Shaping Policy for Tomorrows's Transatlantic Challenges

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Insights from the European Student Conference 2024

After having officially launched the Transatlantic Leaders Fellowship Program with the Fall Policy Convention in Washington, D.C., and London in 2023, European Horizons organized the ninth iteration and first-ever annual European Student Conference (ESC) on European soil, with sessions held at the European Parliament in Brussels and at the renowned College

of Europe located in Bruges. Throughout the last six months, the EPIS delegate cohort, comprising fellows Mihnea Turcitu, Dema Elya, Marvin Katsole, and Björn Laurin Kühn, followed eight interactive masterclasses on European policy-making and transatlantic cooperation, ultimately informing and constituting the very basis for their final policy brief titled "Bridging Transatlantic Borders: A Multilateral Framework to Address Climate Change Migration".

The first day of the European Student Conference unfolded in Brussels, where nearly 80 students and young professionals from all over the European and North American continent were able to explore the capital of European policy-, and decision-making, admire the European political spirit with its various supranational institutions, and attend an insightful panel discussion and fireside chat with panellists such as Lena Eisenreich (Parliamentary assistant at the European Parliament), Dylan Crosson (Researcher in the EU foreign policy unit at CEPS), Vicky Marissen (Partner at EPPA), Gabrielle Mollier (ECHO & UN Humanitarian Partnership Manager at Oxfam International), and Elżbieta Bieńkowska (former EU Commissioner for Internal Market, Entrepreneurship, and SMEs).

Day two of the European Student Conference commenced with a warm morning greeting and opening speech at the Campus of the College of Europe by Federica Morgherini, current rector of the College of Europe and former High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy. Subsequently, ESC attendees enthusiastically started the day with a variety of informative and engaging activities that provided hands-on experience relating to policy-making and crisis management. The latter included two policy workshops aimed at deepening attendees' knowledge on how to present a policy brief successfully and effectively, alongside a real-time multilateral crisis simulation that tested the crisis management and organizational skills of the participants. Ultimately, through the collective immersion into real-world geopolitical scenarios that closely resembled current political crises, the workshops provided ESC attendees with practical experience and valuable insights into navigating complex real-world policy environments in an effective manner.

The afternoon of the second ESC conference day saw a captivating panel discussion titled "NATO at 75: Reassessing Transatlantic Unity for a Future Global Order" commemorating the 75th anniversary of NATO and delineating its location on the geo-political chessboard amidst the current highly dynamic political and military shifts. With panellists such as Dominik Jankowski (Government of Poland), Soren Liborius (EEAS), and Alain de Neve (Belgian Royal Military Academy), ESC attendees were able to gain valuable insights into real-world transatlantic cooperation and multifaceted issues in the face of the ongoing Russian war of aggression. Finally, the second day of the ESC finished off with a delightful evening reception in the middle of the beautiful old town of Bruges to foster meaningful connections

and collectively reflect on the experiences from the day's events and the last six months of the Transatlantic Leaders Fellowship Program as a whole.

On day three of the ESC, each delegation, inter alia, presented their policy brief, that outlined key policy recommendations and strategies for addressing various multifaceted transatlantic issue areas. Following each short policy pitch, lively discussions ensued, with jury members posing thoughtful and oftentimes quite challenging questions, ultimately leading to constructive feedback that could be used to enhance the overall quality of the policy brief. The European Student Conference culminated with a thought-provoking fireside chat with Benedetta Berti, head of policy planning in the office of the Secretary-General at NATO. Her insights on contemporary safety-demanding geo-political situations and transatlantic cooperation furnished a compelling end to the ESC, leaving attendees inspired and ready to make a meaningful contribution to the policy discourse in their chosen policy track.

As the conference drew to a close, the jury announced their final decisions and revealed the recipients of the policy awards. Honoured to have been part of the Transatlantic Leaders Fellowship, the EPIS cohort was able to win the award for the winning policy memo in the Transatlantic Security track! With the winners unveiled, ESC attendees departed with renewed enthusiasm and a shared dedication to continue to build a stronger and more resilient transatlantic relationship in present and future times. In the upcoming months, the EPIS cohort will consequently finalize their policy brief and co-publish it together with the Center for European Policy Analysis (CEPA).

First and foremost, we would like to thank EPIS President Theodor Himmel and Deputy Chairman Johannes Hollunder for their commitment and consistent support of our collaborative efforts. Furthermore, we would also like to thank the team at European Horizons and all of the participants of the Transatlantic Leaders Fellowship and ESC for making the last few months truly remarkable and joyful. The transatlantic connections that have been forged are what make this Fellowship truly unique and special. They extend far beyond borders and time zones, linking us in a web of mutual respect, understanding, and collaboration that holds immense significance for our shared future.

This post was contributed by our delegation to the Transatlantic Leaders Fellowship Programme organised by our partners European Horizons.

Björn Laurin Kühn is a bachelor's and FGGA (Faculty of Global Governance and Affairs) Honours student of Political Science, specialising in International Relations and Organisations at Leiden University. He is particularly interested in Eastern Europe and the MENA region with a focus on security policies, crisis and security management, intercultural negotiation and transatlantic relations. Besides his studies, he is currently a member of the AC committee at the JASON Institute for Peace and Security Studies and is actively engaging in University politics as the IRO (International

Relations and Organisations) representative for the Bachelor's Programme Committee.

Dema Elya is currently studying International Relations & Organisations (IRO) at Leiden University. Having organized a congress on "Diplomacy with Autocracies", she has gained interest in diplomacy, in particular, in mediation. How do we get two completely different countries to still sit at the table together? How do we continue to promote dialogue? Furthermore, she is interested in the EU's coordinated foreign policy. How effective are these coordinated policies of the EU? Think of the EU's migration deal with Tunisia. Lastly, as the Dutch Youth Delegate to the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe, she has learned the value of the international community. She is therefore interested in investigating the role and effectiveness of International Organisations and Non-governmental organizations in the international arena. The topic of diplomacy, specifically multilateral diplomacy, comes back to this topic.

Marvin Katsole is a Bachelor's and Honours student in Political Science, with a specialization in International Relations and Organizations at Leiden University. His academic focus lies in the intricate interactions between the African and European continents. Beyond his academic pursuits, Marvin actively contributes as a Board member of Leiden University's Refugee Initiative. In this role, he passionately advocates for increased educational opportunities for refugees in the Netherlands.

Mihnea Turcitu is a highly accomplished Hounors Political Science student at Leiden University with a specialization in International Relations and Organizations. He is an influential and dedicated board member of Stichting IncLUsion, a foundation committed to supporting asylum seekers in their academic pursuits in the Netherlands. Having lived in the Northern Kurdistan Region of Iraq, Mihnea possesses a profound interest in the Middle Eastern region. He is determined to address crucial issues such as defence, resilience, and the role of diplomacy in conflict mediation. Mihnea is passionate about building a successful career in diplomacy, with a focus on developing and implementing innovative resilience strategies with strategic partners. With the knowledge he has acquired in the lecture hall and on the ground, Mihnea has been able to receive several accolades such as "Future Leader of the Euro-Atlantic Resilience Forum". Currently, Mihnea is focusing his energy on the academic front and is pursuing the Transatlantic Leaders Fellowship Program of European Horizons, where he is honing his European Policy Making Skills. In the background, he works on promoting educational programs as an International Relations and Organizations Student Representative and on mentoring 1st-year students.