants who took part in this stimulating and challenging week. TEPSA also wishes all participants well in their future careers, and keeps its doors open to them in Brussels!

The next PONT seminar will take place in the last week of January/first week of February 2018, and will be focused on trade, in an EU context with a focus on the external dimension. More information on PONT and TEPSA is available at www.tepsa.eu.



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CST II programme

Main Venue : Fondation Universitaire, Rue d'Egmont 11 – Francqui Room

Monday 11 September: Introduction

- 13:00 – 14:15 Welcome and introduction to the training
*by the **TEPSA team** and **Prof Dr Hanna Ojanen**, Seminar leader and Jean-Monnet Professor at the University of Tampere (Finland)*
- 14:30 – 16:00 Workplace communication: giving and receiving constructive feedback
*with **Katri Auvinen**, Professional Trainer at Innotiimi*
- ~ Coffee break ~
- 16:30 – 18:00 Presenting research in a parliamentary hearing: introduction
*with **Fernando Garcés de los Fayos**, Senior Parliamentary Policy Analyst at the Directorate General for External Policies of the European Parliament*

Tuesday 12 September: Reaching policymakers

- 09:00 – 10:30 How to write a policy brief
*with **Prof Dr Sven Biscop**, Director of the Europe in the World programme at the Egmont Royal Institute for International Affairs*
Venue: Fondation Universitaire, Rue d'Egmont 11 – Francqui Room
- 11:00 – 12:30 Visit to the European Policy Centre (EPC): an introduction to the Brussels think tank world
*with **Paul Ivan**, Senior Policy Analyst at the European Policy Centre*
Venue: European Policy Centre, Rue du Trône 14
- 13:00 – 14:30 Lunch discussion
*with **Aura Salla**, Adviser for Communication and Outreach at the European Political Strategy Centre (EPSC), European Commission*
Venue: Fondation Universitaire, Rue d'Egmont 11 – Hoover room



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- 15:00 – 18:00 Presenting research in a parliamentary hearing: mock-presentation at the European Parliament
with - **Pekka Hakala**, Head of Unit at the Policy Department for External relations, European Parliament
- **Dr Marika Lerch**, Parliamentary Research Administrator at the Policy Department for External Relations, European Parliament
Venue: European Parliament, Rue Wiertz 60
- 19:00 Dinner with think-tankers
with - **Prof Dr Michael Kaeding**, TEPSA Chairman and Professor at the Department of Political Science and the NRW School of Governance of the University of Duisburg-Essen
- **Dr Roland Freudenstein**, Policy Director at the Wilfried Martens Centre for European Studies
- **Dr Leonhard den Hertog**, Research Fellow at the Centre for European Policy Studies (CEPS)
- **Vassilis Ntousas**, International Relations Policy Advisor at the Foundation for European Progressive Studies (FEPS)
Venue: Aqua Hotel, Rue de Stassart 43

Wednesday 13 September: Reaching the public

Venue: Fondation Universitaire, Rue d'Egmont 11 – J. Willems Room

- 09:00 – 10:00 Mastering media interviews: introduction
with Luc Hanegreefs, former journalist, TV reporter and presenter
- 10:00 – 12:00 Individual TV interviews
with Luc Hanegreefs
- 13:30 – 15:00 Feedback on the TV interviews
with Luc Hanegreefs
- ~ Coffee break ~
- 15:30 – 18:00 Writing a newspaper column
with Luc Hanegreefs



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Thursday 14 September: Fighting disinformation & dealing with bias in the fake news era

- 09:00 – 10:30 Visit to the House of European History
Venue: European House of History, Rue Belliard 135
- 11:15 – 13:00 The EU in the fight against disinformation: introducing the East Stratcom Task Force of the European External Action Service
Venue: European External Action Service, Rondpoint Robert Schuman
- 14:30 – 17:00 Blogging and social media: what's there for a researcher?
with Dr Simon Usherwood, Reader in Politics at University of Surrey
Venue: Fondation Universitaire, Rue d'Egmont 11 – J. Willems Room
- 18:00 Drinks with EU civil servants: the research-policymaking nexus in the setting of the EU's agenda
with - **Valérie Ramet**, Policy Analyst at the Policy Department for External Relations, European Parliament
- **Gonzalo Urbina Treviño**, Policy Analyst at the Policy Department for External Relations, European Parliament
- **Dr Gaby Umbach**, Policy Analyst for Research Methodologies and Strategic Liaison with Academia and Think Tanks at the Strategy and Coordination Unit of the European Parliamentary Research Service (EPRS)
- **Soledad Rodríguez Sánchez-Tabernero**, Analyst at the European Political Strategy Centre (EPSC), European Commission
Venue: Aloft Hotel, Place Jean Rey

Friday 15 September: Conclusion

Venue: Fondation Universitaire, Rue d'Egmont 11 – Room D

- 09:30 – 11:30 Feedback on your policy brief
with Prof Dr Sven Biscop, Director of the Europe in the World programme at the Egmont Royal Institute for International Affairs
- 11:30 – 12:30 Discussion on the seminar's takeaways



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Day-to-day report

Monday, 11 September 2017

Entry-exercise/The art of feedback, with Katri Auvinen, Professional Trainer, Innotiimi

Rapporteur: Jure Požgan, University of Ljubljana, Faculty of Social Sciences

The first day of the PONTS Career Skills Training II started with an ice breaker. Participants were given detailed instructions from trainer Katri Auvinen with respect to group coordination, division of tasks and a problem solving exercise. This was an excellent opportunity to get familiar with all participants from the very beginning and to address the demanding tasks of working and communicating in a group. In order to enter the room for the introductory session participants needed to successfully solve the problem in 40 minutes.



After the ice breaker participants were welcomed by the TEPSA Secretariat and the seminar leader Professor Hanna Ojanen who introduced the training and explained some practical and organisation matters for the week to come. The second afternoon session was a workshop on the importance of giving and receiving constructive feedback in the context of workplace communication. It served as a kick-off for giving feedback throughout the week by combining some theoretical insights on why and how to give feedback with some practical group work on the implementation of feedback. The presentation of the group work created an opportunity for the participants to reflect upon the importance, barriers, the do's and the don'ts in giving and receiving feedback. The majority of participants agreed that feedback remains a challenge and calls for further practice.



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Presenting research in a parliamentary hearing: introduction, with Fernando Garcés de los Fayos, Senior Parliamentary Policy Analyst at the Directorate General for External Policies of the European Parliament

Rapporteur: Arnolds Eizensmits, London School of Economics and Political Science

Mr Garcés de los Fayos used this session to explain to the participants of the training course what is the place of academic analysis in the work of the European Parliament (EP) and how researchers assist decision-making. This was the participants' first chance to discuss the relation between their research work and the world of politics, which led to an engaging session.



The speaker thoroughly explained his work within the Directorate General for External Policies of the EP. Its mandate is to provide neutral, professional and profound analysis and research regarding the relations between the EU and countries and regions beyond its borders. It is organised in either geographical or thematic/horizontal areas. The Policy Department (an internal think tank) of the Directorate General for External Policies of the EP has three main clients: 1) the EP President; 2) Parliamentary Committees; 3) Delegations which work with the EU's external partners (they tend to request information most frequently). Different research products were explained and displayed, ranked from the most extensive to the shortest: studies, in-depth analyses, briefings, 'At a Glance' papers. The European Parliamentary Research Service, in comparison, provides support to individual MEPs and it deals with both internal and external issues.

The speaker also gave numerous practical recommendations. For example, Mr Garcés de los Fayos noted that research products for policy-makers need to be pragmatic and realistic, presenting several actionable policy options at the end. It is necessary to synthesise elements from different sources and present research in a user-friendly format, taking into account that not every member of a Parliamentary Delegation is an expert in a particular field. There



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is no need to showcase extensive theoretical knowledge, keeping products concise. Finally, side sentences are an interesting format element that help readers to rapidly grasp the key content. Overall, the role of researchers is to facilitate a debate, but not to be in the centre of it.



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Tuesday, 12 September 2017

How to write a policy brief, with Prof Dr Sven Biscop, Director of the Europe in the World programme at the Egmont Royal Institute for International Affairs

Rapporteur: Dr. Evelina Christova, New Bulgarian University

In the opening remarks Professor Biscop briefly out sketched the history, structure and way of operating of Egmont Royal Institute of International Relations. He stressed the full academic freedom the think tankers at Egmont have and the advantage of having Brussels based analysts.

Professor Biscop offered 12 concrete guidelines about writing a policy brief:

1. Have something to say;
2. Have an opinion of your own;
3. Write on a topic that matters;
4. Do not over interpret official documents;
5. Write clearly;
7. Keep it short;
8. Choose a catchy title;
9. Think about time;
10. You need to sell it;
11. Do not be afraid to recycle;
12. Don't stay at the office.



6. Think about the layout;

Professor Biscop was quite detailed in answering all questions in the discussion after his presentation. Topics like referencing, getting feedback before publishing and structuring the policy brief were brought up. Apart the strictly methodological question there were some broader issues that were addressed, like knowing one's field and the people in the field, being aware of what is up-to date and being constantly harvesting for the next work and last but not least, how to have an opinion while at the same time staying out of party politics.



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Visit to the European Policy Centre (EPC): an introduction to the Brussels think tank world, with Paul Ivan, Senior Policy Analyst at the European Policy Centre

Rapporteur: Maryia Hushcha, Comenius University

Paul Ivan, a Senior Policy Analyst at the European Policy Centre (EPC), spoke about the think tank industry in Brussels in general and more specifically about the EPC. While the policy research community in Brussels is relatively small, there can be found diverse types of institutions specializing in politics or economics, party-affiliated or independent, ranging from a couple of staff members to over 40 full time researchers. The EPC is one of the biggest think tanks in Brussels and covers a vast scope of research areas. The EPC has over three hundred members that include diplomatic, private and non-profit institutions that can all benefit from the expertise of the think tank's researchers. Apart from its research activities, the EPC also regularly holds public events, such as roundtables or larger conferences. After a short introduction, the floor was open for questions from PONT participants.



- Considering that you are an independent think tank you need to proactively search for funds for your activities and therefore to have broad membership. How do you win new members?

To be successful in winning new members it matters a lot how well-known and respected the institution is. At the same time, policy areas that a think tank specializes in need to be interesting for potential members. At the EPC our members can benefit from the research that we do, for example for corporations it is always useful to know how EU regulations can affect their business and we provide them with that knowledge through our research.



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- Does the EPC have programs for young researchers?

We have a number of internship or junior analyst positions at the EPC, which tend to be quite competitive. While we usually advertise new openings, speculative applications are always welcome.

- How do you engage with the European Parliament and academia?

We often invite MEPs to our events, and the EP invites us to speak at parliamentary hearings to share our expertise. We also very often, almost in any event, have representatives from one of the other European institutions. The Parliament also sometimes commissions their studies to the EPC, although lately their newly developed internal think-tank has been used more. We also very closely cooperate with academia, usually through joint research projects or their participation in our debates. At the same time, reading their studies enriches our own work.

- What skills does one need to possess to be able to work in a think tank?

Obviously, your academic track record matters. Depending on the level one starts in, it is also very important to have an interest and expertise in a certain area. Often, we receive hundreds of applications for one position and we need to select 4-5 candidates for an interview. So, your application needs to stand out in a way. In terms of research skills, curiosity, attentiveness for details and originality of ideas are very important.

Lunch discussion, with Aura Salla, Adviser for Communication and Outreach at the European Political Strategy Centre (EPSC), European Commission

Rapporteur: Roxanna Azimy, London School of Economics

Aura Salla began the discussion with a brief autobiography and description of her work at the EPSC. She then moved onto an overview of the current challenges which the EU, as a whole, is facing, one of which is the topical phenomenon of fake news. Aura Salla stressed the Commission's aim to promote media literacy but admitted that the team currently focusing on this is rather small in comparison to other world powers such as Russia and the USA. Aura then deliberated how the consumption of media has transformed since the explosion of the internet, facilitating the cherry-picking of articles which correspond with personal interests as opposed to the old-fashioned way of flicking through a newspaper from beginning to end. This has resulted in a lack of exposure to articles outside of self-created bubbles of information and personal perspectives.



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Another issue explored was the distance between the EU and its citizens: the group discussed the argument that the EU has become too abstract and that more contact needs to be made with the public in order to shift the current perception of the EU as an aloof, technocratic authority to an accessible federation, in touch with the issues of its member states on both a large and a smaller scale. This led to a discussion over how the EU affects every citizen all the time, even when they are not necessarily aware of it, for instance through its control of food standards and flight prices. This issue seems to be partially fuelled by many EU officials' overuse of what she calls "EU jargon," rather than using simpler and more accessible terms to explain the same concepts, so as to reach out to the wider EU community, and not just the so-called "Brussels bubble" which sharpens this unfortunate barrier between the EU institutions and the public.



Participants then went on to discuss the challenges which the EU faces when it comes to handling Hungary and Poland's infidelity to EU treaties and the question of whether member states should face persecution such as the withdrawal of Commission funding, or whether this would contradict EU values. This option is especially problematic since these states are not the first to bend EU rules and so it begs the questions of how the EU can determine at what stage it would be acceptable to intervene into national matters and impose disciplinary restrictions.

Finally, when questioned how the volatility of current US politics is affecting how the EU is received, Aura Salla confirmed that, unfortunate as this may be for the US, the EU's unity in its values for tolerance and multiculturalism has been strengthened by the cautionary tale unfolding on the other side of the Atlantic.



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Presenting research in a parliamentary hearing: mock-presentation at the European Parliament, with Pekka Hakala, Head of Unit at the Policy Department for External relations, European Parliament & Dr Marika Lerch, Parliamentary Research Administrator at the Policy Department for External Relations, European Parliament

Rapporteur: Irena Nikolova, New Bulgarian University

On the second day of the TEPSA's Career Skills Training, the participants had to present their policy briefs that were prepared in advance at the European Parliament.

Mr. Pekka Hakala, Head of Unit at the Policy Department for External Relations, opened the session by presenting the general principles and framework of the European Parliament and by introducing the role of the civil servants in implementing the EU policies. He highlighted that experts are independent and they cannot make policies themselves, but they are able to defend their position on a certain topic by providing arguments and clear methodology of the prepared research.



In addition, Dr. Marika Lerch, Parliamentary Research Administrator at the Policy Department for External Relations, explained the way a policy brief and research results are presented in a parliamentary meeting and recommended some tips for a good presentation, such as time management and structured key points.

The session continued with the actual presentation by each of the participants. After every three presentations, Dr. Lerch gave personal feedback to each presenter and she made detailed comments on the different parts of the practice: introduction, structure, strengths and weaknesses and conclusion.



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Wednesday, 13 September 2017

Mastering media interviews: introduction, with Luc Hanegreefs, former journalist, TV reporter and presenter

Rapporteur: Darragh Moriarty, Institute of International and European Affairs (IIEA), Dublin, Ireland

Following the early morning session, Mastering TV Interviews, participants were required to put into practise what they had learned. In the earlier session, Mr Hanegreefs outlined some of the tricks involved in negotiating an interview with a journalist who might not necessarily know as much about the topic at hand. Mr Hanegreefs taught participants the dos and don'ts of giving TV interviews. While the morning session was certainly of value, it made the TV interviews a bit more complicated with all of the different tops and tricks in mind as well as the information to be interviewed on.

Mr Hanegreefs came prepared for the TV interviews having read the policy briefs of all participants. He had a number of questions prepared for each participant and he warned participants that the final question could be a 'naughty question.'



What was very helpful was the giving and receiving feedback session participants took part in on Day 1 as this allowed participants give constructive and positive feedback following the interviews. One common thread throughout the interviews was that participants gave answers that were too long and also, that participants did not take sufficient time before giving their answers. A final thought that came up was that some of the native English speakers spoke too fast given the audience of this particular session was full of mostly non-native speakers.

This session provided invaluable insight. The most interesting part of the session was being



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able to see how a journalist thinks. Although Mr Hanegreefs sometimes appeared to lean towards the stereotypical persona of a journalist – this seemed to be for humorous effect – it did allow participants to gain an understanding of how a more cynical journalist might operate. This was a thoroughly enjoyable session.

Feedback on the TV interviews, with Luc Hanegreefs

Rapporteur: Guido Lessing, University of Luxembourg / Robert Schuman Institute

The entire morning session of the third day of career skills training was dedicated to mastering media interviews. For most of the participants it was a relatively new experience to stand in front of a camera and answer the relevant questions put by media trainer Luc Hanegreefs. His professional experience as a TV reporter and presenter for the Flemish Radio and Television Broadcasting Organization meant that his training was quite practice-oriented.

During the feedback session in the afternoon, participants were keen to get feedback on participants' performance in front of the camera. The media trainer focused on participants' physical appearance in front of the camera as well as participants' communication skills. He presented the interviews to the group and commented on them. Most of the interviews were also discussed in a very constructive way by the trainees themselves. Before recording the interviews, the media trainer stressed how important it is to appear self-confident and assertive when speaking into a video camera. Feelings of unease in front of the camera may compromise the trustworthiness of the interviewee. In order to avoid unnecessary gestures, it helped to hold something in hand. Overly expressive head movements appear twitchy on a TV screen – participants could clearly see that a steady gaze at the camera and a calm flow of words are beneficial for the performance of the interviewee as a whole.

With regard to the content of the interviews, the trainer insisted on the need to convey a single key message to the audience. This key message should be no longer than 15 seconds. The trainer explained that interviewees should avoid long sentences, jargon and complex numbers, and that long answers would not leave enough time for further questions. Since recorded interviews are usually cut and reduced to a short sequence of a few sentences, it is better to take time to find the right answer instead of prevaricating and using vague, empty language.

Most of the cues given by the media trainer actually became evident through the analysis of the participants' interviews. Performing well in front of a camera and conveying the key message is to a large extent a matter of practice.



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Writing a newspaper column, with Luc Hanegreefs

Rapporteur: Antonio Greco, Transparency International, Latvia

During the third day of the training, professional journalist Luc Hanegreefs gave a lecture on how to write a newspaper column, or 'op-ed'. The session started with a presentation in which participants were explained what is an op-ed (short for 'opposite editorial page'), its main characteristics and the differences with an average newspaper article in terms of structure and content. The second part of the session consisted in a workshop in which the trainees were asked to formulate a headline and an opening for newspaper column on a subject of their choice.



An op-ed is a written prose piece by a named author who offers to mass media his or her opinion or commentary on particular subject area, on which he or she is knowledgeable. Authors writing op-eds for newspapers are also called “pundits”, and even though they are usually not affiliated with the editorial staff of a newspaper and free to express their opinions, these have to be generally in line with the policy of the outlet.

An op-ed should generally be 700-800 words long and the author, whose unique voice is that of a specialist, needs to have a clear and defined point to make as well as a clear point of view on the subject of the piece. Of uttermost importance for an op-ed is that it has to be newsworthy and linked to current events. Timing, cultural proximity to the newspaper’s readers, significance and impact of the subject matter, unusualness of an event and description of a “conflict” situation therein are all crucial factors that make a newspaper column newsworthy. Another key element is the definition of the target audience, as it influences the vocabulary used and the choice of the topic. Academics usually tend to express themselves in specialised jargon, and this is generally not the right way to address average readers of a newspaper, as they may not have the same level of knowledge.



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The main difference – in terms of structure – between an average newspaper article and an op-ed is that whilst the former is written according to the ‘inverted pyramid’ paradigm, according to which information is written in order of relevance, op-eds are like circles. They start from the fact, they add interesting elements through the argumentation and then they get back to it. A common point is that both have to attract and keep the attention of the reader. In order to achieve this, op-eds need to have a ‘catchy’ title and an interesting opening.

In the second part of the session, participants were asked to find a catchy title and opening for an op-ed on any argument, on which Mr. Hanegreefs gave participants continuous feedback. The exercise was very helpful. It showed how, after all, finding an attractive title is not such an easy and straightforward task as it sounds, and made participants further reflect on the difference between academic writing and writing for the press.

Overall, the session was very useful and interesting, and gave participants many precious insights not only on writing style, but also on the importance for academics to “stay human” and reach out to the general public to spread their knowledge.



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Thursday, 14 September 2017

The EU in the fight against disinformation: introducing the East StratCom Task Force of the European External Action Service

Rapporteur: Lucie Božková, Institute of International Relations (Czech Republic) / Charles University

The last few years can be described as information chaos. The easiness of creating and sharing information created a perfect field for misinforming. In March 2015, 28 states agreed to create a communication strategy and a team that would fight against disinformation. The Task Force was set up to address Russia's ongoing disinformation campaigns. The main tasks of the Action Plan on Strategic Communication are:

- *Effective communication and promotion of EU policies towards the Eastern Neighbourhood;*
- *Strengthening the overall media environment in the Eastern Neighbourhood and in EU Member States, including support for media freedom and strengthening independent media;*
- *Improved EU capacity to forecast, address and respond to disinformation activities by external actors.*

Blogging and social media: what's there for a researcher? with Dr Simon Usherwood, Reader in Politics at University of Surrey

Rapporteur: Nikoletta Michael, London School of Economics

The lecture with Dr Simon Usherwood was on the topic of blogging and social media in a political/international and European affairs context. He provided insight into his own blogging styles that he shares with the world via his website and twitter page. Many participants were not active on social media professionally so Simon Usherwood was able to explain the positives and negatives of becoming active and what the benefits are for participants and followers.



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Participants established that social media, particularly Twitter is a great way to share ideas with academics/politicians/students and provides a platform to discuss these ideas more broadly. More importantly, they are a way to become recognised and acknowledged by professionals all across the globe who may be interested in the work. Simon Usherwood has even partnered up with some of his followers to work on projects/papers and thus has allowed him to further his research and ideas with like-minded intellectuals. In this way, social media can allow participants to progress in their field.



Simon Usherwood has almost 7,000 followers on Twitter. As an expert in Euroscepticism and Brexit, the Brexit vote has allowed him to further his research in this context and become all the more active with his followers who he regularly engages with. Twitter has also allowed him to share his blog with people who wouldn't have otherwise known about it.

Participants became aware that in fact, it is possible to make social media activity and blogging less time consuming by interlinking it with the profession. As an academic, Simon Usherwood is able to do this and also tries to get his own students more involved. By the end of the discussion, most of the participants seemed to be optimistic about becoming more involved with social media and blogging.



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Friday, 15 September 2017

Feedback on your policy brief, with Prof Dr Sven Biscop, Director of the Europe in the World programme at the Egmont Royal Institute for International Affairs

Rapporteur: Linda Maduz, ETH Zurich & Irine Pankelashvili, Caucasus University (Georgia)

Participants of the TEPSA training program received substantive and detailed feedback on their policy briefs by a professional think-tanker: Prof. Dr. Sven Biscop, commented on each policy brief individually. Similar issues were identified in each policy brief.

The most frequently given recommendations related to the length and the structure of the policy briefs. They should not be too long so that the target audience can read them within a short period of time. A policy brief should not exceed 2-4 pages in length. The main point in writing a policy brief is to target a particular audience: First, one should ask oneself who the potential readers are and only then, professional and detailed proposals should be made. Additionally, what the writer should pay considerable attention to is the structure, including sub-titles and sections, in order to also make the policy briefs visually engaging.

Mr. Biscop also drew the attention of the participants to what a policy brief is not. A policy brief is not a newspaper article nor an op-ed. A policy brief goes beyond describing what is going on or expressing one's own opinion. It ideally offers new ways of thinking and new perspectives on a given subject. A distinction must also be made between academic texts and policy briefs. The use of jargon is not recommended in policy briefs: findings and recommendations should be easily understandable for a non-specialised audience. In the same vein, the use of references, figures, and numbers should be kept to a minimum. An important and characteristic part of a policy brief is its recommendation section, which should be detailed, concrete and specific.

Mr. Biscop more generally pointed to the importance of streamlining the text and simplifying the language in a policy brief. Titles and leads should be catchy and give a teaser of what is to follow (f. ex. focus on a specific country), but without telling it all. They should be informative, but not too descriptive. Introductory and background sections are ideally kept rather short. Sentences, such as "as mentioned already", should be avoided. The use of expressions that are 'catch-all', vague or overused is not recommended either. Mr. Biscop also advised the participants against including too many topics into one policy brief. All this will help the writers of a policy brief to get to their main point(s) quickly and get them across clearly.



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Mr. Biscop's advice and recommendations at the occasion of the last session of the TEPSA training program can be summarised as follows:

- 1. Target your audience;*
- 2. Don't use academic jargon;*
- 3. Be catchy;*
- 4. Be concise and detailed;*
- 5. Be attentive to visual side and content size*

In conclusion, this last session was very useful and informative since each participant was provided precise and constructive feedback on an already written policy brief. Mr. Biscop helped participants identify problems and mapped out possible solutions. This final session gave participants the opportunity to grow and improve their writing skills.



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Evaluation

The Career Skills Training was anonymously evaluated in writing by 14 of its participants, following a scale from -- (not useful) to ++ (very useful) applied to a series of evaluation categories. All participants were overall very satisfied with the training. The participants appreciated the programme (+) and the trainers leading the different sessions (+) and found the organisation of the training useful and effective (+). The participants largely considered that the CST had a positive impact on their current and prospective careers and evaluated the quality and content of the activities proposed throughout the week as very good (++) . The evaluation results also revealed that the training helped the participants gain deeper insights into policymaking and perfected their writing skills (policy briefs) and public speaking skills (EP presentations). The participants appreciated the engagement with the variety of trainers/speakers representing different perspectives and different institutions inside and outside of the EU, as well as the diverse background and expertise of the trainers.