Engaging and Empowering Europe

Brexit explained in metaphors
Understanding the Leave voter
European Neighborhood Policy & the Balkans
Integrating Refugees as Entrepreneurs
Dear Alumni and Readers,

“These are the times that try men’s souls.” These words ring just as true for European voters today as they did for American colonists when Thomas Paine wrote them in 1776. As Europe begins to realize the effects of deglobalization, it faces pivotal choices. More and more European nations are putting up more borders controls, and citizens feel so disempowered by the Union they are breaking off into tribes. It’s a test of the European soul: Public opinion has facilitated this situation – and public opinion is the only force that could stop it.

This issue’s focus, “Engaging and Empowering Europe” lets us look forward, not backward. It lets us think of the bridges we want to see built, rather than the ruptures that threaten to tear us apart. As Europeans face down a mission-critical choice, our authors delve into their own visions for the continent.

Our authors take a close look at Brexit – an earthquake in the European order – drawing on their capacity to reflect and even use humor. Describing Brexit creatively through a series of metaphors helps us see the many ways it can be understood, as well as the many seismic effects it may have.

We look at how the European Neighborhood Policy may engage more Europeans by bringing the Balkan states closer to the continental union, and how a German musician has used music to transcend national and linguistic boundaries.

At the same time, our alumni are taking major steps to empower and engage the Europeans of the future. The Project Aeneas team is taking a careful look at how entrepreneurship education can influence migrants’ workforce and socioeconomic integration, in a project destined to produce evidence-based policy. The team behind Education for a Europe of Rights is looking for ways to instill the respect and appreciation for human rights among young Central European students.

We sit down with the Allianz Cultural Foundation’s new director Esra Kucuk to hear about her vision for the foundation and the alumni network. Finally, we pick up some practical tips from a recruiter who knows a thing or two about landing your dream job.

As you discover how Europe can empower and engage you, we invite you to think of how you can empower your fellow European. Europe holds limitless promise, and European souls will overcome the challenges ahead.

Patience Haggin
Editor-in-Chief
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When 700,000 people took to the streets of London on October 20, 2018 to demand a new referendum on the United Kingdom’s withdrawal from the European Union, I decided to contribute to this cause creatively by launching a daily blog devoted to Brexit metaphors.

In October 2018, I began a new daily ritual: I would come up with a new metaphor every day and flesh it out by writing an article on my blog www.BrexitMetaphors.blogspot.com. This series ran for 161 days until the originally-scheduled date of Brexit on March 29, 2019. Brexit is a very multi-dimensional phenomenon. This is why coming up with original metaphors has turned out to be much easier than I had expected: Brexit can be approached from a wide variety of angles. I have listed below around 40 of my original Brexit metaphors, grouped into five themes.
1. UK VIEWS OF EUROPE & THE RELATIONSHIP WITH EUROPE
a) The EU is a beehive but the UK views it as a hornet’s nest of federalist and bureaucrats.
b) The UK & EU are not a divorcing couple but Siamese twins.
c) EU membership served as a life vest for the UK’s economy in the 1970s (while Boris Johnson claims Brussels has put a suicide vest on the UK and holds the detonator).
d) The Single Market is an IKEA bookcase (cohesive structure), not a Lego set that can be unbundled (set menu, not a-la-carte).

2. 2016 BREXIT REFERENDUM
a) Brexit is a barrel of marmite and dynamite. Love it or hate it, it’s nonetheless explosive.
b) The referendum lit a match inside a fuel tank.
c) When David Cameron ignored the sign “Don’t feed the seagulls” (euroskeptic Tories), he turned them into the predators from Hitchcock’s “Birds” movie.
d) The EU is a punching bag for ungrateful politicians.
e) When you cross the proud lions (victorious history) with the fictional unicorns (myths about the EU) from the UK coat of arms, the offspring is Brexit.
f) Brexit was an over-reaction: Don’t burn your house to get rid of the mouse.

3. BREXIT PROCESS & EU-UK BREXIT NEGOTIATIONS (2016-2019)
a) The British plane, in search of the jet stream, is flying in circles in a storm.
b) Cakeism (having it both ways: “have your cake and eat it”); and Proseccism (a cocktail of egocentrism and oversimplification: “Brexit-ites claim Italy wants a trade deal to be able to sell to UK its prosecco.”)
c) British blind spot shatters against the EU facade in a clash of Johari windows.
d) The Brexit “great leap forward” turns out to be a Leap into the dark.
e) Buying a plane ticket requires further steps of preparation before flying out. Or else, pray for teleportation! (The UK didn’t do its homework.)
f) The UK is king but the EU is the queen in a grand game of chess (sovereignty vs. realpolitik).
g) The UK is a purring puma (medium-sized country) that thinks it’s a roaring lion (global power).
h) Brexit for a Global Britain unites three promises: Jam Tomorrow, Mañana, Inshallah!
i) Brexit is burned fudge (British diplomats are good at producing fuzzy deals and sitting on the fence, but after 2.5 years, they have overcooked their fudge).
j) Getting off the fence is harder than sitting on the fence.
k) Three blind men walked into a Brexit referendum (Buddhist tale about three blind men describing an elephant in conflicting ways after feeling different parts of its body).

4. BRITAIN’S POST-BREXIT FUTURE
a) The UK wants to launch itself out of the EU and orbit as a comet, but the UK’s size poses a problem.
b) Brexit does not have to be framed as a divorce. The EU could view Brexit as the UK’s graduation, not resignation. (The UK could be given EU alumni status.)
c) Hong Kong’s advice to the UK: to be a global gateway, you need a hinterland.
d) Hard Brexit may bring death by coconut to the UK (an exotic fruit may look appealing until it falls from the palm tree and lands on your head).
e) Once beyond the EU’s protective magnetic field, the UK would be exposed to cosmic rays (subject to the powers of China, Russia, USA).
f) Advice to the UK: When you burn your bridges by leaving the EU, don’t burn your breeches (livelihood: industry, trade), or you may end up a sans-culottes (the poor - in 18th century France).
g) Brexit means locking yourself out of the EU house and throwing away the key (the UK will never again be able to rejoin the EU if it leaves.)
h) Brexit has two parts: 1) getting drunk on sovereignty; 2) suffering a long hangover (the economic consequences).
i) Genie in a bottle is a Brexit delusion. “Message in a bottle” sent from a stranded island is the Brexit reality (wish list of impossible EU concessions vs. call for help in distress).
j) The city of London had the best table in the EU restaurant. In a post-Brexit context, the UK finance industry may need to move to a space near the toilets.
k) Extreme scenarios for a “hard” Brexit: West Berlin in the Cold War; or a Napoleonic continental blockade in reverse.
l) A post-Brexit UK is a smartphone with a cracked screens: its economic value goes down as soon as the screen has been cracked.
m) Brexit is a bed of roses which have no leaves.

5. CAN BREXIT BE ABORTED?
a) Can a country be “half-pregnant”? (compromise solutions to keep UK within the EU or very close outside the EU).
b) Stairs that go down also come up. So does Brexit.
c) Indefinite “Leave” to “Remain”: another name for a soft Brexit (UK’s Withdrawal Agreement is Brexit in name only and mimics EU membership closely.)
d) Brexit is the longest path from EU membership to EU membership (similar to the saying “Communism is the longest path from capitalism to capitalism”). Communism and Brexit take you back to square one: You have to go through the stages to realize they sound great in theory but do not work in practice.

In conclusion, I’d like to address something from Chaos Theory. The recipe for getting out of chaos and back into more manageable complexity is simply “Do something! Anything!” In the fall of 2018, the situation in the UK was bordering the chaotic and I felt I needed to do something. Anything. And if my metaphors can help give a more sensible EU-friendly perspective to even just a handful of Brits who may soon be voting in a new referendum or a general election, I couldn’t be happier.

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Understanding Brexit: Themes for a Future Europe

The UK has always been a reluctant EU member. It has dragged its heels over efforts to deepen EU integration and demanded rebates to satisfy a euroskeptic electorate. Yet despite being a somewhat “special case,” the undercurrents which pulled this nation on a path away from the continent should not be ignored in the future of Europe.

by Tom R.

The A55 highway sweeps along the North Wales coast to the Port of Holyhead where fast ferries whisk freight and the occasional tourist to the Republic of Ireland. The coastal communities tucked against the rugged mountains of Snowdonia are closer to Dublin than they are to the political heart of the United Kingdom. They have also benefited from decades of input by the European Development Fund. Upgraded railway stations, offshore windfarms, a major Welsh language center and new tunnels taking the highway out of town centers have all been contingent on this support. Yet in the 2016 referendum, this region voted, by a significant majority, to exit from the European Union. A drive along this remote coastline highlights many of the issues which underpinned a successful Brexit campaign.

The pro-EU campaign faced a constant struggle to prove the value of continued European engagement. The EU rarely makes a major PR effort when supporting regional development. A few overgrown road signs in North Wales make scant reference to EU support. Only later did the myeu.uk website, started by proponents of a second referendum, appeal to disciples of the internet age. If the European project is to win over those at the economic, social and geographic fringes of the population it seeks to represent, it must prove its value locally. This is especially apparent in the era of “fake news” where facts can be loosely interpreted and shared rapidly to support a particular campaign.

The slogan “£350 million a week for the NHS” became synonymous with the Brexit campaign. Boris Johnson and other Brexiteers touted a cash injection to the UK’s beleaguered health service with money currently sent to the EU. The fact that much of this money returned in the form of grants, subsidies and other expenditures was rarely highlighted as the debate instead became bogged down in the intricacies of the UK’s financial relationship with the continent. Supporters of pan-European integration may argue that the benefits are plainly visible but for those outside the echo chambers of Brussels and other European capitals, this is rarely the case. Health, education and security have always proved election winning themes and the Brexit referendum was no different. The perceived ambitions of Europe cannot reflect a puerile focus on integration but must instead appeal to the common interests of the average European citizen. Europe, and those who support the Union, must be able to rebut populist stories built around themes such as health and security with hard facts which demonstrate the continued relevance of the European project.

Immigration. Always the metaphorical elephant in the room when it comes to any debate on the drivers of Brexit. Remainers have frequently blamed the far-right for racist and nationalistic messaging which stoked anti-immigrant sentiment and support for British isolationism. It would be remiss to suggest such a campaign did not play a part in the outcome of the referendum. The immigration issue can be distilled into two key areas which had a practical effect on the outlook of British voters.

Firstly, at the macro level, the European Union has failed to deal effectively with an existential migrant crisis. A slow, disjointed response to the arrival of thousands of immigrants across the Mediterranean exposed stark national divides within the union. Many therefore questioned the wisdom of entrusting ever greater powers to Brussels when the
short-term solutions to the crisis were largely found at the state level – closed borders and the return of boats across the Mediterranean. Furthermore, the imagery of the crisis did little to portray the EU as either a provider of security or a compassionate and effective force for human rights. As further crises loom on the fringes of Europe from the Ukraine to the Middle East, Europe is sure to have renewed opportunities to demonstrate effective and unified policymaking.

Intra-European movement represents the second pillar of the migration issue in the Brexit vote. The ability to travel and work freely throughout the EU has brought huge advantages for businesses – from international strategy consultants to farmers requiring seasonal fruit harvesters. Yet such freedoms can also bring significant problems. Some regions in the UK, including Wrexham in North Wales and Boston in Lincolnshire, have received a disproportionate share of new arrivals. Such rapid changes in population have rarely been supported by concurrent alterations in central government funding, which leaves these communities under-resourced and provides easily-accessed fuel for xenophobic attitudes. Fluid European movement can only be matched with an equally dynamic approach to government intervention in order to support areas burdened by immigration. It is unsurprising that the constituencies with the highest Brexit vote mirror those with the greatest inflows of migration. Yes, xenophobic attitudes may have been present in some cases, but this was frequently the outcome of poorly managed integration and the collapse of local services.

The themes link closely to the global trends of rising populism synthesized in a recent briefing by Professor Michael Cox at LSE. Populist politicians have gained power from poorly managed immigration, ineffective government communication and the rising power of new forms of media. Europe’s current situation, in which central government struggles with internal economic inequality and sluggishly approaches external threats, is ripe for such exploitation. Populist movements from Catalonia to Poland draw strength from the foundations of the Brexit campaign – primarily a promise to govern in the interests of the “common citizen” rather than some hazy central elite.

“The best argument against democracy is a five-minute conversation with the average voter.” This quote, often wrongly attributed to Winston Churchill, is frequently deployed in contemporary debates over the validity of the referendum. The “average voter” may know very little about the true benefits and weaknesses of continued EU membership. They might also be easily influenced by the whims of a nationalistic media or by stories shared across social media with scant regard for underlying truth. Yet these facts alone are not justification to deny a democratic decision on EU membership. If the EU is to continue along a path towards integration, it must be able to justify its value to the “average voter.” This requires effective policymaking to meet the real challenges facing Europe and greatly improved two-way communications. Europe must diffuse the value of EU membership to the local level and, most importantly, provide feedback and identify issues which have only been highlighted by the sudden shock of the referendum result.
The last thing on an EU politician’s mind right now is the Western Balkans, which is exactly why it should be. As the EU is consumed by urgent and flashy matters, it needs to remember to engage this fracturing region, and continue to put pressure on a path towards reforms and the enlargement process.

by Michele Macmillan

The Need for Enlargement Policy that Engages the Western Balkans

The last thing on an EU politician’s mind right now is the Western Balkans, which is exactly why it should be. As the EU is consumed by urgent and flashy matters, it needs to remember to engage this fracturing region, and continue to put pressure on a path towards reforms and the enlargement process.

Although the EU has poured billions of dollars into supporting development and democratic governance reforms in the countries that once made up Yugoslavia, little progress has been made in recent years. National governments have been consumed by ethnic divisions and have done little to fight corruption. This apathy has lead to reform deadlock, economic stagnation, high youth unemployment and high levels of corruption.

Steps that lead nowhere

In June 2018, there was considerable media coverage of the name-change deal struck between Greece and the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYROM), after decades of a long stalemate between the two countries. The newly named Republic of North Macedonia will continue along the EU accession process and gain access to NATO. Despite the EU wanting to claim a large victory in the region, other Western Balkan issues remain unresolved. These include progress on reforms, an increase in tensions between Serbia and Kosovo over a border swap, and involvement of other powers in the region.

In recent years, another round of enlargement seemed almost unattainable to some Western Balkan countries. As a result, the EU created a commitment process for these countries designed to assist in the achievement of accession goals. The Berlin Process was created to hold the Western Balkans accountable and to develop a strategy for the remaining unresolved issues. The Berlin Process involves a series of summits that are to help these countries in reaching the requirements for the accession process or path towards membership. A recent summit in April of this year took place with almost no real output and a divided EU over how to tackle the issue in the region. EU member states have grown increasingly divided over what steps the Balkan countries should take.

The state of affairs in Kosovo are illustrative of the EU’s failure to exert the pressure needed to get Serbia to officially recognize Kosovo. Furthermore, despite the fact that Kosovo has met all requirements, visa-free travel to Schengen countries remains off limits for Kosovo (unlike Georgia and Ukraine have managed to obtain). EU member states are hesitant to voice strong support for either side of the debate on Kosovo’s statehood status, but the EU is also divided over whether they should support a territory swap with Serbia or push for the 2013 Brussels Agreement. It is critical for the European Union to have a unified stance when addressing Western Balkans issues and even more important for the Serbia-Kosovo feud if progress is to be made.

Russia and China’s influence

The EU’s carrot and stick approach has been losing support as a preferred means of influencing national politicians in the Western Balkans. This lack of enthusiasm has seen the rise of other powers such as Russia and China exerting their influence in the region. Russia and China are playing two different roles in the region – one wielding political power, the other investment power.

The Western Balkans could easily serve as the next site of a political crisis between Russia and the European Union. Russia has recently been meddling in disputes between Serbia and Kosovo, thus undermining Macedonia’s name change and trying to delegitimize the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO)
alliance. Serbia has increasingly sought to secure Russia as an ally in opposing Kosovo statehood and the EU’s “western” intervention in the region. Russia is trying to disrupt the EU’s sphere influence in the Western Balkans through the accession process and establish its dominance in the region.

Chinese companies have been investing money in infrastructure projects such as highways and bridges in order to create economic ties to the market. Although China might not initially see the Western Balkans as a large economic hub, it is a bridge to trade with the EU market and has potentially for conditionality. Additionally, as Chinese firms allow Western Balkan governments to take out loans for infrastructure projects, these countries will be bearing large amounts of Chinese debt. This could become a significant problem, particularly if EU engagement continues to wane and Chinese funding grows.

The necessity of engagement
It is in the vital interest of the EU to continue its engagement in the Western Balkans, to not just support its own democratic efforts in the region, but to also prevent other countries from becoming a major influence. The Balkans are vulnerable to recidivism as ethnic tensions remain strained, public trust in government institutions is low and slow economic growth persists. Should Russian economic and political support continue unchecked we could see a return to potentially violent turmoil in the region. It’s imperative that the EU finds a new approach to tackling the democratization process in the Western Balkans – or risk losing all security in the region.
Born in 1962 to a farmer in Lünen, Westphalia, Max Raabe got his start singing in a children’s church choir. He studied singing at Berlin’s Hochschule der Künste and graduated as a state opera baritone. He fulfilled a dream by founding the Palast Orchester (Palace Orchestra), which has performed German hits from the 1920s and 30s since 1986. His breakthrough came in 1992 with the original hit “Kein Schwein ruft mich an” (“No swine calls me,” meaning “No one calls me”).

Since 1998, he has regularly played tours in the United States. In 2005, the Palast Orchester performed its first concert in New York’s renowned Carnegie Hall, with many more to follow. Across the whole of Europe and in countries such as China and Japan, this style-conscious singer has made his name.

In which languages do you sing your songs?
To start with the exotic languages, you can already hear me in Chinese, Japanese and Russian. Furthermore, I also sing in many European languages like Polish, Spanish, French, English, Italian and, of course, German.

Are the foreign-language versions translations or new interpretations?
They’re actually pieces from the respective countries, and some are multilingual. “Ich küss die Hand, Madame” is “I kiss your little hand, Madame” in English. Once, in Krakow, I sang it in Polish. Some songs from the Weimar Republic were also popular abroad, such as “Beautiful Gigolo” by Leonello Casucci. We often play the songs in German, because people have the original lyrics in mind anyway, as with “Dein ist mein ganzes Herz” (“Yours Is My Heart Alone”) by Franz Lehár.

Max Raabe performs traditional German songs internationally.

“On Mondays, the audience is harder to crack”

Singer Max Raabe makes traditional German songs popular around the world, breaking down national and linguistic boundaries. by Andreas Lorek
Was “Kein Schwein ruft mich an” a hit abroad?
This is one of the few pieces that doesn’t translate well. Because the phrase “not even the swine care” only exists in German. In Italy, they say something like “not even the dogs care.” But so far, I’ve not seen a need to perform “No dog calls me” in Italy.

Is there a language in which you prefer to sing?
Absolutely in German! (chuckles) I love to perform my repertoire abroad. But then you realize how nice it is to come home. Then every nuance, pause and emphasis registers with the audience immediately. Abroad, an original from Berlin is an interesting world of sound. But the language’s subtleties cannot be conveyed. When you’re back in Germany, you bathe in your own mother tongue, so to speak, and get a whole new awareness of what you have.

Do you sell CDs abroad?
In a few specific cases. But the market is really small. In fact, Germany is one of the few countries where CDs are still being sold.

Abroad, do you mainly perform for German-speaking audiences?
No, no. We consider it very important to have as few Germans in the audience as possible. I’d be uncomfortable speaking English in front of a German audience. We go abroad so we can play for an American, English or French audience. Of course, if a German au pair girl comes to our concert abroad, we won’t kick her out of the concert hall. When we play a concert in America, we usually play just over half of our songs in German, and the rest in English.

Do you understand what you’re singing in other languages?
My English is passable. In the other languages I understand the songs too. We recently had a concert in St. Petersburg where I sang a piece in Russian. Of course, with every word and sentence, I knew what I was singing. Otherwise that’s not possible.

What is the biggest praise for concerts abroad?
Actually, it is the same everywhere: you see that people are spellbound when they listen in a calm, concentrated manner. Sometimes it’s so still you would hear a pin drop. This is the best. Of course, as a musician you can feel whether people like the set, whether they are focused on listening to it, whether you’re captivating the audience. It doesn’t matter if you perform in Kiel or San Francisco.

Do you also moderate in foreign languages?
I tried it in China, though I didn’t succeed. But in Japan, I spoke in Japanese for part of the evening. It’s possible to pronounce Japanese in a very German way, which is very understandable. I learned a few passages by heart. Of course, I had to look again and again on my cheat sheet and the endings of the evening I spoke freely in the concert hall. By and large, I always try to moderate in the local language. In Italy, I did the entire show in Italian. Everything that I say I’ve prepared exactly. I do not have the talent or spontaneity to do the show off the cuff. Using the right words is enormously important to me – no matter which language I’m speaking.

Do you have a different style of presentation for each night?
I think so, of course. However, I rather tell stories. Some of them follow absurd trains of thought, but when they turn the corner they lead to the next piece. It is not like I moderate in some witty way.

How do audiences react differently in different countries?
It’s the same as in Germany: the audience is always a bit harder to crack on a Monday than on a Friday. And that is the same around the world. I can perform in the same city for five consecutive days, and it’s different every day. There’s no “Stuttgart audience” or “Hamburg audience.”

Do your jokes always work?
Yes, luckily. Of course, they often work differently, or I have to change something. But I only translate moderations that have been tested and proven in Germany. Of course, I have translators who help me with this. I can’t speak the languages well enough to understand the punchlines, nuances and special vocabulary. I can sometimes understand how it sounds in French or Italian. It’s okay if I speak with a German accent, but it must not come out in German sentence structure.

Your group played at Marilyn Manson’s wedding to Dita Von Teese. How did that happen?
Manson heard our music in some bar in Moscow and then asked the bartender who was singing. And then he came to us.

Was that a special audience?
Yes, it was really funny. The wedding was at a castle in Ireland. It was pretty cold everywhere, but there were big log fires burning in each room. It was a bit like Halloween for adults. All the ladies were wearing pale make-up and big, dark and wide robes and dresses. Some changed clothes several times over the evening. But it was magical. They were really nice and hospitable. They invited us to join the celebrations. Later we made some music together. Mr. Manson and his wife were very reserved, polite hosts..

Who would you like to play with?
I have no plans. Sometimes it just happens. At one point we invited Thomas Quasthoff on stage at a concert. Moments like that are spontaneous.

We wish you and your orchestra a lot of fun and success.
Alumni Academy: Engaging with the Digital and Global

Dispatches from the Allianz Alumni Academy 2018 at Charles University

What does Europe’s future hold? Challenges and opportunities in times of increased globalization and digitalization
by Freija Haas

At the Allianz Alumni Academy held at Charles University in November 2018, the conversation between Ivan Krastev and Dr. Tomáš Sedláček identified two key aspects -- globalization and digitalization -- of the challenges that Europe is facing. These two aspects might also constitute an important common ground to find a conceivable path forward.

Ivan Krastev and Dr. Tomáš Sedláček provided different explanations for Europe’s current ruptures. Ivan Krastev emphasized the immigration’s impact on Europe and the pressure it places on cooperation within the EU. History is key to understanding EU members’ different approaches to migration, he argued, with some regarding migrants as an asset and others as a threat to their culture.

Dr. Tomáš Sedláček provided another view, focusing on the role of the economy and growth in our society. He compared the belief in economic growth with the religious idea of a paradise. Furthermore, he underlined that the economy should serve the people’s well-being, rather than enslaving them.

The European Union’s issues are many and challenging; it must tackle threats to democracy in several European countries, while at the same time navigate a more unstable surrounding world. A first step to confront these issues is to identify the issues’ roots, which Ivan Krastev and Dr. Tomáš Sedláček took an important role in doing.

Fake news & cyber threats: Is the European project in danger?

by Kristina Lavarova

An alumni panel on fake news and cyber threats began by defining these two trendy words and putting them into a more tangible perspective. Since we all live in an information (knowledge) society, possessing information is becoming even more crucial as it gives us competitive advantage. According to Dr. Jan Ludvik of Charles University’s Center for Security Policy, information has become a commodity which can, if used properly, benefit society as well as the individual.

The most persistent line in the speakers’ notes tackled with burning problem of our inability to evaluate the information we get. The real issue comes from the fact that we know how to use all modern technology but, at the same time, we evaluate the information poorly. As Dr. Jan Ludvik clearly put it, “we are skilled in searching, but poor when it comes to evaluation”. This remark especially referred to youngsters who cannot distinguish between commercial and media information and make almost no effort to verify the source of information they receive from social media.

Masaryk University’s Dr. Petra Vejvodova further explained this hypothesis, emphasising media literacy and its current unstable condition, especially at primary and secondary school where critical thinking lags far behind. While the youth pass through development stages, they are much more susceptible to media manipulation which result in change of behaviour and even one’s reasoning.

Journalist Daniel Moßbrucker joined the discussion by presenting another perspective that claimed fake news are not “a phenomenon of today”. To him, the new element is the environment in which the information is spread, i.e. the cyber space. He pointed out the cognitive biases which lead to perceiving fake news: as we do not have time to research the information and its sources, we see it as true as long as we already believe its contents.

In the course of the discussion with the public came the necessity to differentiate, on the one hand, fake news (based on cognitive biases), malicious fake news and—on the other hand—the journalistic mistakes that lead to false information, i.e. disinformation. All panellists agreed that disinformation should be fought with regulatory frameworks and media literacy focused on the most vulnerable groups: elder people and children.

Mößbrucker likened fact-checkers to firefighters who have no water at their disposal: we know what we should be doing but we do
not have the resources to do it. May this remark let us think of our own responsibility to fight this trend and not to take fake news as an excuse for not addressing the real problems from which our modern societies severely suffer. We should be well-equipped and ready to “spot and fight” the burning site like a genuine firefighter will do.

Digitalization, an opportunity to do good
by Hans Siglbauer

Fake news, Eastern trolls, infringements of privacy -- the internet and all aspects of globalization pose severe threats to free life in a peaceful society. Digital tools, however, can also be harnessed to pursue good goals and ideas that can help improve society and our lives. Alumni heard about four approaches and initiatives to use digital tools in order to pursue goals that have the potential to ameliorate single aspects of everyday’s life.

Matt Stokes presented a comprehensive overview of several initiatives cooperating with Nesta Global Innovation Foundation, such as Consul, Smart Citizen and the Kiron University, which provides online lectures for refugees. Online platforms like these could prove to be useful tools to spread transparency and create commitment in digitalized societies. Yet, according to Matt, the major challenge of entrenched digital exclusion ought to be kept in mind.

Similarly, Krysztof Iżdebski presented a variety of programs he and his colleagues from TransparenCEE had started to strengthen civic technology in Central and Eastern Europe, from "Tinder for dogs" through the "Sejmometr" -- an online tool monitoring the behaviour of Polish policy-makers -- to the online-mapping tool Rejestr. Their work identifies best practises in how people use digital tools and how to transfer these to other regions.

Volt Europa’s Head of Digital Campaign Karolina Machová presented the movement’s program for a pan-European Union party structure to an audience of curious alumni. The Luxembourg-based organization promotes a “pan-European approach” to policy.

According to Julia Kloiber from Berlin, the internet has become a battlefield for information. Collecting valuable data will be of crucial importance. To that end, in cooperation with the Federal Ministry of Education and Science, she initiated a Prototype Fund in order to foster open source projects, including devices to measure local air pollution.

Be Able Product Designer Yi-Cong Lu spoke on behalf of the Berlin-based organisation’s work to empower marginalised groups such as the disabled through design. Its MatchMyMaker project, launched last year, pairs “makers” with people with disabilities to create personalized aids.

Viable and ethical
by Ioana Căcilă

How can we maintain a viable and ethical approach in the face of pressure? Britta Hamann, project manager at the Munich branch of 100 Scientists, presented her team’s work to support the development of a pan-European voice system involving experts from the fields of language, psychology, and artificial intelligence.

At the centre of the Alumni Academy workshop was Impact Hub, a Vienna-based organisation that operates across 50 countries, bringing together a network of more than 16,000 diverse individuals to launch businesses and organisations that make the world a better place.

A bit of advice that sounds obvious, but is often missed is the importance of first focusing on what the need is, rather than being convinced you already have the solution. Martin Mikyška, of Studio Iceberg, explained the principles of Design Thinking and said that the key to finding the right solution is to directly involve people who experience the problem.

Most inspiring was Tereza and the team from Pragulic, who whilst still university students set up a business to offer tours of Prague, delivered by the people that know the city streets the best: the homeless. Starting with just €1500, they’ve created a completely self-sustaining social enterprise that’s given dozens of people employment and a chance to rebuild their lives. As she so rightfully put it, if they could do this with €1500, imagine what you could do with €5000 Jackpot project funding.
What are some of the past experiences you had that lead you to take this position at the Allianz Cultural Foundation?
"Culture needs open space -- and a partner that creates it". This is the motto under which the Allianz Cultural Foundation works to initiate and foster projects that contribute to mutual understanding and cross-border dialogue in Europe and the Mediterranean area. This really spoke to me. I'm a political scientist by trade and have in recent years focused on opportunity-oriented encounters and social discourses in a society in transition.

I moved to this position from the Maxim Gorki Theatre, it is the smallest state theater in Berlin, where I was a member of the directorate. The theater implemented a new, more political style of theater making that is focused on multi-ethnic societies and creates narratives that reach out to people's hearts. It brings people in who are not normally represented on stage and gives the stage to those who are not always heard. This type of theater interested me, and I ended up working at the interface between culture, science and politics. The three years I spent there developing narratives in favor of a diverse urban society gave me a great insight into what is needed for artists to have their freedom and space to flourish and safely grow their projects.

Before, I had worked for one of the biggest private foundations called Stiftung Mercator. It's a German foundation engaged in cultural education, climate change and integration where I developed the German-wide education program Junge Islam Konferenz: a platform that gives young people an institutional-
We are noticing that an open society is an achievement we need to take a stand for and fight for. In other words, there is no doubt that we are going to be confronted time and again in the future with questions relating to how we, as a European society, want to live, how we want to connect with each other within Europe, and how exactly our projects can contribute to achieving our goals.

At the foundation we are currently in a process of strategic reorientation to define more clearly the areas in which we as a foundation can have impact and the topics that we would like to focus on in the future. We hope that this will also support our grantees in understanding the profile of the foundation more clearly. At the same time, I spend a lot of time thinking about whether there is any other way to contribute other than via the granting of funds. Perhaps we can also achieve our goals by initiating unique cooperative activities and alliances designed to help us overcome divisions. The idea of reclaiming basic freedoms and open spaces for art and cultural creators plays a significant role here.

In 2016 for instance, we launched the project Artists at Risk which supports artists and authors from the Mediterranean region who are not able to move freely or grow creatively in their home countries, either because their work is being censored or they are being forced to flee. As part of this program, these artists and creatives can network with others and even gain further professional skills. I am interested in looking more into these types of collaborations.

Is part of your new vision to look at the structure of the ASA Alumni Network?

It is fantastic to gather so many young people engaged in the European idea. I am interested to see what we are capable of doing together. In order to get in a mindset of movement and action, we must look into the methodology, and develop strategies and action plans. I would like to use this kind of engagement to focus on our future topics together and to be in discussion with the next Alumni Council on how we can develop an action plan to mobilize our community. Another idea is to make the Alumni Network more intersectional. We are a cultural foundation -- why don’t we bring people from different artistic and cultural backgrounds together as well?

What words of advice or wisdom would you want to give to members of the ASA Alumni Network?

In my life, I have participated in several young leader programs and I wish that someone had told me before that I would be creating networks for life. My first young leaders’ program was 15 years ago and I am still in contact with those people today. You have intense bonding moments with them, and you should think about opportunities that go beyond this conference. It is possible to create a network and to connect with people from around the globe.

Do you have a vision for the Europe you would like to see in 2020 and beyond?

Currently, in Europe, we are witnessing a huge attraction to national answers rather than joint international solutions. Particularly following the elections to the European Parliament we can see that more and more people are voting for right-wing populist parties.

At the same time, many people are just now beginning to realize that an open society is not something we can take for granted. We are noticing that an open society is an achievement we need to take a stand for and fight for. In other words, there is no doubt that we are going to be confronted time and again in the future with questions relating to how we, as a European society, want to live, how we want to connect with each other within Europe, and how exactly our projects can contribute to achieving our goals.

This is why we support initiatives such as A Soul for Europe and particularly its ultimate goal to involve culture as a creative factor in the process of European integration. We want to create encounters and foster dialogue between the political sphere and civil society. And we are certain that culture can make a decisive contribution in this realm.
Integration through Entrepreneurship: Creating Opportunities for Refugees

Project Aeneas uses entrepreneurship education to accelerate migrants’ integration. by Fabrizio Dell’Acqua and Galen Englund

Twenty-seven years ago, Frank, originally from Albania, found himself being forced to move to Italy in the aftermath of Enver Hoxha’s disastrous reign. As he describes it, he was the lowest of immigrants. But in the years since having fled, he has achieved remarkable things: a PhD in Management and long-term studies in the United States; multiple ventures that he oversaw as a co-founder and, thanks to those experiences, a successful career as a public speaker and startup mentor. Today, Frank is a role model for a new generation of refugees in Italy whom he is teaching as lead instructor of Project Aeneas.

Twenty-seven, coincidentally, is the number of motivated new migrant and refugee students from across the world learning entrepreneurial skills through a 15-week pilot course in Trieste, a port city in Northeastern Italy that is home to Illy coffee. Their origins are diverse – Pakistan, Afghanistan, Brazil, Senegal, Nigeria, and Albania to name only a few – and their stories about the challenges they faced at home and through their journeys are harrowing. They have come together in their new European home armed with intuition, dreams, and plans for a better life.

Each week, they gather in courses taught both in English and Italian by Frank and others to learn the fundamentals of business: fundraising, strategic and financial modeling, goal-setting, marketing, and legal basics for entrepreneurs. At the end of the course, which is coupled with mentorship support, each student has created a new business plan and, whether they launch the business or not, has more skills to support their integration into Italian – and European – life.

Founded by ASA Alumni, Project Aeneas is the driving force behind the course. After nearly a year-and-a-half of preparation, what started as a Jackpot Project has become an NGO coordinating classes for refugees aimed at helping their economic and social integration into European society. By bringing together business and migration perspectives, Project Aeneas will analytically assess whether the 15-week courses and follow-up mentorship in essential entrepreneurial skills provide the means for recently arrived refugees to better integrate into their new homes. The first cohort of students started their new journey in December 2018, supported by two local implementing NGO and public partners: ICS Trieste and IRES FVG.

Project Aeneas is founded on the knowledge that forced migration to the EU is the new normal: demographic changes, coupled with protracted fragile contexts across the African continent and the Middle East, ensure that immigration will continue. Despite arrangements that should be made to stabilize areas refugees and migrants flee from, these human
flows cannot be stopped. Humanitarian imperatives require providing shelter for those who most need it. At the same time, feasible solutions for migrants to integrate and contribute to European societies are increasingly essential, and well-researched approaches presented to EU decision-makers all the more so.

A critical challenge to smooth integration is, naturally, work. The truth is, refugees and migrants almost always want to work -- a fact borne out by years of research across the world. However, the social, legal and economic conditions in which they find themselves often act as hurdles to fulfilling their desire to work and their aspirations. Self-employment, or entrepreneurship, remains an under-investigated possible means of fostering socioeconomic integration. In many cases, this is really the only path available to groups with limited resources to express their potential. When people can sustain themselves and their families, contributing to the welfare of their new community, the odds of sustainable integration are increased. The resilience of refugees, and the cross-pollination of new business ideas they bring with them can spell for economic growth in their new homes while yielding benefits for their home countries.

Project Aeneas wants to make this happen. It looks at how refugees can become entrepreneurs through a training program and, based on empirical analysis and program-design, assesses if doing so helps them to integrate into their communities. This is something that has already proven to be successful in many developing world contexts; a wealth of research has demonstrated that business training is fundamental to the creation of self-sustaining micro-enterprises. Fundamentally, Aeneas examines whether entrepreneurial education – like the course offerings underway in Trieste today – has an impact on the long-term integration of refugees.

The curriculum combines the most current entrepreneurship education with the context-specific needs of the refugees. Specifically designed to allow refugees to develop and execute a business idea successfully, it includes:

• a comprehensive curriculum based on innovative entrepreneurial education;
• weekly instruction with an esteemed educator on the issue of the week;
• online resources and components openly sourced from the world’s best universities (MIT, Stanford, and more);
• a mentorship program with local leaders and engaged business people;
• remote support and administrative oversight

Informed by existing studies on migrant integration, the pilot program in Trieste marks the beginning of a longitudinal study that will track two groups of refugees: participants in the course and a similar cohort of their peers who are not in the course. The study’s findings will compare integration outcomes of the course participants with similar refugees who do not participate in this initial course.

The underlying analysis relies on a series of quantitative and qualitative surveys building on the peer-reviewed Immigrant Citizens Survey created by the Migration Policy Group. A baseline survey of both groups has been conducted before the course start, and follow-up surveys will be administered at the end of the course, then at 6, 12, and 24-month points to both groups. Through such a long-term follow-up, Aeneas seeks to empirically examine how the entrepreneurship program and mentorship opportunities impact refugee lives and integration into their communities.

Today, the students are dreaming up innovative plans for their future businesses: used car import companies linked to Afghanistan, vi-

- 15-week entrepreneurship course
- 27 migrants from countries including Pakistan, Afghanistan, Brazil, Senegal, Nigeria and Albania

or from Italy to new courses in more countries.

If you are interested in Project Aeneas, or just want to share your ideas, please contact any of the Alumni in the founding team (Andrea Contigiani, Fabrizio Dell’ Acqua, and Galen Englund) at projectaeneasngo@gmail.com.
Tips and Tricks to Prepare for an Interview

Working in recruiting is challenging and rewarding at the same time. Ultimately, you have a significant impact on the future of your company by the people you hire.  
by Anna Lászlo

Anna Lászlo, our recruiting and employer brand specialist at Formlabs Berlin and ASA 2008 alumni, shares some insider tips on how to successfully prepare for an interview! So you better make sure you follow them.

What do you do for a living?
I am a recruiter. My role ranges from recruiting to employer branding to candidate experience to project management. I see myself as selling careers and advising people on their careers. I am trying to match my company’s opportunities with the ambitions and goals of candidates. Meeting people and learning about their goals and what motivates them is always a great learning opportunity for me. I get to dig into their personality and background.

Anna, what can you recommend to applicants when applying for a job?
First of all, know yourself, define your areas of interest, and define your career goals. Map your skills and areas of development. It helps to ask for feedback from people around you, as you might not have a clear picture of how you are perceived and where you should strive to improve.

Before you decide to apply for a specific job, read the job description carefully and make sure that you submit all the requested documents and that you have understood the requirements. There are hard criteria and soft criteria in each job description. That means that some of the criteria are “must haves” and some are “nice to haves.” If the job requires you to speak a certain language at an advanced level, and you are just intermediate, then you will most likely not be invited to the interview.

A CV and a cover letter are door-openers, so you should invest some time in developing a “master CV” that includes all the things that you have done. You can use this “master CV” as a basis for job-specific CVs, where you list your experience that is relevant to the specific role. This shows that you are able to synthesize information. Recruiters don’t have much time to go through an application. Therefore you need to structure the information as precise as possible so that they see right away whether or not you are the right candidate for the role.

While editing your CV, you should pay attention to the requirements of the role and include relevant experiences in the CV. Chronology is also important. Your last experience should be first and exclude potentially irrelevant information. Depending on the role, you can list your achievements and projects. And of course, pay attention to formatting and grammar, as in some roles, you might need to be attentive to details.

What are some of the mistakes candidates make in an interview?
The biggest no-go that I see is a lack of motivation and preparation for the interview. Recruiters and hiring managers love talking to candidates, who are genuinely motivated and excited about the role and company. When you are invited to an interview, think of why you want to work for that specific company and in that specific role, what you can add to the team and how you could develop in that role. There is nothing worse than talking to a candidate who just gives very general reasons for joining your company.

When you prepare for your interview, look for information about the company, industry, products, strategy and company culture to have an overview of your potential new workplace. You don’t need to know everything about them, but it’s nice to see that a candidate was curious to find out more. There are also plenty of sources on the internet with the most common interview questions for an interview with a recruiter. You can do an exercise and answer them all.

There are also other mistakes you could make, but they would be more in the field of discrimination against age, gender, ethnicity, race etc.

What advice can you give to someone who is preparing for a job interview?
Be able to elaborate and share examples of situations from your previous experiences that are relevant to the role you are applying for. Explain the situation, your action points, the outcome, and what you learned. I recommend using the STAR (Situation-Task-Action-Result) method when preparing answers to potential questions. If you use this method when answering to a question, your interviewer will know what you have done, how you’ve done it, and what the outcome was.

Most of all – be yourself! Recruiters have a nose for authenticity.
Good Reads: What We’re Reading

Esra Kücük’s pick:

Die Tagesordnung (The Order of the Day) by Eric Vuillard — 2017

"It is fictional but documental and it is about the Hitler party no longer having any money, for campaigning and calling all the big enterprises in Germany to support them. The book is about what would have happened if these companies decided not to support this party.”

- Esra Kücük

After Europe by Ivan Krastev — 2017

In this short, eminently readable volume, Bulgarian Ivan Krastev delves into the pivotal moment Europe currently faces, and what the continent’s future may hold after it passes. He argues that Europe’s refugee crisis – which he calls Europe’s “9/11” – has indelibly changed the continent and threatens the future of the European project.

The Economics of Good and Evil by Thomas Sedlacek — 2013

In this ambitious book that holds appeal for non-economists, Charles University professor Thomas Sedlacek argues that many economic concepts have their roots in ancient theology and myth. Originally published in Czech, this book became a surprise bestseller around the world.


A former Wall Street quant sounds an alarm on the mathematical models that control so much of our modern lives. O’Neil makes this abstract problem comprehensible and relatable by tracing the arc of a person’s life, narrating how algorithms sort the person as a student, job applicant, employee, voter and even medical patient.

The Spider Network by David Enrich — 2018

This deeply-reported work of narrative journalism takes readers into the mind and misadventures of a young, unscrupulous trader who was convicted of an elaborate scheme to manipulate one of the financial world’s most influential metrics for personal gain. Compelling storytelling makes this tale – including its complex economic details – impossible to put down.

The Bank That Lived a Little: Barclays in the Age of the Very Free Market by Philip Augar — 2018

This non-fiction thriller chronicles three decades of boardroom intrigue at one of Britain’s largest banks, following its transformation from an old Quaker bank into a full-throttle capitalist machine. Meticulous journalism takes us into boardrooms where executives argued whether Barclays would remain small and domestic or become a global titan. It unravels for readers the ultimate fallout – for both bankers and the common man or woman.

Circe by Madeline Miller — 2018

In this novel dramatizing ancient Greek mythology, a goddess turns to the world of mortals for companionship. Banished to a deserted island, Circe honed her occult craft and crosses paths with famous mythical figures, including the Minotaur, Icarus, Medea and Odysseus. When Circe draws the wrath of men and gods, she must summon her strength to confront the most terrible Olympians and decide whether she belongs among gods – from whom she was born – or mortals, whom she’s come to love.

Malacqua by Nicola Pugliese — 2017

In this heretofore-overlooked novel, a journalist searches for meaning in a mythologized Naples after four days of rain trigger a series of haunting supernatural events. First published in 1977, this book captivated Italy but was withdrawn at the author’s request until his death in 2012. It has recently been published in English for the first time.
Adrienn Nyírcsák (ASA 2013) started a new position working for the Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture at the European Commission as a permanent official in Brussels. As a policy officer, Adrienn works on the education of third-country nationals in the EU and the post-2020 EU strategic framework for education.

Mikołaj Barczentewicz (ASA 2013) published three papers exploring the foundations of law and constitutions. In “The Illuminati Problem and Rules of Recognition” (Oxford Journal of Legal Studies), he used the fictional scenario of an Illuminati conspiracy to look at the problem of how to distinguish the law from other systematic and rule-guided social practices of legal officials -- an issue quite important in thinking about, for example, Chinese law. In “The Limits of Natural Law Originalism,” he used the topic of constitutional interpretation to talk about vampires. While no vampires were featured in “The Social Basis of Ultimate Legal Rules,” that paper may be of interest to those interested in the cheerful topic of how bad things have to get before people rebel against a legal system.


**Viviane Dittrich (ASA 2009)**
is now working as Deputy Director at the International Nuremberg Principles Academy. She contributed a book chapter on the significance of the Nuremberg Principles to a 2018 French publication entitled "Juger les crimes contre l’humanité: Les leçons de l’histoire." In November of 2018, she was invited to Shanghai, Tokyo and Hong Kong to give talks about the lasting relevance of the Nuremberg and Tokyo tribunals for modern international criminal law.

"I believe that 2020 will be a difficult year for the EU with challenges like Brexit, the threat of core values and tests of the fiscal rules, but I am hopeful that these challenges will be overcome and that doing so will build a stronger, more efficient union.”

Freija Haas

**Galen Englund (ASA 2015)**
rans a series of urban refugee research projects in Uganda that gave local government and residents the data they asked for in order to improve services in their daily lives. He also shifted to running his own consulting firm, where he advises groups on how to enhance their research on topics ranging from what to do with returning ISIS fighters to migration policy.

**Paola Garufi (ASA 2011)**
and her boyfriend climbed Mount Kilimanjaro, which proved to be the most challenging adventure for both of them. The journey involved seven days of breathtaking landscape, multiple climates, exhausting walking, dark nights, incredible stargazing and self-discovery. As Paola stated: "I discovered physical fatigue, I discovered I was altitude sick and did not give up, I discovered I survived with no shower for seven days, I discovered the summit feels great but it lasted 10 minutes, I discovered the whole journey was what made the experience so unforgettable. It is amazing how much energy you can get from yourself and from those who are around you to reach your goals!"

**Freija Haas (ASA 2017)**
finished her bachelor’s degree in political science at Uppsala University in 2018. She presented her bachelor’s thesis on how public access to official records in Sweden has been affected by EU membership. Freija also obtained an internship at the Swedish department of foreign affairs, which will begin this spring.

**Maria-Mercedes Hering (ASA 2015)**
completed her master’s thesis on the construction of women’s roles in the Third Reich in December 2018. She realized once more how deeply those constructions still affect women’s lives and hopes to conduct more research on this issue.

**Vincent Homp (ASA 2017)**
received a Masters of Politics & Technology from the Technical University Munich. "After having completed three months of the first semester, I am even more pleased to be part of this interdisciplinary, innovative and seminal program together with a lot of bright and diverse minds," Homp wrote.

**Kristina Lazarova (ASA 2017)**
began a new job as Junior Manager at ALPIQ’s office in Sofia, a Swiss energy company trading across Europe, with a special focus on the liberalization of the energy market on the Balkans. In 2018 she successfully finished her bachelor’s degree in European Studies and started the master’s degree in energy management at the Sofia University.

**Michele Macmillan (ASA 2017)**
finished her Erasmus Mundus Masters in Public Policy in July 2018 and moved to Washington D.C to work as a program associate for Cadasta, a land rights organization.

**Michelle Nedashkovskaya (ASA 2015)**
wrapped up her time as a fellow at the U.S. Mission to the United Nations by organizing U.S. participation in the UN High-Level Meeting on Peacebuilding and Sustaining Peace. She left New York City to finish her fellowship in London as an adviser to the U.S. Executive Director at the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development.

**Boyan Petrov (ASA 2017)**
has co-founded a non-governmental organization, PGLF Bulgaria, which in August 2018 managed to successfully organize the first edition in his country of an educational non-profit project dedicated to changing the paradigm of leadership through intensive institutes, seminars and summits.

**Max Siegel (ASA 2013)**
graduated from Yale Law School in May 2018. Following graduation, he traveled to Chateau Lafite Rothschild, where he and the Yale Law School Wine Society took second place in the finals of the Left Bank Bordeaux Cup. Subsequently, Max passed the New York State bar exam and began a clerkship in the chambers of Hon. Eric N. Vitaliano of the U.S. District Court for the Eastern District of New York. In 2019, he will start as a law clerk to Hon. Barrington D. Parker, Jr. of the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Second Circuit.

**Nicolas Zahn (ASA 2013)**
was invited to talk about the social consequences of artificial intelligence in a special series on Swiss Radio and Television. The show "Dataland" brought together various experts and representatives of civil society to debate the future of digital Switzerland.
Max Steuer: Devoted to Free Speech and Human Rights

A newly-minted political science PhD studies free speech and opens students’ eyes to human rights.

by Patience Haggin

Max Steuer speaks during Education for a Europe of Rights, his Jackpot Project at the Central European University in December 2017.
Max Steuer believes in teaching students by challenging them. The now 27-year-old Slovak political scientist learned this firsthand. He calls competing in the Slovak Human Rights Olympics as a teenager a transformative experience. At age 18, he came in fourth place out of 64 candidates reflecting on the permissibility of displaying crosses in public schools. Just a few days earlier the Grand Chamber of the European Court of Human Rights delivered the controversial Lautsi ruling precisely on that question.

His educational projects tend to challenge young people and put them on the spot. This is true of “Education for a Europe of Rights,” the Jackpot Project he conceived to prompt precocious high school students to think critically about human rights education. The project consisted of a workshop at the April 2017 Slovak Human Rights Olympics in Modra, then a December 2017 symposium that drew first-year undergraduate students.

Max grew up an only child in Šamorín, a town of 13,000 in western Slovakia, within commuting distance of Bratislava. A true interdisciplinary, he holds degrees across related but distinct fields, including two bachelor’s degrees: one in political science and one in law. Add to that a Master of Arts in International Relations and European Studies, then the PhD that he completed in 2019.

Max has held leadership roles in the International Association for Political Science Students, which includes his work as vice president and editor-in-chief of the journal Politikon. In 2018 he was a visiting researcher at the Department of Democracy and Democratization at the Berlin Social Science Center.

For Steuer, competing in the Slovak Human Rights Olympics at age 18 was a transformative experience.

“I think all of us are interested in what is happening around us. I think the unpredictability of developments reveals that we lack the tools to, if not predict, which is impossible, then at least try to understand better why collective decisions such as Brexit and Trump are happening. I think academic debates can contribute to understanding what is behind these factors,” Max said.

At his home Comenius University in Bratislava, he cooperated on an undergraduate course for first-year students that relates core political science concepts to Czech and Slovakian history to first-year undergraduate students.

Max completed his doctorate in 2019. He’s published papers on the Slovak Constitutional Court, Slovak free speech cases, and bans on Holocaust denial activities..
Prague, feeling the charm

by Nad’a Kovalčíková

Once described as a stone town with a market, the hundred-spired Prague numbers today among the most photogenic cities in the world. Last November, the city built on the Vltava river, historical seat of Czech royalty in the 11th and 12th century, became the site for the Allianz Alumni Academy 2018. A series of discussions about Europe were held at Charles University, one of Europe’s oldest and largest universities founded in 1348 as the first university in Central Europe.

After the Velvet Divorce of Czechoslovakia on 1 January 1993, Prague became the capital city of the Czech Republic. Today, the best way to discover the city and its little streets or larger boulevards is on foot. In addition, this jewel of Europe opens its Old Town walls to everyone who wants to stroll through it. In winter, Staroměstské or Václavské squares showcase twinkling Christmas markets with traditional craftworks, warming mulled wine or so called “trdelnik,” a cake made from sweet rolled dough. If you want to discover the rocky hill called Petřín, you will get to Prague’s very origins where stones were dug to build the city’s buildings. More romantic souls may prefer to stay in the city center and have their breath taken by magic views of the Prague Castle from the famous Charles Bridge to which iPhone photographs cannot do justice. This bridge, which was originally called Stone Bridge, was built under the reign of King Charles IV, one of the region’s most well-known monarchs. This 621 meter-long connective link, which was completed at the start of the 15th century, has served as a trade route between Western and Eastern Europe and has carried its current name since 1870. What makes this bridge even more unique is a long alley of thirty baroque statues and statuaries that were installed on the pillars. Passing from one side of the Vltava river to the other makes everyone’s head turn and mind wonder. Charles Bridge is nowadays a bridge of thousands of tourists passing across it every day.

While November is a cold month, the Czech liqueur slivovica and traditional winter cuisine brought joy and warmth to all alumni’s souls. Others also enjoyed Prague’s vibrant coffee scene boasting several little cafés and historical gardens. After an entire day of stimulating discussions and Czech beer, the European crowd of a transatlantic group of Alumni expressed further interest in exploring Prague’s night life. The music was playing, people were dancing, and the mood was good. The city’s capacity to charm you during the day is met by its capacity to seduce you at night. And even though this year’s topic of alumni discussions was “fake news,” the debates were honest, the city’s magical ambiance was genuine, and the reunion was tremendous. The Old Town wall would hardly stop all the tourists who nowadays come to Prague to fall in love with its charm, feel the history and be part of its present.