

club.da alumni news

1 | 2026



+++ Bidding farewell to Professor of History Thomas Row +++
+++ club.da Scholarship awardees 2025-26 +++ Polemics Magazine +++
+++ Five Years RCVMT Mentoring +++ More news from DA & club.da +++

Dear Alumnae and Alumni,

This year has brought tremendous change – both at the Diplomatic Akademie Wien and within our own Club. At the DA, we warmly welcome Ambassador Martin Eichinger as the new Director following the retirement of Emil Brix last year. Within club.da, long-time board member and former President and Vice-President David Lansky is stepping down. However, we are thrilled to welcome three new faces to the board: Julia Dean, who joins as Vice-President and brings a wealth of experience as a former DASI President, alongside Kathrin Spielvogel and Marko Rogi. These transitions will position the Club perfectly for the years to come.

This issue covers a lot of ground and I want to take this opportunity to reflect on these changes, particularly within club.da. With new members joining the board, I am incredibly happy to see our reach and engagement expand. I hope this serves as an encouragement for many of you to consider taking on a role within the Club.

Every single position is up for election annually. This association lives and breathes through the activity and passion of its members, making each election a fantastic opportunity to step forward and propose your ideas, not just to the board, but to the General Assembly. Every active member holds the right to vote and the right to stand for election. I believe it is essential for an association like ours to cultivate active members who are ready to take on leadership roles. Our one-year board term allows us to continuously steer and guide the Club on its core mission: to

be a home after graduation and a place you genuinely enjoy returning to, whether at local events, lectures or via club.da chapters across the globe. The more our members engage, the stronger the future of our Club will be.

I would also like to express my sincere gratitude to Ambassador Eichinger for his steadfast support of the Club, his open ear and his active engagement with us. It is a great honour to receive such generous backing from our alma mater.

Last but certainly not least, this issue features a first piece on the upcoming retirement of Professor Thomas Row. He has inspired generations of students at the DA and has always been a highly anticipated, well-received speaker at several club.da events. I want to thank him deeply for his dedication and his memorable lectures. I truly hope we will be able to welcome him “Back to School” as a guest in a future edition of the series.

I wish you and your families a wonderful summer, look forward to an exciting new 2026-27 year ahead and hope to welcome many of you to our upcoming events!

On behalf of the entire board and with best regards,
Oliver Authried

PS: To support our work and the club.da Scholarships, kindly visit
<https://club.da-vienna.ac.at/Membership>.

Inside this issue

club.da General Assembly 2026	3	Polemics @ club.da alumni news	15
A New Chapter for the DA's Chair of History	4	Why Mentoring Matters	16
Introducing Scholarship Awardees 2025-26	6	RCVMT x club.da Mentoring Programme statistics	17
Alumni supporting the DA's next generation	11	News and Updates from the DA Community	18
Borrowed Words: Violence of an Imposed Language	12	Event Calendar & Imprint	20

A New Generation Takes the Helm

Honouring long-standing commitment while welcoming new leadership for the years ahead:

A short report on the club.da General Assembly, which took place on 26 June 2026

As every year, club.da members gathered at the beginning of the 26th International Alumni Meeting for the Club's General Assembly. Besides reviewing another successful year of alumni activities, scholarships and international networking, this year's meeting was characterised by an important generational transition within the Club's leadership and several decisions shaping club.da's future.

After ten years on the board including four years as President of club.da, David Lansky did not seek re-election. Oliver Authried thanked him for his outstanding commitment to club.da, its local chapters and the wider DA community. While leaving the executive board, David will remain closely connected to the Club as a newly elected member of the Advisory Council.

The General Assembly unanimously elected a new board for the 2026-27 term. Julia Dean, who most recently served as President of the Diplomatic Academy Students Initiative (DASI), was elected Vice-President. Joining her are two further representatives of the current student generation: former DASI Treasurer Marko Rogi was elected Auditor, while former DASI Vice-President Kathrin Spielvogel became a member of the Election Committee. Together, their election underlines club.da's long-standing commitment to involving young alumni and recent graduates in shaping the Association's future.

The Advisory Council was further strengthened through the appointment of retired Ambassador Désirée Schweitzer, alumna of DLG 23 and until recently Austrian Permanent Representative to the United Nations in Geneva. Many alumni will remember her as the gracious host of the DA



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alumni networking reception at the Austrian Mission in Geneva in October 2025. She joins Oliver Kitz, Lucia Kronsteiner and Gerhard Reiweger on the Advisory Council.

During his first report to the General Assembly, the DA's Director, Ambassador Martin Eichtinger,

reflected on his first year in office, highlighting recent infrastructure projects, new international partnerships, continued digitalisation and the Academy's efforts to secure sustainable funding while maintaining academic excellence. He also emphasised the importance of club.da's Scholarship Programme in attracting outstanding students from around the world and thanked the Club for its close cooperation with the Academy.

The General Assembly also adopted two further important resolutions. Following a proposal from a member, it approved an increase of the annual membership fee for regular members from EUR 40 to EUR 50, effective 1 January 2027. The additional income will primarily strengthen club.da's ability to support current DA students through scholarships and other initiatives.

Finally, Jacob Pesikoff was introduced as the new President of the club.da Vienna Chapter and presented plans to further strengthen cooperation between alumni, current students and newly admitted students.

The meeting concluded with another unanimous decision as the General Assembly awarded honorary membership to Professor Thomas Row in recognition of his decades of outstanding service to the Diplomatische Akademie Wien and generations of DA students.

A New Chapter for the DA's Chair of History

After nearly two decades at the Academy, Professor Thomas Row prepares to hand over the Chair of History to Oxford historian Professor Katherine A. Lebow

For almost twenty years, Professor Thomas Row has shaped the study of history at the Diplomatische Akademie Wien – Vienna School of International Studies. Since assuming the Chair of History in 2006, he has inspired generations of students with his engaging teaching, academic curiosity and deep understanding of European and international history. As he prepares to retire later this year, the DA is both expressing its heartfelt gratitude for his outstanding contribution and looking ahead to the next chapter with the appointment of Professor Katherine A. Lebow as his successor from 1 September 2026.

Throughout his tenure, Professor Row has played a central role in developing the Academy's history curriculum while maintaining an active international research profile. An expert in international relations, European political history and modern Italian history, he has published extensively, organised numerous high-level academic conferences and led memorable study trips to destinations including the Western Balkans, Ukraine and the Kurdistan Region of Iraq. His enthusiasm for history and his ability to connect past and present have left a lasting impression on countless students and alumni alike.

This became particularly evident during his most recent "Back to School" lecture on 28 May 2026. Looking at the twenty-first century through the lens of history,

Professor Row invited alumni, colleagues and friends of the Academy to reflect on the forces shaping today's world. The event filled the DA's Bruno-Kreisky-Saal and also brought together many former teaching assistants and long-time colleagues, making the evening both an engaging intellectual discussion and a celebration of Professor Row's remarkable contribution to the Academy.

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**Back to School...
with Professor Row:
"The 21st Century as History"**

club.da
Your home after graduation

DA's Chair of History (cont.)

His impact was further recognised during this year's club.da General Assembly, where members unanimously elected Professor Row as an honorary member of the Club in appreciation of his decades of dedicated teaching, scholarship and support for the DA community.

From September onwards, the Chair of History will be held by Professor Katherine A. Lebow, currently Associate Professor of Modern History at Christ Church, University of Oxford. An internationally recognised scholar of twentieth-century European history, particularly the history of East Central Europe and Poland, she brings extensive teaching and research experience from institutions including Yale University, Columbia University, the University of Virginia, the Central European University and, indeed, the DA itself. Her appointment ensures that the Academy's long tradition of excellence in historical scholarship will continue while opening exciting new perspectives for research and teaching.

The DA and club.da warmly thank Professor Thomas Row for his exceptional service, his commitment to academic excellence and the inspiration he has provided to generations of students over the past two decades, while at the same time extending a very warm welcome to Professor Katherine A. Lebow.


We will take a more detailed look at Professor Row's remarkable career, his years at the DA and his lasting legacy in the next issue of club.da alumni news.




Introducing ...

Scholarship Awardees 2025-26

Learn more about six of the 2025-26 club.da and Rotary Club Vienna Maria Theresia (RCVMT) Scholarship Awardees and on how DA alumni join forces to support the Academy's next generation




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Scholarship Awardee
2025-26

"I was born and raised in Kosovo, where I witnessed both the consequences of failed negotiations and the possibilities created by successful ones. That duality shaped me early and instilled a conviction that continues to guide my path: diplomacy is difficult, imperfect, and often slow, yet it remains the most rational instrument we have."



LENA IBISHI



Lena Ibishi | MAIS 30

al environment. Its professors are not only tenured scholars of distinction but also experienced practitioners who bring decades of institutional knowledge into the classroom. The student body is equally ambitious and globally attuned. One is consistently challenged to think with greater precision, argue with clarity, and rely on evidence rather than instinct. I value that rigour.

Prior to beginning my studies at the Academy, I was admitted to the University of Cambridge for the MPhil in Politics and International Studies, an opportunity I remain deeply honoured by. At this stage, however, I chose the MAIS to pursue a programme more directly embedded in diplomatic practice and Vienna's institutional landscape. Cambridge remains part of my long-term academic plans, particularly for a research-oriented PhD in history focused on state formation and political thought. For now, I have chosen the path that most directly prepares me for diplomatic service.

What's something people wouldn't immediately expect about you?

One thing people don't usually expect about me is that my profile is not confined to seminar rooms and long citation lists. I am also a poet and the author of *Europe's Gunpowder* (Dukagjini Bookstore, 2021), part of the National Library of Kosovo's collection, and I have co-authored medical research published by the National Library of Medicine and the Hellenic Journal of Obstetrics and Gynecology.

Another surprise: I was a member of the Bajram Curri National Troupe, performing traditional programmes on national television during major state celebrations. In a way, it was early training in representation: posture, timing, and not blinking under bright lights.

This interview was conducted by Osama Naim, who is enrolled in the DA's 30th MAIS programme.

Please tell us about your academic background.

I completed my Honours Bachelor's degree at the Central European University in Vienna, specialising in Political Science and International Relations. My thesis examined 15th-century Albanian state formation through nationalism theory, papal documents and political philosophy, tracing conceptual lines from medieval sovereignty to modern statehood. I am drawn to questions that require both historical depth and theoretical clarity.

What drew you to the DA?

First and foremost, it is the oldest diplomatic academy in the world. If you want to learn how something is done, you go to the source. More importantly, the DA offers a rare intellectu-

Introducing Scholarship Awardees 2025-26 (cont.)

Mabel Korley | MAIS 30

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

My academic and professional path has been shaped by a passion for governance, diplomacy, and international cooperation, and for how they can drive change for marginalised communities. Growing up in Tema, Ghana, I saw how systemic barriers limited opportunities, especially for girls. Despite these odds, I dreamed of contributing to global conversations. Studying Political Science and French at the University of Ghana equipped me with the tools to navigate global affairs and amplify voices like mine.

There, I volunteered with the Office of Students with Special Needs, where I developed a commitment to inclusive education and supporting vulnerable populations - competencies that I believe are fundamental to effective leadership. I subsequently enrolled in an intensive advanced French language course in France, where I later served as an English Language Assistant under France Éducation Internationale, promoting cultural exchange and language learning among diverse student groups. These experiences built my adaptability, intercultural competence, and qualities that have prepared me for my academic and professional goals.

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

Though I have just begun, the DA's environment and interdisciplinary approach have helped to broaden my understanding of international relations, as well as sharpen my skills in policy analysis. In my opinion, the curriculum is challenging but rewarding, and the diversity of the cohort brings different perspectives to the table. I love exploring Vienna and building connections with classmates from around the world. The opportunity itself has been life-changing, bringing me closer to realising my diplomatic aspirations.

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

The DA has been my dream school since I was in my second year during my undergraduate programme in Ghana. It was recommended by my professor and mentor, and I have since fallen in love with the school. The MAIS programme offers



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Scholarship Awardee
2025-26

"I aspire to contribute to international development and policy reform across Africa, working with institutions such as the UNDP and the African Union. My long-term goal is to produce research that informs relevant policy solutions grounded in the lived realities of marginalized populations, and I believe the MAIS program will equip me to bridge local needs and global decision making, ensuring that communities like mine, are not left behind."



MABEL KORLEY




an interdisciplinary curriculum with a wide range of subjects that align with my aspirations. The networking events and career talks organised by the Careers and Development Centre also drew me in, alongside the school's vibrant alumni association.

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


Long-term, I aim to contribute to international development and policy reform in Africa, working with institutions like the UNDP and the African Union. I aspire to conduct research that informs policy solutions grounded in the realities of marginalised populations, and I believe the MAIS programme will equip me to bridge local needs and global decision-making, ensuring that communities like mine are not left behind.

This interview was conducted by Soulaf Khamis, who is enrolled in the DA's 19th MSc ETIA programme.

Introducing Scholarship Awardees 2025-26 (cont.)




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Scholarship Awardee
2025-26

“Living in a region affected by war and recurring crises made me witness firsthand the consequences of environmental degradation, resource scarcity, and their impact on people’s lives. These personal experiences, combined with my academic background, motivated me to seriously explore how science and international policy can be connected to develop sustainable solutions.”



SOULAF KHAMIS



Soulaf Khamis | ETIA 19

from a scientific field, I was looking for a programme that integrates technology and environmental studies with international relations and policymaking.

The MSc ETIA programme was the ideal choice for me because it combines environmental science, sustainability, energy and international policy. To be honest, I was not very familiar with the political and diplomatic aspects at first, but the environmental and sustainability components were what truly attracted me. Having lived in a region that experienced severe environmental challenges, and having seen their impact on communities, I found myself asking: “Can real solutions be developed through a deeper understanding of international policy and global cooperation?”

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

During my time at the Academy, I have gained knowledge I did not expect. I have learned about international law, policymaking, and how the European Union responds to crises, in addition to developing a deeper understanding of international relations, economics, history and how all these fields intersect with environmental issues.

Studying within such an international and diverse community has been incredibly enriching. Discussions with colleagues from different backgrounds have broadened my worldview and introduced me to new ways of thinking about environmental challenges—not only as scientific problems but also as political, economic and social ones.

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

In the long term, I aspire to work with international organisations focused on environmental issues and sustainability, especially those seeking solutions to complex global challenges that require international cooperation—such as water scarcity, wastewater treatment, energy shortages and climate adaptation. I am also interested in working with companies or institutions that focus on sustainability innovation.

This interview was conducted by Mabel Korley, who is enrolled in the DA’s 30th MAIS programme.

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

My academic journey began with a Bachelor’s degree in biology, specialising in microbiology. This field provided me with a strong scientific foundation and an analytical approach to understanding health and environmental challenges. After graduation, I worked in education and later in a natural medicine laboratory.

I later worked with the World Food Programme (WFP) in Syria, an experience that was significant both professionally and on a humanitarian level. Living in a region affected by war and recurring crises allowed me to witness firsthand the consequences of environmental degradation, resource scarcity and their impact on people’s lives.

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

I was drawn to the DA because of its international character, its multidisciplinary environment, and its diverse community of students and experts from different backgrounds. Coming

Introducing Scholarship Awardees 2025-26 (cont.)

Jihane Karimou | ETIA 18

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

My academic journey has been diverse from the start, blending languages with international affairs. I earned a Bachelor's degree in Applied Foreign Languages (English, Spanish), where I also studied international trade, political geography and economics. During my third semester, I also did an exchange in Bogotá, Colombia which further deepened my interest in regional dynamics and the Global South.

I then pursued a diploma in Latin American and Caribbean Studies in Paris, concentrating on geopolitics, governance and development.

Alongside my studies, I have volunteered for several years with an Austrian charity named *Stimmen für Afrika*. This organisation supports initiatives that raise funds and collect educational materials for schools in Benin.

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


My time at the DA has helped me define and deepen my interests. It encouraged me to move from broad topics to more focused areas such as climate governance and energy transitions. The programme requires engagement with both technical and political aspects, which has improved my ability to think across disciplines.


Beyond academics, the DA environment is very international and hands-on. In my role with the Africa Society, I have taken on responsibilities like organising events and coordinating with diplomats and institutions. This has made me more confident in professional settings and more comfortable navigating institutional environments.

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

I first heard about the DA from a friend. I had already seen positive feedback about the institution, which encouraged me to look into it more seriously. What caught my attention was its strong international focus and the variety of perspectives it brings together.


I was especially motivated to apply to the Environmental Technologies and International Affairs programme because






Scholarship Awardee
2025-26

"My time at the DA has helped me define and deepen my interests. It encouraged me to move from broad topics like international relations and development to more focused areas such as climate governance and energy transitions. The program requires engagement with both technical and political aspects, which has improved my ability to think across disciplines."



JIHANE KARIMOU




of its interdisciplinary structure. I wanted a programme that goes beyond theory and directly addresses current global challenges. The MSc ETIA programme achieves this by combining environmental, technical and political aspects, particularly in the context of climate change.

What ultimately convinced me was how closely the program reflects real-world issues. It treats climate change not as an abstract topic but as a complex problem linked to governance, development and international cooperation.


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

After graduating, I want to engage more with climate and development issues through hands-on work experience. I am especially interested in working with international organisations, particularly in the Global South. What motivates me most is contributing to energy transitions that are effective and inclusive, reducing existing inequalities. The MSc ETIA programme has provided me with a strong foundation for this path.

Introducing Scholarship Awardees 2025-26 (cont.)




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Scholarship Awardee
2025-26

“What’s stayed with me most is learning next to people from so many different backgrounds, culturally and politically and professionally. The Academy makes space for real dialogue and doesn’t shy away from disagreement, which has pushed me to question some of my own assumptions and think harder about how complicated international affairs really are.”



OSAMA NAIM



Osama Naim | MAIS 30

ed that education shouldn’t slip out of reach just because someone’s life has been upended by conflict. Knowing that others were willing to back me meant a great deal, especially at a point when I was rebuilding almost everything at once.

How has the scholarship supported your studies?

It gave me a bit of steadiness at a moment when very little in my life felt settled. Moving from Gaza to Austria meant starting over almost completely, adapting to a new environment while trying to rebuild an academic and personal life at the same time.

More than anything, the support gave me room to breathe. That room mattered. It meant I could put more of my attention into the MAIS programme, into the discussions and the research, instead of spending all of it worrying about how to keep going.

What has been your experience at the DA so far?

What’s stayed with me most is learning next to people from so many different backgrounds, culturally and politically and professionally. The Academy makes space for real dialogue and doesn’t shy away from disagreement, which has pushed me to question some of my own assumptions and think harder about how complicated international affairs really are.

Being part of this community has also reminded me of something simple that’s easy to forget: diplomacy is mostly about listening. It’s about accepting complexity instead of rushing past it and finding ways forward that actually hold up.

Looking ahead, what are your aspirations?

I want to build a career at the intersection of diplomacy and humanitarian work, on policies that better protect civilians and support communities that conflict has already torn through. I don’t think political agreements alone get you to a lasting peace. You also have to invest in people directly, in their education and in institutions that actually include the people they’re meant to serve.

I’m genuinely grateful to the club.da donors and the alumni community for making this chapter possible.

Could you tell us a little about yourself?

I’m a Master’s student in the MAIS programme at the DA and I come from Gaza, Palestine. Years of conflict there have shaped who I am, both personally and professionally. Before coming to Vienna, I worked with humanitarian organisations on child protection, mental health and psychosocial support, youth participation and sexual and reproductive health and rights. What I want to do with my career is contribute to policies that protect human dignity and vulnerable communities and that push peacebuilding forward in a real way, not just on paper.

What does receiving the club.da Scholarship mean to you?

For me, this scholarship was never really about the money. What mattered was what it said: that people believed in what I’m trying to do and in the values that brought me to the Academy in the first place.

Coming to Vienna for graduate studies wasn’t something I could take for granted. It happened because people decid-

Introducing Scholarship Awardees 2025-26 (cont.)

Lilia Petrova | MAIS 30

What brought you to the DA and why have you chosen MAIS?

I was first introduced to the Academy by a professor who suggested it to me. At the time, I had never heard of the DA, but when I looked into it, I realised that the programme was aligned perfectly with what I was looking for academically and professionally.

MAIS has a practical approach, especially when it comes to real-world policy issues and the engagement with many prominent figures in the field, which is something I hadn't seen to the same extent elsewhere. What really solidified my decision was a friend of mine who had just graduated the DA and strongly recommended it to me.

What impact will/does the RCVMT Scholarship have on your academic year?

The RCVMT Scholarship has a very meaningful impact on my academic year. On one hand, it significantly reduced the financial burden associated with my studies, which allows me to concentrate more fully on my coursework without the constant financial pressure.

But beyond that, the scholarship to me means much more than financial support. Being supported by the Rotary Club Vienna Maria Theresa introduces me to a diverse network of professionals who are committed to international engagement and leadership. This sense of belonging and encouragement is incredibly motivating and inspires me to approach my studies and my professional life with an even stronger sense of responsibility and purpose.

What are some of the highlights of your time at the DA?

I think that one of the greatest highlights of my time at the DA has been the sense of community. While I have been impressed by the variety of courses and the opportunity to learn from fascinating and highly experienced professors, it is the people who have truly defined my experience. The DA brings together individuals from diverse backgrounds who are curious, engaged and supportive of one another. The way we support one another academically and personally has created a strong sense of belonging, making the DA feel more like a home than a traditional university.



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RCVMT Scholarship Awardee 2025-26

"The way we support one another academically and personally has created a strong sense of belonging, making the DA feel more like a home than a traditional university."



LILIA PETROVA



What are your professional aspirations?

My aspirations lie in the field of international relations and diplomacy. Working with people from different cultural and professional backgrounds and engaging with diverse perspectives has always been a strong motivation for me.

In the long term, I hope to contribute to strengthening democracy, the rule of law, and regional cooperation in the Balkans—things that the region still struggles with.

Besides individual support, there are several scholarship programmes funded by the DA alumni network.

club.da Scholarships are financed by membership fees and donations. Since 2011, 41 female, 19 male and one non-binary student from 32 countries have received support.

In addition, since 2022-23 the Rotary Club Vienna Maria Theresa has been supporting one DA student per year with its annual RCVMT Scholarship.

More information and the full interviews are available at <https://club.da-vienna.ac.at/Scholarships>.

Borrowed Words: The Everyday Violence of an Imposed Language

Polemics—Magazine of the Diplomatic Academy of Vienna @ club.da alumni news

Written by: Divine Boyembe | Edited by: Sarah Jiayi Drogies

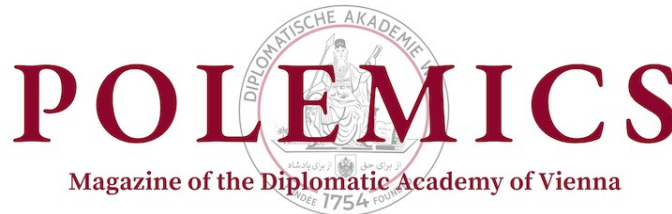
“I speak only one language, and it is not my own.”

This paradox, articulated by Jacques Derrida, serves as a poignant entry point into the reality of linguistic dispossession: inhabiting a language that was never freely chosen but imposed through colonial history and maintained through institutional force. For millions, language is not a natural possession but an imposed habitat. This condition creates a profound identity split, where the speaker is a subject of a culture that simultaneously alienates them from their own roots. It is a hierarchy that determines who is heard and who is relegated to silence.

The Experiential Split

The violence of linguistic dispossession manifests in what Eva Hoffman names the “semantic twilight zone”: a liminal space where the inner voice of the mother tongue begins to atrophy before the imposed language has penetrated the deeper layers of the psyche. In this zone, words in the new language function as simple referents, markers without the emotional or conceptual systems required to anchor them to one’s inner life. The result is a profound split between an interior world shaped by one linguistic reality and a public existence conducted in another.

Psychological research suggests that affective processing is significantly stronger in a native language than in a foreign language. Because native languages



are learned in high-emotion contexts like childhood, they are built on affective grounding. But when operating in an imposed tongue, public

life becomes rational, detached, stripped of the emotional architecture that makes language feel like home. This dissociation produces what might be called *contrasubjectivity*: the pain and anxiety that emerge when synchronicity between self, environment, and language fails. The individual experiences a faintness, a sense of being severed from their own thoughts even as they articulate them.

Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o describes language as the “collective memory bank” of a people, the repository of their philosophy, worldview, and accumulated experience. When a language is replaced by colonial alternatives, this memory bank begins to dissolve. For languages rooted in oral tradition, the stakes are particularly high. *Lingala*, spoken on each border of the Congo River, for instance, operates through richness in nuance and contextual play rather than grammatical rigidity. Its meaning-making depends on tone, situation, and relational context—an epistemology that resists reduction to the written, standardised forms demanded by the colonial language. But generations have grown up speaking a hybrid *Lingala* imbued with French. Thus, when *Lingala* vocabulary is replaced with French loanwords “because it’s easier,” what disappears is, beyond a set of words, an entire framework of ancestral knowledge that cannot be recovered once the language that carried it is gone.

Summer 2025/2026

Volume XIX, Issue 2

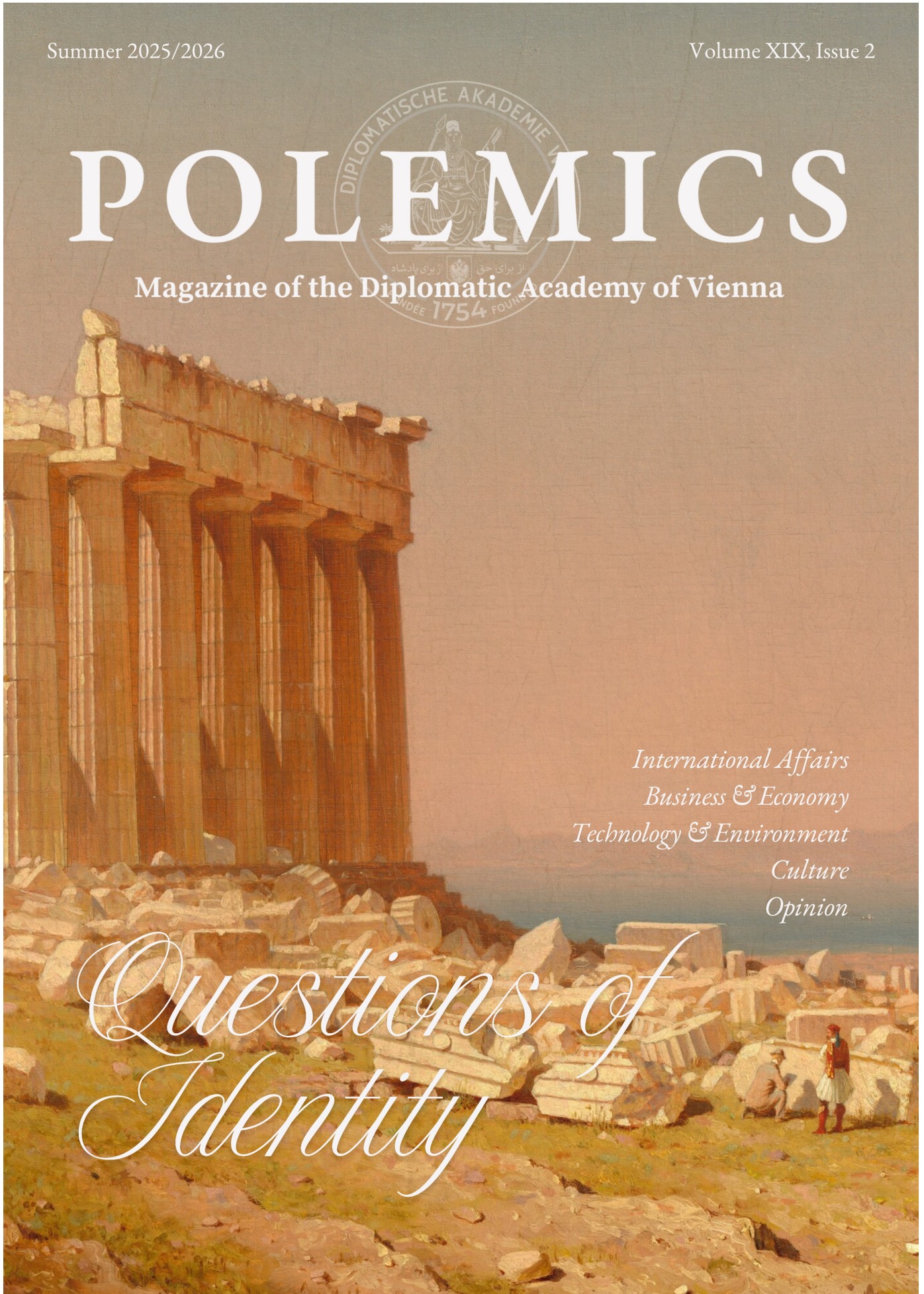
POLEMICS

Magazine of the Diplomatic Academy of Vienna



International Affairs
Business & Economy
Technology & Environment
Culture
Opinion

Questions of Identity



Borrowed Words (cont.)

Language as Power Infrastructure

Language is never a neutral medium of communication. It is an infrastructure of power, a system that determines not only what can be said but who is legitimate to say it. Pierre Bourdieu identified linguistic exchanges as relations of symbolic power, where the value of an utterance depends on the social authority of the speaker rather than on its truth.

An official language operates as a gatekeeper, deciding who sounds credible and who sounds suspect. In formal institutions such as schools and courts, speech that deviates from the standardised norm is measured and found wanting. Asylum seekers might find their entire life stories disqualified as implausible, even if the events they describe occurred, because they cannot narrate suffering in the bureaucratically acceptable register. The problem is not a lack of language *per se* but the wrong relationship to the official standardised version.

The modern nation-state often treats linguistic diversity as a problem to be managed, a deviation from an imagined norm. Those who arrive at state institutions speaking languages other than the official one are reclassified as languageless, their fluency in mother tongues rendered irrelevant or invisible. The monoglot ideology, a term coined by Michael Silverstein, frames language as static and fixed, refusing to recognise the fluid, context-dependent nature of actual linguistic practice. In doing so, it systematically excludes those whose speech does not conform to rigid state expectations.

Institutional Dispossession: The School and the Mind

Schools serve as primary sites where linguistic dispossession is enacted and reproduced. In many postcolonial settings, children, upon entering school, are forced to unlearn their mother tongues to gain legitimacy. This separation of the language of conceptualisation (school) from the language of daily interaction (home) results in what Ngũgĩ calls a “dissociation of the sensibility,” which produces a society of “bodiless heads and headless bodies,” where the mind is linguistically severed from the environment it inhabits. Learning becomes a purely cerebral activity rather than an emotionally felt experience, leading to a crisis of confidence where students feel inadequate simply because they are navigating a language barrier.

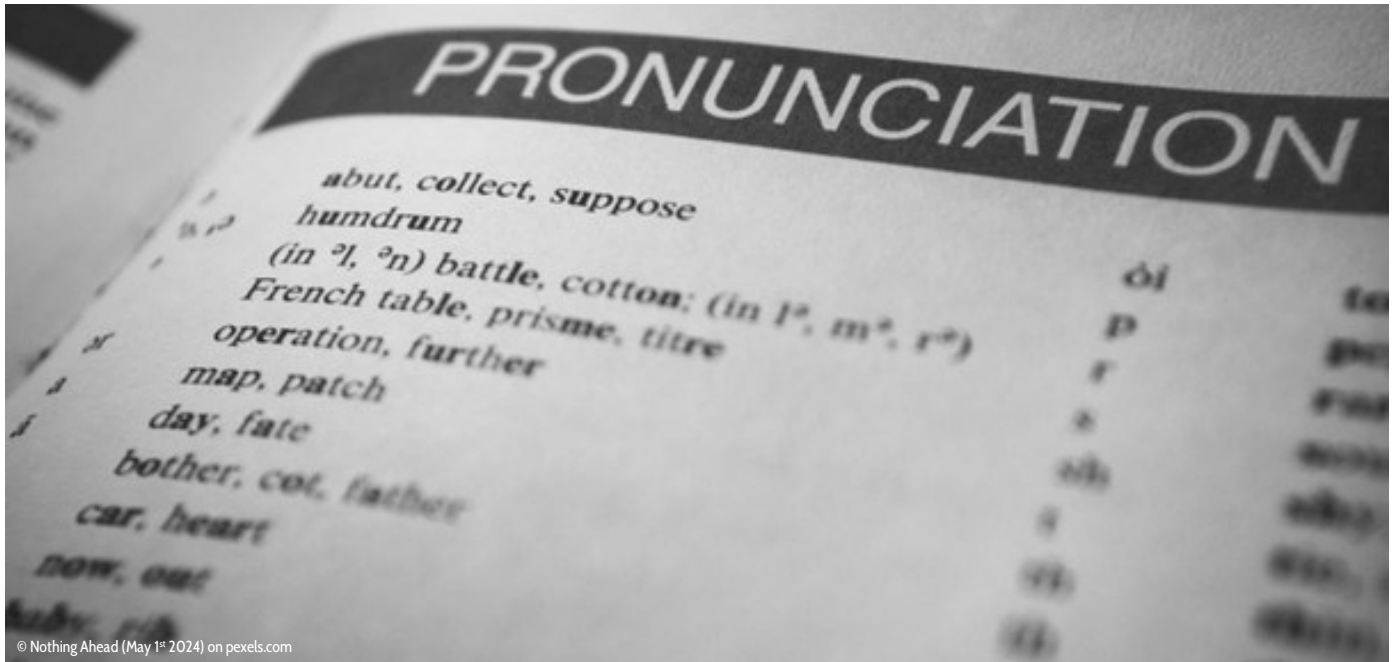
Political Resistance and Reclaiming Dignity

The struggle to overcome this dispossession has led to two distinct paths of resistance:

The first path is embodied by Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o’s radical break with colonial languages. In 1986, he stopped



Borrowed Words (cont.)



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writing in English, choosing instead to compose his works in Gikūyū. This decision was not aesthetic but a political, deliberate effort to “decolonise the mind”. For him, the use of colonial languages positions European languages as inherently superior and African languages as inadequate for serious intellectual work. To write in Gikūyū is to reject this hierarchy, to assert that African languages are fully capable of carrying complex thought, and to ensure that literature serves the people whose experiences it claims to represent.

The second path is represented by Chinua Achebe’s strategy of appropriation and transformation. Achebe argued that English, though a colonial imposition, could be bent and reshaped to “carry the weight of his African experience.” By infusing English with indigenous rhythms, proverbs, and idioms, African writers could respond to the colonial centre, asserting the legitimacy of their own histories and worldviews. For Achebe, the goal is to make the colonial language express realities it was never designed to articulate.

Both strategies acknowledge the same wound. Both recognise that linguistic dispossession is a structural violence that shapes thought, identity, and social posi-

tion. Neither path should be necessary. Both exist because the violence of linguistic imposition continues.

The goal of decolonising the mind is not merely about communication; it is about restoring the harmony between a person’s language and their social environment. As Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o famously suggested, a world of many languages should be like a “field of flowers of different colours,” where each idiom expresses its unique shape while contributing to a common “floralness” of human dignity. Reclaiming one’s language is a vital act of self-preservation and an essential step toward ensuring that every individual has the right to be heard on their own terms.

For several years, the DA’s students have been publishing “**POLEMICS—Magazine of the Diplomatic Academy of Vienna**” which features articles on a broad variety of topics written and edited by the students. Since 2016, it is our great pleasure to share Polemics articles on a regular basis. Furthermore, club.da is a proud sponsor of POLEMICS.

To read the current issue and subscribe, please visit <https://www.polemics-magazine.com>.

Why Mentoring Matters: Conversations that Shift Perspectives

After five highly successful years, Gabriela Abado is stepping down as the founding RCVMT Mentoring Programme Chair. Here she takes us on a journey from the pilot year with six mentors and mentees to a joint career services initiative that's here to stay. Many thanks to Gabriela for her hard work and dedication to DA students over the years!

For the fifth year in a row, the Rotary Club Vienna Maria Theresia and club.da joined forces to run what has by now become a much-appreciated mentoring programme for graduate students of the Diplomatische Akademie Wien. The idea is simple—bring together students navigating the transition from academic to professional life with Rotarians and DA alumni who have already experienced the ups and downs of career journeys and have stories worth sharing—successes as well as periods of uncertainty or discouragement.

The programme offers individual mentoring relationships, but it is much more than a matching exercise. Over the course of an academic year, RCVMT organises informal meetings with executives from international organisations and business and invites mentees to Rotary evenings, often featuring distinguished guest speakers. The result is a space in which students can ask the questions they may not yet know how to phrase: How do I get started? What skills really matter? What do recruiters look for? How can I differentiate myself from seemingly perfect AI applications? And, perhaps the most intriguing question of all, how does one turn “I have no idea what comes next” into clarity and confidence for moving on.

One of this year's highlights was a special visit to PwC, made possible by the generous invitation of the PwC CEO

and fellow Rotarian, Dr. Rudolf Krickl. Ten mentees met with a senior partner, Dr. Barbara Redlein, for an open, lively exchange. We spoke about artificial intelligence, changing organisations, what this means for young professionals entering the job market, and what companies actually look for when recruiting interns and junior colleagues. Do they even recruit, or is AI taking over the junior roles? The mentees asked direct questions in an informal setting; the answers were honest, practical, and encouraging. Barbara also shared insights from her own career journey, making the conversation not only informative but personal. For me, it was another reminder of why mentoring matters: sometimes one open conversation with an experienced person can shift how a young person sees their next step.



RCVMT x club.da Mentoring Programme (cont.)

Over the past five years, I have had the privilege and pleasure of developing and leading this programme. I have watched participation grow from year to year, not only in numbers but also in energy, commitment and diversity. More DA alumni have joined as mentors, broadening the range of professional backgrounds available to students and making the programme richer. We have also seen mentees become part of the wider Rotary family, including through the newly founded Vienna Maria Theresia Rotaract Club—Rotary's own leadership incubator and a place where enthusiasm and creativity are physically experienced by the members.

There are many reasons to join the mentoring programme. For students, it offers access to people who can help translate ambition into action. For mentors, it is a chance to support talent, share experience, and be pleasantly surprised by the clarity, curiosity and courage of the next generation. Mentoring is not a lecture, and it is certainly not about having all the answers. It is about listening, opening doors, offering perspective and, now and then, admitting that careers often look much more logical in hindsight than they felt while we were living them.

After five very successful years, I feel this is the right moment to pass the baton and make room for new leadership. Five years is a good time: long enough to



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build something strong, short enough not to start believing one 'owns' it.

I leave with deep gratitude for the excellent cooperation with club.da—Andreas, Brigitta, Oliver and all colleagues who have perfectly organised our events. My warmest memories are the many encounters with mentees: at kick-

off and closing events, at special visits, at Rotary evenings and at the personal conversations that are the true heart of mentoring.

Most unforgettable of all has been my own experience as a mentor. Conversations with my mentees have enriched my life and created relationships that I hope will last for many years. Leading this programme has been a truly rewarding chapter of my Rotary life.

To those who are considering joining: please do. As a mentee, mentor, speaker, or supporter, you may discover that mentoring is one of those rare exchanges in which everyone gives—and everyone receives more than expected.

Statistics

2021-22:	6 mentor/mentee pairs
2022-23:	16 mentor/mentee pairs
2023-24:	14 mentor/mentee pairs
2024-25:	26 mentor/mentee pairs
2025-26:	28 mentor/mentee pairs



News and Updates from the DA Community



◀ STRABAG ART @ DA

We are proud to welcome the STRABAG ART Collection to our campus! More than 20 works of contemporary art have been placed at the DA on permanent loan, creating new spaces for inspiration, dialogue and creativity.

The collection was officially inaugurated by DA Director Martin Eichtinger, Deputy Director Martina Schubert and Sebastian Haselsteiner, head of STRABAG ART, in the presence of artists, partners and guests.

A special highlight: two artworks by Alfredo Barsuglia were completed live during the opening event.

Our sincere thanks to STRABAG ART, Mr. Haselsteiner and his team, and UNIQA Insurance Group for their generous support.

Kunst kennt keine Grenzen ▶

Since 2008, Dr. Friederike Forst-Battaglia opens doors for our students that go far beyond the classroom. The format *Kunst kennt keine Grenzen* has shaped generations of DA students and left a lasting mark on our community.

For eight Saturdays each year, museums become lecture halls and artworks become living stories. Dr. Forst-Battaglia does not simply show us art, she teaches us how to truly see it.

Thank you for opening our eyes and minds, and for inspiring DA students year after year.

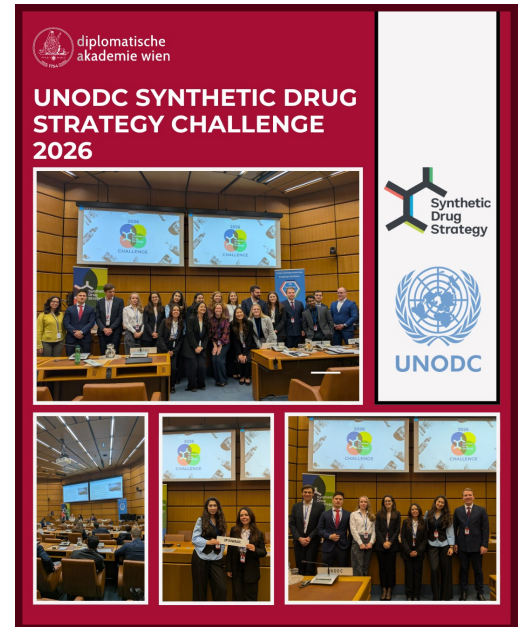


News and Updates (cont.)

DA students successful at UNODC Challenge ▶

We are proud to announce that a team of DA graduate students has been named one of the winners of the UNODC's Synthetic Drug Strategy Challenge 2026. The challenge tasked students with developing a national strategy to address synthetic drug threats in humanitarian emergency and conflict settings, drawing on evidence-based tools, interdisciplinary approaches and close mentorship from UNODC experts. The winning team developed a national strategy for the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, examining the country's unique position at the crossroads of major trafficking routes, regional conflict spillover and humanitarian pressures.

As winners, our students have been invited to present their strategy at the Commission on Narcotic Drugs in Vienna, bringing their ideas directly into international policy discussions.



◀ Multilateral negotiations at the DA

As the world prepared for the 2026 Review Conference of the Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons, our students stepped into the negotiation room first.

At the DA, simulations like this are a long-standing tradition dating back to the late Director Ernst Sucharipa, whose legacy continues in bringing real-world diplomacy into the classroom.

DA students visiting ISTA ▶

Following the inspiring Current Issues lecture by ISTA President Martin Hetzer, our students visited the Institute of Science and Technology Austria in Klosterneuburg. From the VISTA Science Experience Center to a guided campus tour and a presentation on XISTA, the visit offered valuable insights into cutting-edge research and innovation.

We are sincerely grateful to President Hetzer and the entire ISTA team for the warm welcome.



On the calendar ...

- | | |
|-------------------|---|
| 27 August 2026 | 17 th Vienna Summer Meeting @ Schweizerhaus |
| 29 September 2026 | Talk by Amb. Georges Santer @ DA |
| 1 October 2026 | Book presentation with Michael Reinprecht @ DA |
| 3 December 2026 | St. Nicholas Party & Meet and Greet @ DA |
| 24 January 2027 | 23 rd DA Ski and Snowboard Championships |
| 26 February 2027 | DASICON 2027 |
| 8 March 2027 | club.da/RCVMT Int'l Women's Day panel |
| 10 March 2027 | da.link career day 2027 |
| 4 May 2027 | club.da/RCVMT World Press Freedom Day panel |
| 25-26 June 2027 | 27 th International Alumni Meeting in Vienna |



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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](https://club.da-vienna.ac.at/connect) at <https://club.da-vienna.ac.at/connect>.

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Imprint

- Publisher:** Club der Absolventinnen und Absolventen der Diplomatischen Akademie Wien (club.da, ZVR: 737329369)
Oliver Authried, President
Favoritenstraße 15a, 1040 Wien, Österreich/Austria
- Editor-in-chief:** Andreas Ehrmann
- Editorial team:** Sybil Bitter, Katharina Dück, Nicole Lojnik, Divine Amen Boyembe, Zoya Morrison
- Design:** Andreas Ehrmann, Nicole Lojnik

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