

# club.da alumni news

# 1 | 2025



+++ Farewell interview with DA Director Ambassador Emil Brix +++  
+++ club.da Scholarship awardees 2024-25 +++ Polemics Magazine +++  
+++ Books by DA alumni +++ More news from the DA and club.da +++

Dear Alumnae, dear Alumni,

As summer approaches and the academic year winds down, it is once again a moment for reflection and renewal.

This edition of club.da alumni news appears at a time of considerable change—and challenge—for the incoming director at the Diplomatic Akademie Wien, for all the graduates who endeavour onto new paths and build their careers, but also on the bigger stage: the international system. Amid global uncertainty and shrinking budgets, international organisations (IOs) are facing increasing pressure to redefine both their financial foundations and their strategic roles. This issue features a timely article on resource mobilisation for IOs, outlining how they can remain relevant actors in a fragmented world. We encourage you to give it a read.

We also take this opportunity to express our deep gratitude to Ambassador Emil Brix, who was conferred honorary membership by club.da's General Assembly upon his departure from the DA. As director of the Academy since 2017, Ambassador Brix has left a lasting mark on the institution, advocating for its intellectual strength and its place in the international landscape. His legacy will continue to shape our community for years to come.

We are equally honoured to welcome Professor Werner Neudeck as a new honorary member. Professor



Neudeck's commitment to academic excellence and his longstanding service to the Academy's teaching and research mission have deeply enriched our collective experience.

The club.da board has also seen some changes: we warmly welcome our new members and thank the outgoing board members for their service and dedication. It is inspiring to see new ideas and perspectives come into the Club's leadership.

As always, we remain committed to supporting future generations. The club.da Scholarships for the 2024–25 academic year have been awarded, and it is our pleasure to introduce the new awardees in this issue. Additionally, this year's club.da Alpbach Scholarship was awarded to Lew Töpfer following a highly competitive selection process—congratulations! The club.da Alpbach Scholarship is our latest addition to the Club's scholarships and will be a cornerstone to deepen the networks club.da seeks to foster.

We wish you a joyful summer, full of new encounters and warm reunions.

On behalf of the entire club.da board  
and with best regards,

Oliver Authried, David Lansky, Brigitta Blaha

PS: To support our work and the club.da Scholarships, kindly visit

<https://club.da-vienna.ac.at/Membership>.

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# General Assembly 2025

## Brief summary of club.da's annual meeting

As always, the annual General Assembly of **club.da** took place as part of the 25<sup>th</sup> International Alumni Meeting on 27 June 2025.

The meeting started with a moment of silent remembrance of the late DLG 01 alumna Ambassador Erika Liebenwein, the late Professor for International Law Karl Zemanek and all colleagues who passed during the last year.

Consequently, the Club's board and secretary-general had the pleasure of giving an overview of another successful year for **club.da**.

- For the academic year 2024-25, the Club spent EUR 11,000 on direct financial support for current DA students. Besides EUR 8,000 for four **club.da** Scholarships (see pages 8-11), an additional EUR 3,000 were reserved for the first-ever **club.da** Alpbach Scholarship. The awardee, MAIS 29 student Lew Töpfer, will report on their experience at the European Forum Alpbach in the next issue of **club.da** alumni news.
- The Club and its local chapters organised 49 events and gatherings all over the world in 2024.

- The reach of the DA's and **club.da**'s networking and career platform, **da.connect**, which is co-funded by the Association for the Advancement of Teaching at the DA, grew to almost 3,000 alumni and students. To support all these and more initiatives, the Club relies on membership fees and additional donations

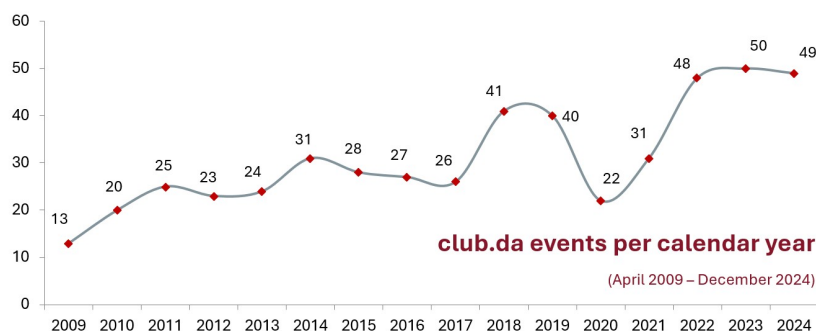
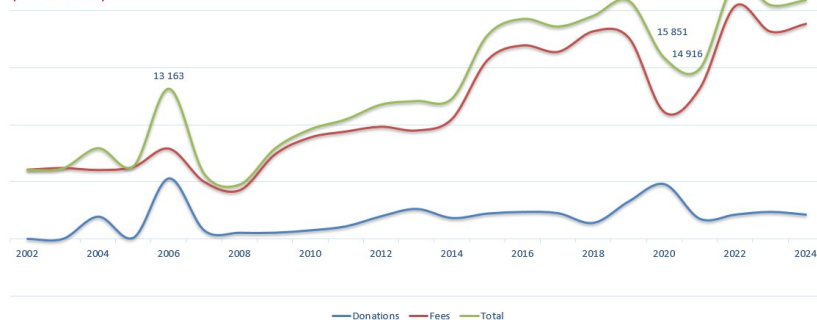
from its global network. With almost EUR 21,000 of income in 2024, the Club's financial base continues to allow the board to finance the mentioned initiatives. Based on the presented facts and figures,

the General Assembly discharged the board for the fiscal year 2024 and elected the proposed board members for the 2025-26 term. Besides a switch of responsibilities between Carmen Hagen (now Deputy Secretary) and Mila Wölfer (now auditor), all board members will continue their roles and successful work for **club.da** for another year.

Finally and most importantly, the General Assembly prolonged

the good tradition of awarding an Honorary Membership of **club.da** to (former) DA directors. To read more about Ambassador Emil Brix's eight-year tenure, kindly read our farewell interview on the next pages.

**club.da membership fees and donations**  
(2002 – 2024)



# Farewell, Ambassador Brix!



Photo: © DA/Peter Lechner

***You have been the director of the DA for eight years. Are there any especially memorable moments you would like to reflect on?***

Yes, certainly. These were quite rupturous eight years. I strongly remember March 2020 when, over one week-end, we had to stop courses on campus and move immediately online. We all mastered this—including the students, but certainly the staff.

The second moment was 24 February 2022, the beginning of the Russian aggression in Ukraine. Immediately, we at the Academy—students, staff, faculty, myself—stood on the side of the Ukrainians defending their identity and sovereignty. Students collected aid for Ukraine, and I immediately stopped and suspended our cooperation with the Russian institute MGIMO

in Moscow. We organised public events to ensure strong support for Ukraine in the Austrian public. It was an important moment because our role goes beyond academic education; it's about preparing our students for the world out there.

The third memorable moment was October 2023, after the Hamas attack on Israeli civilians. This again had an immediate impact on the Academy. There was a debate on how we should react as an institution. We had an Israeli exchange student from the Hebrew University who had to return to Israel as she was in the army. It was a very momentous time.

All of these moments were global events rather than moments of the DA, but they required a response from the Academy.



After eight years at the helm of the Diplomatische Akademie Wien, its 25<sup>th</sup> director will retire on 31 July 2025. In this interview, we asked him about highlights and challenges during his eight-year tenure and his future plans after the DA.

***These Zeitenwende moments—how did they change the DA?***

They intensified what we always should do: try to understand what's happening right now in international affairs. In stable times, you analyse without much emotion, but in a disruptive age, you sometimes take sides. It is our job to prepare students for these moments. Dialogue remains essential. And the understanding of history is crucial—to avoid repeating mistakes, even though some mistakes will happen despite that.

***Were there other challenges during your tenure?***

The biggest crisis was COVID-19. We had to ensure that students did not lose this critical time in their lives. I hope we managed well. We also discussed hybrid education possibilities—something very important. But the aftermath of COVID brought financial challenges. Unlike other Austrian institutions, we received no extra government support. Despite our efforts, this didn't change immediately. It took almost three years after COVID before we convinced the government to support the Academy. I'm proud we finally succeeded.

Another challenge was modernising the Academy's structure. Though the DA was separated from the Foreign Ministry in 1996, some organisational aspects remained outdated. Change management is never easy, but we had an external audit of our organisational structure. The expert group found no serious flaws but recommended subtle improvements. I believe we

are now better prepared for the coming years.

***Let's speak about positive milestones. What were the most gratifying moments for you?***

Mostly, it's about the students—about 1,000 students passed through the Academy during my time. Each of them brought gratifying moments. Also, starting our new master's programme, Digital International Affairs (DIA), in our 270<sup>th</sup> anniversary year was a highlight. DIA has a bright future because we need people who are technically competent and understand the international scene.

Another gratifying aspect was the Academy's reputation. We co-chair the network of diplomatic academies worldwide, together with Georgetown University.

This network is an obligation, but maintaining our reputation benefits students, Austria's international standing, and Austrian foreign policy.

***You had a long diplomatic career before this. How was running an academic institution different?***

Leading the DA is completely different. Every decision here centres around students. What helped me most was not my foreign ministry work, but my time in science policy at the Ministry of Science and Education, where decisions had to be made every hour. Also, my time in Parliament and working for the leader of the conservative party taught me to make decisions quickly and follow through on them.

In bureaucracy, implementation is often neglected, but in politics and here at the Academy, it is crucial.



[Continued from page 5]

**What do you see as your legacy?**

I don't like the word legacy, but it's important to take stock. I had two goals when I started. First, to strengthen the Academy's research quality. Reputation is fine, but you also need meaningful research to attract students and faculty. Second, to open the Academy more to the public through events. Inspired by my time in London and the Chatham House tradition, I believe in public discussion of international affairs.

We also started building up a junior faculty. It's ongoing, but we had more than 100 applicants for a postdoc position recently. Lastly, I worked to introduce cultural studies at the Academy. Cultural diplomacy and soft power are crucial, and now the Academy's law includes culture as one of our fields. I hope a Chair for Cultural Studies will soon follow.

**Alumni have always played an important role at the DA, its alumni association, club.da, is one of the oldest in Austria. What is your message to them?**

Alumni are a key asset. No director would ignore that. While we don't have the American or British tradition of alumni endowments, our growing network is a sign of a healthy relationship. Alumni activities should not be reduced—in fact, they should be expanded. Even though my successor won't be an alumnus of the DA, fresh ideas are good. I hope the alumni association, club.da, will continue to grow in its role.

**You've spent over forty years connected to the DA—as a student, a faculty member, and now as its director. What would you tell future students, or those considering applying, about what makes the Academy special? What's the experience like, beyond what's written in our marketing brochures?**

The obvious things are already mentioned in our marketing: the high quality of education, the small class

sizes, and of course the quality of life in Vienna, which is a real asset for this institution.

What I cannot really put into a marketing brochure is this: as a student here, you have the chance to dive into an experience that you won't find at a large public university or a more traditional academic institution. Here, you enter a small intellectual community that draws on very diverse backgrounds—socially, intellectually, ethnically, and linguistically.

Students here have the opportunity to use that diversity. I know it from my own time as a student at the DA. This mix of perspectives is unlike anything I've seen at other academic institutions. But it also requires something from the students: they must be willing to engage, to let themselves be challenged by this creative and diverse environment. If they do, the DA is a place where they can truly grow.

**Looking ahead, what are your plans after the DA?**

First, I want to sit on the Adriatic coast and enjoy a cup of coffee—something I haven't done in a long time. But more seriously, I plan to focus on academic work and writing. I won't write memoirs but essays on relevant issues—such as the rise of radical patriotism and how

democratic societies should respond.

I'll also spend time on my cultural interests and nonprofit work. For example, I've been on the board of the Ludwig Wittgenstein Initiative for some years now. We have this very simple idea about “Creative Vi-

enna”. We managed to tell the world that Sigmund Freud was an Austrian. It took some time but it worked out. With Ludwig Wittgenstein, we still have a lot of work to do to bring him home to Vienna, too, and to tell the world about Vienna's creative potential. We already managed, for instance, to name one of the Austrian Parliament's big conference rooms after him. I'll certainly invest more time in these initiatives.







Photo: © DA/Daniel Novotny/fotonovo.at

***On 1 August, you'll hand over the DA to your successor. What will you tell him?***

This will actually be the third time Ambassador Martin Eichtinger follows me in a position, so I already know that this Academy will be in very good hands. He's highly experienced, creative, and deeply engaged with international affairs, including issues of war crimes and restitution. I don't think he needs much advice from me.

In German, we say "auch Ratschläge sind Schläge."

I'll always be available if he or anyone else at the Academy needs me. This place has been one of the most meaningful parts of my professional life because it allowed me to combine my backgrounds as a historian, a diplomat, and a political actor.

***What will you miss about the DA?***

I'll stay in touch, of course. The DA will continue to organise inspiring public events and important discussions. But what I'll miss most are the students—their spirit, their intellectual curiosity, and the vibrant commu-

nity we built together. This place feels like a family, and I will miss being part of that daily interaction.

***Ambassador Brix, thank you very much!***

The pleasure is mine. All the best.

*This interview was prepared by the  
DA Development Department's  
2025 IES Abroad intern Mia Vitanzo  
and conducted by Andreas Ehrmann.*

## The DA's incoming director: Ambassador Martin Eichtinger

Ambassador Martin Eichtinger, born on April 5, 1961, in Graz, Austria, will succeed Ambassador Emil Brix as the director of the Diplomatic Akademie Wien on 1 August 2025. He has had a distinguished career in diplomacy and politics, having joined the Austrian diplomatic service in 1986.

Martin Eichtinger served as personal secretary to Vice Chancellor and Foreign Minister Alois Mock and in various key roles, including Ambassador to Romania and Moldova (2007-10), the United Kingdom (2015-18) and, most recently, Italy (2024-25) as well as Director General for Cultural Policy (2010-15) and Austria's Special Representative for Neighbour-



hood Policy and the Danube Region (2023-24).

From 2018 to 2023, he was a member of the government of Lower Austria, responsible for housing, labour markets and international relations.

In addition to his diplomatic and political career, Martin Eichtinger held key roles in the Federation of Austrian Industries (iv), where he managed international relations. In 2003, Eichtinger joined the Austrian Ministry of Economics and Labour, serving as Chief of Staff and later as Secretary General.

Ambassador Martin Eichtinger is married with two children.

# Introducing ...



## ***What has your academic and professional journey looked like so far?***

My academic and professional journey has been shaped by international experiences. I earned my Bachelor's degree from a German university in Barcelona and later pursued a Master's at the Vienna University of Economics and Business, specializing in Export and Internationalization Management. These experiences have given me a strong global perspective and the ability to adapt to different business environments. Professionally, I have worked in both industry and consulting, focusing on supply chain and project management.

## ***What attracted you to the DA, and how did you decide on your specific programme?***

What attracted me to the DA was its strong emphasis on international relations, diplomacy, and current political developments. These subjects have always interested me, and with my academic background being

business-oriented, I wanted to explore a new field to gain a broader understanding, especially given today's evolving geopolitical landscape. Since I already hold a Master's degree, I chose the postgraduate DLG programme for its intensive and structured one-year format, which allows me to deepen my knowledge while using my time effectively.

## ***How has your time at the DA influenced your personal and academic development?***

The studies at the DA have given me new perspectives and deepened my understanding of international relations. I especially valued the courses with professors who bring both academic expertise and practical experience. Their insights not only provided a strong theoretical framework but also enriched discussions with real-world examples and anecdotes. Beyond academics, I truly appreciate the DA community and the events organised by the Academy and student societies. Visiting various embassies offered me first-hand insights into different diplomatic perspectives, and attending conferences, such as one on Poland's security perspectives, gave me the opportunity to expand my network and engage with experts.

**Klaudia Kasprzyszak**  
DLG 61 (2024-25)

## ***What are your long-term goals, and how do you see your education contributing to them?***

I would like to combine my professional experience in the private sector, particularly in consulting, with my knowledge of international relations. My goal is to work on projects that connect the private and public sectors, collaborating with institutions or international organisations to address current challenges and improve existing solutions.



## club.da and Rotary Club Vienna Maria Theresia (RCVMT) Scholarship Awardees 2024-25



"I am very thankful to have received the **RCVMT Scholarship**. I have been financing my own studies, so I am especially grateful for this valuable support.

The scholarship en-

couraged me to focus on my academic and professional goals at the Vienna School of International Studies, especially in international cooperation, diplomacy and digital governance.

When my former colleague Ms. Wagner, Vice Consul for Education and Science at the Austrian Consulate in Shanghai, heard that I had decided to apply to the DA, she happily told me her story and said: women's career

development is very important. I always remember her words and want to pass on this spirit.

I want to better understand the challenges that women face and hope to support them in the future. I am happy that at the end of my first year, I was selected for a one-year internship at the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), which will help me gain key skills for a career in international organisations."

**Yuanyuan Song**  
DIA 01 (2024-26)



### *Alumni-sponsored scholarships for DA students*

Besides individual support granted by DA alumni, there are three scholarship programmes which are funded by members of the DA alumni network.

**club.da Scholarships** are available for first-year students and financed by membership fees and additional donations. At the end of 2023, **club.da** concluded its "Road to 100K", having spent more than EUR 100,000 on scholarships since 2011. All in all, **club.da** has supported 35 female and 18 male students from 28 countries so far.

The **DA Alumni Hall of Fame Scholarships** are open to

second-year students and based on donations by the members of the DA's Alumni Hall of Fame.

Furthermore, since the academic year 2022-23 the Rotary Club Vienna Maria Theresia (RCVMT) has been supporting one DA student per year with its annual **RCVMT Scholarship**.

In total, EUR 160,130 have been awarded through all three programmes since 2011.

For more information, please visit  
<https://club.da-vienna.ac.at/Scholarships>.

# Introducing ...



## *What attracted you to the DA, and how did you decide on your specific programme?*

Both my previous studies, as well as my professional background have shown me the clear importance of international politics. The DA was the best place at which I could enhance my further academic interests. Not only does the reputation of the DA speak for itself, also the ability of this institution to develop its programmes throughout time and to stay dynamic and up to date with the newest world challenges is what made my decision quite easy. Being a refugee from Syria, who only recently obtained the Austrian citizenship, is a personal experience in international political relations that shapes me today. Perhaps that was one of the many reasons I decided to do the MAIS programme.

## *What has your academic and professional journey looked like so far?*

After I graduated from high school in 2017, my academic journey at the University of Vienna started. Six years later, I obtained my Master with honours in Political Science, majoring in political theory. In my master's thesis, I delved into the question behind the liberal term of violence and its relatedness to today's climate crisis and the climate movement. Further, I tried to develop a radical democratic understanding of civil disobedience as a form of active citizenship. After graduation, my master thesis was published as a book, and I am proud it has been made available at the library of my alma mater. During my master studies, I worked as a scientific coordinator at the Central European University in Vienna. Afterwards, I worked as a parliamentary assistant for the Green party at the Austrian Parliament. There, I was conducting policy research about the European Union, which awakened my interest for international politics.

## *How has your time at the DA influenced your personal and academic development?*

Having just finished the second term, I am very glad to have received the opportunity to study at the DA. I am mostly aware of the advantages of studying with an international community with many different backgrounds. This is providing me with new insights and ideas, that I would not have gotten otherwise.

**Jaafar Bambouk**  
MAIS 29 (2024-26)

## *What are your long-term goals, and how do you see your education contributing to them?*

In the future, I am planning to merge my previous academic background in political thought with my newly obtained focus on international politics. Many challenges our world is now facing are global ones that require thorough critical thinking as well as pragmatic and diplomatic solutions.



## club.da Scholarship Awardees 2024-25

***What has your academic and professional journey looked like so far?***

I began my studies in Canada at the University of Alberta, where I pursued a Bachelor of Management. Alongside my education, I gained hands-on experience in public affairs and policy research. As a Public and Government Affairs intern at Navigator, I worked on legislative analysis, media relations, and stakeholder engagement. Before that, I served as a constituency assistant at the Legislative Assembly of Alberta, where I worked closely with elected officials. Now at the DA, I support Professor Patrick Müller in my capacity as a teaching assistant.

***What attracted you to the DA, and how did you decide on your specific program?***

I was drawn to the DA for its focus on European and global affairs, and proximity to key international institutions. I saw MAIS as the ideal programme to refine my understanding of foreign policy and security stud-

ies. As a Ukrainian, I have a deeply personal motivation to pursue a career in the diplomatic field in order to ensure a stable and lasting peace for my country with its sovereignty respected at all times. That is why DA's close relations with international organisations and foreign diplomats, as well as the programme's emphasis on EU foreign policy aligned perfectly with my long-term goals.

***How has your time at the DA influenced your personal and academic development?***

My time at the DA has been transformative, both academically and professionally. It would take a while to list everything that I have already learned in just two terms, from analysing deep historical contexts to assessing contemporary global developments. One thing I am certain of is that I am far more analytically sharp than I was at the beginning of this academic year. Professionally, the DA has provided me with invaluable networking opportunities. I was able to attend meetings that were part of DA's Executive Program for Public Officials and Junior Diplomats from Ukraine. This gave me a chance to connect with like-minded motivated

**Stanislav Vasyliuk**  
MAIS 29 (2024-26)

Ukrainians that are going to shape the future of our country.

***What are your long-term goals, and how do you see your education contributing to them?***

My long-term goal is to play a key role in shaping Ukrainian foreign policy and diplomatic engagement. I see myself contributing to the European integration and security initiatives. Academically, the MAIS' interdisciplinary nature equips me with the skills necessary to navigate the complexities of international relations.

# The Illusion of Being Informed

“Birds of a feather flock together.” This old saying feels particularly relevant in the algorithm-driven world of today’s media. We’re constantly surrounded by news that aligns with our views, reinforcing what we already



that confrontation, there is little room for the kind of nuanced discussions that are essential to a healthy democratic society. If we don’t question our beliefs, we can hardly refine them. We’re not really informed with only one side of the story.

believe. But does this ever lead to a deeper understanding of the world—or merely a curated, self-affirming echo chamber?

In the age of having endless content at our fingertips, it’s easy to feel like we’re constantly informed. But the more news “finds us,” the more we risk being lulled into a false sense of knowledge—one that shields us from complexity, confrontation, and the uncomfortable process of true learning. **This is the News Find-Me Effect (NFM): the belief that we are informed, simply because the news comes to us, whether we seek it or not.**

## The Silent Erosion of Cognitive Dissonance

No discomfort. No friction. The News Find-Me Effect erodes one of the most essential ingredients for personal growth: **cognitive dissonance**—the discomfort we experience when our beliefs are challenged. In the past, stepping outside our informational comfort zones meant engaging with different media outlets, conversing with people who held opposing views, or reading articles from across the political spectrum. Today, algorithms work hard to avoid this discomfort. They prioritize content that aligns with our preferences, smoothing over the bumps that might lead to introspection or disagreement.

As a result, we grow desensitized to anything that doesn’t align with our perspective. We stop confronting difficult truths and uncomfortable facts. Without

## Personalization: The Double-Edged Sword

We live in a media environment where news follows us, not the other way around. Platforms like Facebook, Twitter, and Google personalize content based on our past behavior—what we click on, what we “like,” and who we interact with. It feels seamless, intuitive. But, like the birds of a feather flocking together, we tend to engage with content that resonates with us, reinforcing our existing beliefs. This constant stream of tailored content may feel validating, even empowering. But it comes at a cost: the Filter Bubble, a concept coined by Eli Pariser, describes the trap where algorithms isolate us from viewpoints that challenge our own. The result is a world where our information diets are shaped by algorithms, not curiosity.

Pariser likens the experience to junk food: quick, easy, and satisfying in the short term, but ultimately harmful to our intellectual health. **We gorge ourselves on content that mirrors our own thinking, never confronting the messy, contradictory world beyond our screens.** We don’t seek out knowledge. It comes to us, packaged neatly in familiar narratives, reinforcing rather than expanding our understanding.

## The Political and Democratic Fallout

The consequences of this passive news consumption extend beyond personal understanding. The media is often described as the fourth pillar of democracy, a vital institution meant to hold the powerful

## The News Find-Me Effect in the Algorithm Age

*Written by: Divine Boyembe / Edited by: Alexandra Steinhoff*

accountable, uncover corruption, and ensure transparency. But when news is tailored to fit the narrow contours of our personal beliefs, we lose the media's critical role as a watchdog. Democracy thrives on a vibrant, dynamic exchange of ideas, on the clash of differing perspectives. Without this, democracy risks becoming stagnant. When everyone is simply reinforcing their own beliefs—dialogue, dissent, and the possibility of meaningful compromise wane.

Social media and algorithmic-driven news consumption have already been linked to political polarization. The more entrenched we become in our ideological bubbles, the less willing we are to engage with opposing viewpoints. When we do engage, it's often with hostility, fueled by the outrage that algorithms have nurtured to maximize our emotional responses. Democracy cannot thrive if polarizing discourses erode the bridges of compromise.

### **The NFM: A Threat to Knowledge and Engagement**

The NFM doesn't just stunt our intellectual growth—it actively undermines political engagement. Studies show that individuals who passively consume news through social media are less politically knowledgeable and less likely to engage in democratic processes like voting. There's no point seeking the news when you believe it will find you.

The danger lies in the fact that this passive consumption doesn't encourage critical thinking or deeper political engagement. Instead, it creates a society of apathetic citizens, satisfied with shallow, surface-level understanding, who may think they are well-informed but, in reality, are out of touch with the complexities of the world around them.

### **Can We Reclaim Our Information Diet?**

The solution to reclaim control over our information diets and resist the pull of our personalized

news feed isn't simple, but it starts with active engagement. Diversifying our sources of information—seeking out reputable outlets, turning on the radio or a podcast, subscribing to trusted newsletters, and engaging with content we might not agree with—helps us avoid algorithmic bias and expand our perspectives. It's not just about consuming more news; it's about the better consumption of news and making mindful choices. Setting specific times for news consumption (e.g. during your commute or coffee breaks) can help manage information overload and anxiety. Finally, stay curious and use each piece of news as an opportunity for continued learning, rather than expecting to become an expert after a single read.

Media literacy is key in this process. If we understand how algorithms shape our reality and how they prioritize certain kinds of content over others, we can begin to make more informed choices about where we get our news. This doesn't mean turning off the algorithmic world entirely. It means informing ourselves beyond our bubble.

### **The Bigger Question: What Are We Willing to Lose?**

Is the convenience of personalized news worth the price of a fragmented, polarized society? Are we content with being "informed" by what the algorithm decides is best for us, or do we crave the discomfort, the challenge, and the diversity of perspectives that come with actively seeking out news?

In the pursuit of a better, more informed society, perhaps we must embrace the discomfort of cognitive dissonance—the uncomfortable space between what we know and what we have yet to learn. If we do, we might just restore the media's watchdog function and bring back a meaningful, democratic dialogue.



Find more information on the student-run POLEMICS magazine at <https://www.polemics-magazine.com>.



# Adapting to a Fragmented World

## The Changing Funding Landscape

The world is changing—geopolitical shifts, economic pressures, and evolving global priorities are reshaping the landscape. As a result, global funding dynamics are changing too—governments are tightening their budgets, geopolitical fragmentation is making multilateralism more fragile, and private sector engagement remains highly concentrated in only a few UN agencies. The result? A growing financial gap that IOs can no longer ignore.

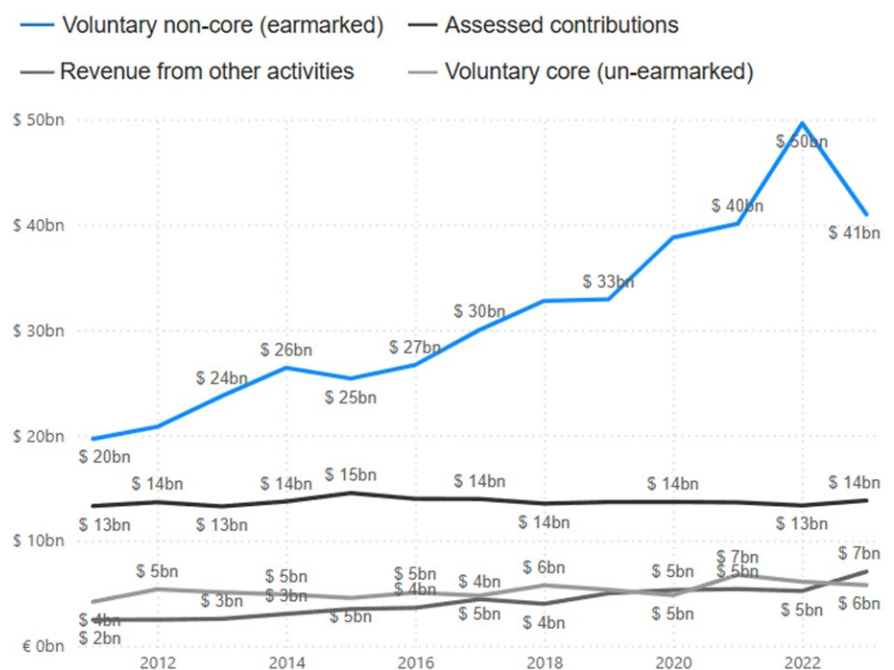
For decades, international organizations (IOs) have relied on a predictable funding model: a mix of assessed contributions from member states and voluntary donations, primarily from certain traditional government donors. This system, while stable in the past, is now showing clear cracks as it becomes increasingly skewed.

Take the UN system as an example. Voluntary non-core (earmarked) contributions have nearly doubled from \$20 billion in 2011 to \$41 billion in 2023, now accounting for over 60% of total funding. However, this growth is largely driven by traditional donors. IOs are not diversifying their funding bases or upping their assessments enough to meet expanded core needs, but instead are deepening their reliance on – and thereby are yielding control to – a limited number of major players with specific agendas.

But the challenge is bigger than money. The question for international organizations is not just how to secure funding, but for what kind of role? In a world where private actors and regional blocs are increasingly shaping global governance, IOs must define their unique value proposition. Are they merely project im-

plementers? Are they conveners of global cooperation? Are they regulators of norms? The future of resource mobilization depends on the answers to these strategic questions.

Revenue UN entities by Financing Instrument, 2011-2023, USD



Source: [CEB UN System Chiefs Executives Board of Coordination](#), EY-Parthenon analysis

While the rise in voluntary non-core funding might seem like a positive trend, it comes with risks. Unlike assessed contributions, which provide stable funding for operational costs, earmarked funding is highly restricted. Most of it goes directly into projects, with only a small percentage (through “project support costs”) contributing to administrative and institutional needs. This means that as earmarked contributions grow while assessed contributions stagnate (despite inflation), IOs face increasing difficulties in covering essential operational expenses. Without stable operational funding, IOs risk becoming fragmented project implementers rather than strong, independent global institutions.

# Resource Mobilization Strategies for International Organizations

*By David Lansky*

Beyond being a numbers problem, this shift in funding structure is a sustainability issue. If IOs cannot expand and concomitantly increase funding to cover project and core operations costs, they risk becoming mere project implementers rather than strategic global actors. Addressing this implies rethinking resource mobilization systematically: not just tweaking fundraising strategies, but actively restructuring how IOs engage new types of partners, especially private sector players, philanthropic foundations, and non-traditional donors.

The challenge to find new partners is twofold:

1. Internally, IOs need to ensure that they thoroughly vet their potential partners to ensure their strategies (vision, mission) and execution (e.g. their supply chain) are in alignment with them, this slows down partnership approvals.

2. Externally, IOs must make a stronger case to corporate and philanthropic partners, who may see limited alignment between their priorities and an IO's mission.

The dual challenge—the “Straddle” problem of needing both internal approval and external buy-in—is the one of the biggest barriers to effective resource mobilization today by IOs. This article explores how to break through these constraints and build a more resilient funding model.

## The 'Straddle' Problem in Resource Mobilization

For many IOs, the internal vetting process is as difficult—if not more so—than persuading external funders to contribute. Potential corporate partners undergo rigorous examinations on issues like human rights records, environmental policies, and political affiliations. Even if a prospective partner is willing to collaborate and to formulate its goals cooperatively, certain

internal stakeholders may raise concerns about ethical alignment or reputational risk, which should be pinpointed early on.

Meanwhile, private sector partners often hesitate to work with IOs for entirely different reasons. Unlike humanitarian-focused agencies like UNICEF or WFP, which have clear “feel-good” missions, important organizations with highly worthwhile goals may struggle to show themselves as attractive philanthropic partners. Companies may not immediately see how supporting trade regulation, nuclear safety, or public administration reform benefits their brand or aligns with their corporate social responsibility (CSR) goals.

Hence the “Straddle”. Some potential partners want to collaborate, but internal approvals result in lengthy, disheartening processes. Other potential partners could easily pass internal vetting but lack a clear business case for why they should engage with an IO.

The consequence? Many high-potential funding opportunities die before they can materialize. This structural issue means IOs must be just as skilled at internal advocacy as they are at external engagement.

To break out of this cycle, IOs need a dual-pronged approach—streamlining internal approvals while also reframing and reinforcing their value to external funders. The next section outlines concrete strategies to overcome both barriers and unlock new funding opportunities.

## Strategies to Overcome the “Straddle”

### *Clarify strategic positioning*

Many IOs struggle to mobilize resources because their positioning in the global system is unclear. Some are caught between acting as neutral conveners and as policy influencers, while others are balancing between project execution and global standard-setting.

[Continued from page 15]

This ambiguity makes it harder for corporate and philanthropic actors to see why they should engage. A clearer strategic role—whether as global regulators, knowledge brokers, or problem-solvers—will not only ease external buy-in but also help IOs refine their internal approval mechanisms for partnerships.

#### *Streamlining Approvals & Decision-Making*

Once the strategic positioning has been re-established:

- Develop a Pre-Approved Partner List – Vet high-potential corporate partners in advance based on ESG/CSR compliance and alignment with institutional values to fast-track approvals.
- Standardize Internal Business Cases – Create templates that clearly articulate strategic alignment, risk mitigation measures, and expected impact to accelerate decision-making.
- Leverage Internal Champions – Identify senior advocates who can push partnerships through internal barriers and reduce risk-aversion.

#### *Reframing the Value: How IOs Engage the Private Sector*

Meanwhile, ensure the value proposition to the potential partners is clear:

- Shift from "Charity" to Strategic Impact – Position partnerships as investments in regulatory influence, market expansion, and risk mitigation rather than just philanthropic donations.
- Highlight IOs as Knowledge & Innovation Hubs – Emphasize access to exclusive global data, research, and policy insights that businesses can leverage.
- Leverage Proof-of-Concept Projects – Start with small-scale pilot collaborations to showcase value before asking for larger commitments.
- Build Cross-Sector Coalitions – Position IOs as conveners that unite corporate, government, and philanthropic funding streams for shared impact.



#### **Pushing the status quo: Alternative Funding Models**

Even if IOs re-establish their strategic positioning, improve internal approvals and clarify the value-add in their potential partnerships, they remain stuck in a model where they rely on external contributions. It's time to think beyond donations and explore alternative funding structures that offer greater financial resilience.

##### *Joint Bidding & Multi-Agency Partnerships*

Rather than competing for the same pool of donors, multiple IOs working on overlapping issues (e.g., climate resilience, health security) could jointly seek funding from major foundations or governments. By presenting themselves as an integrated solution, rather than as fragmented entities, IO "joint ventures" can offer funders a more efficient, scalable way to achieve impact.

##### *Selling Knowledge & Services Instead of Just Seeking Grants*

A number of large corporate entities are becoming their own IOs to a certain extent, pursuing visions and missions for good. To compete, IOs may need to develop specialized services that corporations or governments pay for. Examples include:

**Policy Advisory Services** – IOs provide data-driven policy recommendations tailored to corporate or government needs.

**Certification & Compliance Programs** – Companies operating in regulated industries (e.g., sustainable finance, trade compliance) pay IOs for certification services.

**Training & Capacity Building** – Businesses or governments fund IO-led executive education programs on critical global issues.

By monetizing their expertise rather than relying solely on contributions, IOs can generate self-sustaining revenue streams that make them less dependent on traditional donors.



## Conclusion: The Future of Resource Mobilization

The financial landscape for international organizations is shifting rapidly. Traditional funding sources—particularly assessed contributions from states—are stagnant, while voluntary funding is growing but remains overly reliant on a few donors with increasingly earmarked contributions. If IOs fail to expand their funding base, the ones who see themselves as strategic players risk becoming project managers, the ones who see themselves as project managers, risk losing their rigorous oversight over their projects, unable to fulfill their core mandates in an increasingly volatile world.

Yet, the challenge is bigger than funding alone. The ability of IOs to mobilize resources is directly tied to their broader positioning in global governance. As new actors—from multinational corporations to regional blocs—take on roles traditionally played by IOs, the question is not just how IOs should raise money, but what role they aim to play in a fragmented world. Will they continue as neutral conveners? Will they assert themselves as regulators and standard-setters? Or will they reposition themselves as innovation hubs for global problem-solving? The answers to these questions will define not only their financial future but also their institutional relevance.

The “Straddle” problem—navigating both internal and external barriers to securing partnerships—is at the heart of this challenge. IOs cannot afford to rely solely on donor goodwill; they must professionalize their resource mobilization strategies by:

- Developing a Pre-Approved Partner List to provide resource mobilization teams clarity during the partner acquisition phase.
- Reframing their value proposition to corporate partners as a strategic investment rather than philanthropy.
- Exploring alternative funding models that generate sustainable income instead of just seeking donations.
- The time is ripe for international organizations to adapt to a new strategic and financial reality—one that demands greater agility, diversified revenue streams,

and stronger partnerships. But above all, IOs must take control of their positioning in global governance. If they fail to define their unique role in solving global challenges, they will continue to lose influence—not just with donors, but in shaping the international agenda itself.

International organizations that successfully navigate this transition will not only secure new and sustainable funding but also bolster their institutional resilience, expand their global influence, and reinforce their relevance in a world where their traditional authority can no longer be taken for granted.

### Sources:

UN and IO Financial Reports & Official Data

1 United Nations Funding Data (UN DESA) – Figures on voluntary non-core (earmarked) contributions rising from \$20 billion in 2011 to \$41 billion in 2023. (Source: UN DESA Reports on Funding Trends)

2 General Assembly Budget Approval for 2025 – \$3.72 billion UN budget approval & liquidity crisis discussion. (Source: UN Press Release at <https://www.ungeneva.org/en/news-media/news/2024/12/101679/general-assembly-approves-372-billion-un-budget-2025>)

3 Liquidity Crisis at the UN – The UN had only \$67 million in cash in early 2024 compared to \$700 million the year before. (Source: Center on International Cooperation (CIC) at NYU at <https://cic.nyu.edu/resources/the-liquidity-crisis-at-the-united-nations-how-we-got-here-and-possible-ways-out/>)

Resource Mobilization & Private Sector Engagement

4 UNICEF & World Bank Partnership on Education & Skills – An example of IO-private sector partnerships aligning with corporate strategic goals. (<https://www.unicef.org/press-releases/world-bank-and-unicef-partner-promote-education-skills-and-training-young-people>)

5 UNDP & Gates Foundation Climate Resilience Partnership – \$14 million grant for smallholder farmers, highlighting foundation-based funding. (<https://irff.undp.org/news/undp-and-bill-and-melinda-gates-foundation-partner-build-climate-resilience-smallholder>)

6 World Food Programme (WFP) Private-Sector Engagement – Shows how some UN agencies successfully engage corporate partnerships. (<https://www.wfp.org/stories/6-partners-helping-us-change-world>)

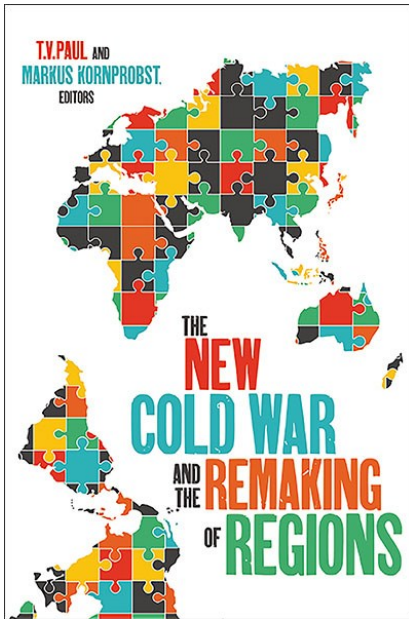
Geopolitical Trends & IO Funding Challenges

7 EY 2025 Geostrategic Outlook – Covers the shift towards economic sovereignty, fragmentation of multilateralism, and declining development cooperation. (Source: EY’s Geostrategic Outlook Report 2025)

8 UNHCR Global Appeal for 2025 – Illustrates the reliance on voluntary contributions and stagnation of assessed contributions. (<https://reporting.unhcr.org/global-appeal-2025>)

# Research by DA faculty

**The New Cold War and the Remaking of Regions** by T.V. Paul and Markus Kornprobst



The new book is a compelling examination of how secondary states are preserving their strategic autonomy and are resisting spheres of influence. Russia's invasion of Ukraine and the deteriorating United States–China relationship signify the

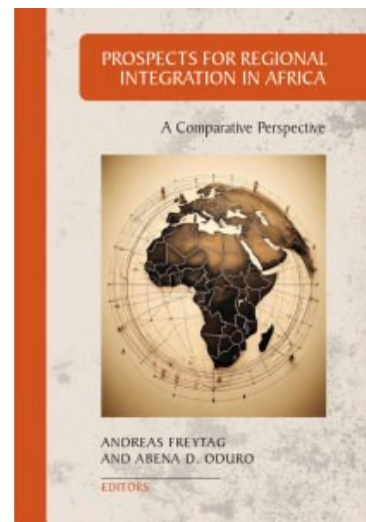
onset of the New Cold War. Unlike the original Cold War, this competition is multipolar and "multiplex," with secondary powers, small states, and even non-state actors pragmatically selecting which of their interests intersect with those of the great powers.

The New Cold War and the Remaking of Regions contends that multiplexity and multipolarity have important repercussions for the world's regional orders. Contributors to the book address the New Cold War and regional ordering processes from realist, liberal, and constructivist perspectives. They demonstrate how variable regional dynamics will lead either to peaceful change or conflict.

This volume is part of a new wave of scholarship that expands the focus of international relations beyond great powers and recognizes the increasing agency that other states have gained in the twenty-first-century world order.

More information is available at <https://press.georgetown.edu/Book/The-New-Cold-War-and-the-Remaking-of-Regions>.

**Insights and lessons from integrating Asian economies: (What) Can Africa learn from Asian market-led regional integration?** by



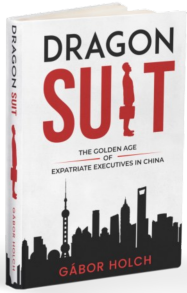
DA postdoctoral fellow Katja Kalkschmied and Joachim Ahrens. This chapter appears in the book **Prospects for Regional Integration in Africa: A Comparative Perspective** edited by A. Freytag and A. Oduro

The article explores what Africa can learn from different regional integration experiences in Asia. While countries in East and Southeast Asia have achieved long-term economic development and sustained growth alongside with and due to intensified regional integration, countries in South Asia have stagnated and continue to be the least integrated economies in the world. East and Southeast Asian countries have neither adhered to orthodox prescriptions of policy and institutional reform nor to a conventional path of regional economic integration. Instead of applying a governance-led path of policy and institutional integration, they chose a market-based approach, which appeared to be pragmatic, economically effective, and politically feasible. This chapter argues that current political, institutional, and economic conditions on the African continent are not conducive to sophisticated policy and institutional integration, European-style, but would allow for market-driven regional cooperation, Asian-style.

More information is available at <https://africansunmedia.store.it.si/ZA/book/prospects-for-regional-integration-in-africa-a-comparative-perspective/1667713>.

# Books by DA alumni

## Dragon Suit: The Golden age of expatriate executives in China by DA alumnus Gabor Holch



Few books address the experience of living in China as a foreigner, and those that do are either subjective diary-style memoirs or books on specific business-related topics.

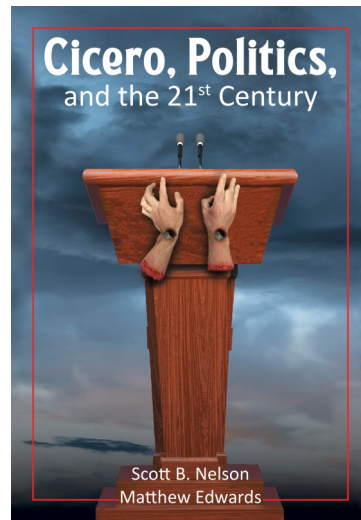
By showing China through the stories, headaches and successes of multinational managers based in China, **Dragon Suit** closes the gap between well-researched but unentertaining monographs on foreign business in the world's most populous country, and delightful but scarcely researched expat memoirs.

Worldwide business leaders who try to comprehend China's unavoidable impact on their livelihoods often ignore the most important voices: those of expatriate managers with years of experience in the country. Based on interviews with China-based corporate executives over five years, **Dragon Suit** brings to life the country's swarming cities, recent economic tsunami, unstoppable middle class, endemic pollution, intermittent Internet, confusing culture, and endless opportunities.

**Dragon Suit** addresses crucial questions for international business: How did China become a key market for global firms? Why are most foreign managers unprepared for its challenges? Why did the country's near-million foreigners begin to leave in the mid-2010s, and who will replace them? Most importantly, how can executives, managers, entrepreneurs, experts, and students prepare for an increasingly China-facing future in business?

More information is available at <https://www.eastwestleadership.com/dragon-suit-book>.

## Cicero, Politics, and the 21st Century, co-authored by DA alumnus Scott B. Nelson



The book addresses the West's current crisis of confidence. Reflecting on how the famed Roman philosopher-statesmen Marcus Tullius Cicero thought and acted in a time of great turbulence in the ancient world, this book offers lessons to 21st century students of

politics and statesmen alike.

Cicero's example shows that the survival of liberal democracy requires us to recover a sense of nobility in politics - a balance of power, honor, and justice with the pursuit of truth for the common good. **Cicero, Politics, and the 21st Century** brings the reader into the dirty politics of the late Roman Republic and tells how Cicero rose to the top in this environment.

He managed to work with people who were often diametrically opposed to him, juggling different power blocks and interest groups, while trying to implement reforms, all at a time when the state apparatus and public consensus holding the Republic together were breaking down.

Cicero was able to attain power, all the while maintaining his integrity and advancing the interests of his people. Additionally, Cicero and his time bring much needed perspective to our political thinking by enabling us to examine events through a prism of assumptions different from those we have inherited from the turmoil of the 20th century.

More information is available at <https://www.academicapress.com/node/567>.



# MSc Digital Int'l Affairs

With the completion of the 2024-25 academic year, we are also celebrating the end of the first year of the DA's and the University of Innsbruck's new MSc in Digital International Affairs (DIA) programme. The first cohort is made up of eleven students from nine countries in Europe, Asia and the Caribbean.

The MSc DIA is a two-year full-time interdisciplinary programme on the digital transformation of international affairs. It equips students with the knowledge and skills necessary to shape the international relations of tomorrow.

The objective of this new programme is to prepare its graduates for international careers with a focus on digital environments.

To do so, the programme pursues two objectives: First, it seeks to enhance the students' understanding of opportunities and risks which digitalisation has created in different, interrelated areas of international affairs



**universität innsbruck**


**DIPLOMATISCHE AKADEMIE WIEN**  
FONDEE 1754 FOUNDED

**CELEBRATING ONE YEAR OF DIA**

"Having prepared and organised our new DIA for many years, it was great to get to know our first student cohort! How they are like? Well, DIA-esque: bright, innovative, cosmopolitan, tech-savvy, forward-looking!"

**DIA-1  
2024-26**

*Markus Kornprobst,  
Dean and Professor of International Relations*



**MARTIN SENN**

"Digitalisation has a profound impact on the practice of international relations and the practice of academic research. The Digital International Affairs (DIA) programme gives students a competitive edge in this digital transformation by providing them with profound insights into the nature and impact of digitalisation in different realms of international relations as well as with state-of-the-art training in digital tools, methods and data."

Head of the Department of Political Science, University of Innsbruck

such as diplomacy, law, security or economics. Second, the programme seeks to develop the students' competence in applying digital technologies, including artificial intelligence, and methods for generating and analysing digital data.

This combination of understanding and applying digitalisation is unique in the global landscape of master programmes and will give graduates a competitive edge on the labour market. It will allow them to be innovative in a range of (overlapping) issue areas, including cybersecurity, cybermarketing, digital networking and artificial intelligence.

We still welcome late applications for the 2025-27 programme

and regular interest in the 2026-28 DIA 03 and ask all DA alumni to spread the word!

For more information on the MSc DIA, kindly visit <https://www.da-vienna.ac.at/DIA>.



# Study trips in 2025



Exploring the heart of **Brussels** with our first-year students! From unforgettable moments to inspiring visits at some of the most notable institutions, this study trip was one for the books.

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Our **Western Balkans** Study Trip offered a deep dive into diplomacy, civil society and regional dynamics.

In Tirana, Belgrade and Sarajevo, the DA delegation enjoyed briefings at the respective Austrian embassies and EU Delegations. In addition, the group was invited to engaging discussions with Foreign Ministers Igli Hasani of Albania and Marko Đurić of Serbia.

Amongst many other appointments, our students had a powerful visit to the Bunk'Art Museum in Tirana, was received by the High Representative for BiH, Mr. Christian Schmidt, and met with members of think-tanks like the Center for Research, Transparency and Accountability in Belgrade, Transparency International BiH or the Post-Conflict Research Center Sarajevo.



Finally, the new study trip to the **Baltic Sea Region** was an inspiring journey through Estonia's political, cultural and security landscape with, for instance, insights into cyber defence and a meeting with the President of the Republic of Estonia, Alar Karis.





# Exchange programmes



The Bay Area, Beijing and Paris—these are three of the exchange programme destinations available to the DA's second-year MAIS students. Find below a few glimpses of Julia's, Nike's and Marimar's experiences during their recent months abroad at world-renowned universities.



EXCHANGE SEMESTER  
STUDENT BLOG

**JULIA  
GRÜNTHALER**

"My time at Stanford was very special to me. Being part of a different academic culture and learning more about development economics and history was very inspiring and I could also lay the groundwork for my thesis project."


EXCHANGE SEMESTER  
STUDENT BLOG

**NIKE  
ATTANASIO**

"We were part of a very inspiring international cohort. Apart from enjoying campus life, I loved exploring California and New York. I learned so much during this quarter and I am incredibly thankful for this opportunity!"






EXCHANGE SEMESTER  
STUDENT BLOG

**NIKE  
ATTANASIO**

"The most valuable lesson I learned during my exchange semester in Beijing is to not be scared of stepping out of your comfort zone. Nine times out of ten it proved to be worth it to challenge my own beliefs, as I always learned something new about China and about myself. I had the chance to understand a bit more about such a fascinating and complex culture, such as the Chinese one."





EXCHANGE SEMESTER  
STUDENT BLOG

**MARIMAR  
KEIMEL**

"Being among the first two students able to go on exchange at the Paris 1 Panthéon-Sorbonne in Paris was an amazing opportunity. Luckily I was able to combine a 3-month summer internship at the Austrian Embassy during the Olympic Games with the exchange starting mid September."

Exploring Beijing while studying at Renmin University

A unique cultural and academic adventure as part of the Vienna School of International Studies exchange programme.



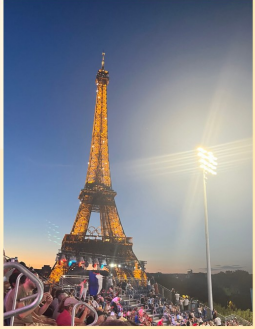


EXCHANGE SEMESTER  
STUDENT BLOG

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"Being among the first two students able to go on exchange at the Paris 1 Panthéon-Sorbonne in Paris was an amazing opportunity. Luckily I was able to combine a 3-month summer internship at the Austrian Embassy during the Olympic Games with the exchange starting mid September."






"I would recommend all DA students, who have the possibility to apply for an exchange to do so as it really is an invaluable and enriching experience! ☺"



# 25<sup>th</sup> Int'l Alumni Meeting

As always, the first day of the DA's and club.da's annual Alumni Homecoming Weekend consisted of the Club's General Assembly 2025 (see page 3) and the traditional DA Sommerfest. On Saturday, 28 June we organised guided tours of the exhibition "A Century in Pictures. Austria 1925-2025" at the Austrian National Library, followed by a relaxed gathering at Heuriger Kierlinger. We thank 300+ alumni and friends for their interest in this year's programme.





## On the calendar ...





<https://club.da-vienna.ac.at>

8 July 2025	DA goes Berlin: Networking Event @ Austrian Embassy
29 July 2025	Summer Drinks on the Danube: Meeting of Alumni of Vienna Universities in Bratislava
28 August 2025	16 <sup>th</sup> Vienna Summer Meeting at Schweizerhaus
25 September 2025	Networking and Get-Together for DA graduates in IOs
25 January 2026	22 <sup>nd</sup> DA Ski and Snowboard Championships organised in cooperation with the Austrian MFA
11 March 2026	da.link career day 2026
11 April 2026	31 <sup>st</sup> Diplomatic Ball at the DA
26-27 June 2026	26 <sup>th</sup> International Alumni Meeting in Vienna

## Follow us online

For up-to-date information on all our events please check out our event calendar at <https://club.da-vienna.ac.at/events> or log in to our networking and career platform da.connect at <https://club.da-vienna.ac.at/connect>.

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