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Internship Report

Framing the Climate Change Debate in the U.S.



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Part I – Internship Report

1. Preparation

1.1. Reasons for my Application at the German Marshall Fund

I applied for the foreign policy internship at the German Marshall Fund of the United States (GMF) for several reasons. First, I felt the internship would complement my previous experience in Brussels well. From September to December 2010, I interned in the office of Franziska Keller of Bündnis 90/Die Grünen, a Member of the European Parliament (MEP) in the Greens/EFA group. As a political science student with some theoretical understanding of the European institutions based in Brussels, I was by no means an expert on the institutional and political details of the EU. Thus, the internship in the European Parliament (EP) was a good start: I familiarized myself with the Parliament's legislative procedure, the political parties, the EP's place in the European Union, and the general functioning of the Brussels polity and politics. However, as I discovered Brussels more and more, I felt that there was more to the EU than just the political institutions. Like in other capitals such as Berlin or Washington D.C., the political institutions in Brussels are embedded in a thriving biotope of NGOs, advocacy groups, lobbying offices, consultancies, political foundations, think tanks, embassies, and political representations. An internship in the external surrounding of the European institutions would enable me to gain a better understanding of politics in Brussels, while gaining an insight into a diverse and challenging working environment in politics apart from public administration.

Another reason why I applied for the internship was that GMF is one of the oldest and best established American public policy organizations in transatlantic relations. I hoped to benefit from the exposure to GMF's extensive network with political institutions, academia, and the private sector while building up a network for my future career. GMF's American legacy was especially appealing to me in this regard - ever since I followed the presidential elections during my stay in the US in 2008, I have a strong personal interest for U.S. politics and transatlantic relations.

A third reason was that the foreign policy internship focuses thematically on renewable energies and climate change. The renewable energy sector is a fast growing and dynamic market with enormous potential, while climate change is one of the most pressing issues of our time and tremendously interesting from a political scientist's point of view. By the time I applied, I was already interested in renewable energies as a possible future career path and had a personal profile fitting well into this internship. Finally, I applied for the internship because I was planning to write my Magister thesis about climate change legislation. I hoped that working with a climate change-related program at GMF could spark some valuable thematic ideas for my thesis.

1.2. My Application

I applied for the internship via email, which is the accepted standard for internships and jobs in Brussels. For most internship postings on websites such as eurobrussels.com, employers in Brussels receive between 200 and 350 applications. I wanted to keep my application as concise and clear as possible to deliver my message effectively during the short time the employer would pay attention to it. As requested in the job advertisement, I submitted a one-page cover letter and a one-page CV including two references, the MEP I previously interned with and a US Professor of political science. I included both pieces into a PDF-file. Written pieces or work samples were not requested. I also abstained from checking up on my application status by making phone calls, as GMF indicated that calls would not be taken.

In the cover letter, I started out by shortly explaining my motivation for the internship. I then proceeded to describe my previous experiences and why I was a good candidate for the post in greater detail. By presenting myself as a United States-affine person with experience in climate change and renewable energies-related projects, I tried to tailor the CV to the offered position as best as possible whilst staying accurate in my descriptions. I first mentioned my stay in the U.S. and my interest in American and transatlantic politics. Then, I laid out my previous professional experiences by describing my internship at the European Parliament, followed by the internship at the Federal Ministry for Education and Research. In the following paragraph I laid out the soft skills I acquired during my time as moderator and editor at RadioQ, finishing up with my language skills. My CV was again concise and simple. I put professional experiences at the

top, followed by additional working experiences and student jobs, education, and skills, including computer programs and languages. I explained my professional experiences with one or two bullet points each to give the employer a better idea of my tasks during the internships. I also decided to include a small black and white picture into the CV to make it more personal.

1.3. Theoretical and Topical Preparations for the Internship

While I didn't prepare anything specific for the internship after I was accepted, I prepared extensively for the interview. My preparations were twofold: I first studied current affairs in EU-U.S. relations. In order to get some first-hand impressions from within the Parliament, I met an advisor to MEP Reinhard Bütkofer to talk about the current state of affairs between the European Parliament and the U.S. I also read up on the state of climate change negotiations, American politics, Obama's stance in foreign policy, and EU foreign policy in general. For the topical preparations I mostly used books and newspaper articles. Secondly, I informed myself intensively about the German Marshall Fund as an institution. I regularly read the GMF website including news flashes and policy briefs, went to GMF events in the Parliament, and studied the 2010 annual report. This helped me greatly during the interview, as I was able to tell my interviewers in more detail why I wanted to intern specifically with the GMF Brussels office and what fascinated me about the organization. Finally, I practiced the interview situation by role-playing the interview with a friend several times. This enabled me to better explain how the internship would fit into my career plan. It also helped me to present the skills I obtained from earlier internships and activities more comfortably, and to explain my motivation with greater confidence. In the end I felt well prepared, and even though the interview itself was a rather stressful experience for me, the conversation went well and I was able to answer most questions satisfactorily.

With regards to the internship itself, I strongly benefitted from my previous work at the European Parliament. By working in the office of an MEP, I learned how the Parliament operates. Knowing the working routines of MEPs, the structure of the Parliament, and, most importantly, daily office life in a political institution, greatly helped me with research and communication tasks during the internship.

1.4. Practical Preparations

Already based in Brussels, there was no need to prepare practical issues. The monthly salary allowed me to stay at the flat I already lived in. Visa or health insurance-related preparations weren't necessary. As an EU citizen, there was no need to acquire a work permit either. I signed the contract a few weeks into the internship and received my salary and related proper documentation monthly.

2. The Internship

2.1. GMF - the Organization

The German Marshall Fund of the U.S. is an American non-partisan institution that works to promote mutual understanding between North America and the EU and to strengthen transatlantic cooperation on global issues. GMF was founded in 1972 by the help of a DM 150 million gift from the German government to the U.S. as a permanent memorial to the Marshall Plan. As of today, GMF is one of the most recognized and largest transatlantic think-tanks and grant-making institutions. The organization has about 200 employees and seven offices in Washington, Berlin, Paris, Brussels, Bratislava, Belgrade, Warsaw, and Ankara, as well as smaller representations in Stockholm and Turin.

GMF operates in four main fields of activity: grant making, networking, research, and convening. In the field of grant making, GMF is very active in the Eastern European region. The Balkan Trust for Democracy (BTD), the Black Sea Trust for regional cooperation, and the Trust for Civil Society in Central and Eastern Europe are the largest grant making bodies of GMF. All bodies are partnerships with the public and private sector and distribute grants to support democracy, good governance and regional cooperation projects, such as research projects, policy simulations, and exchange programs.

The most important initiative in the networking branch is the Marshall Memorial Fellowship (MMF), a professional development and networking initiative for European and American young professionals and leaders. During the program, the participants go on a study tour to learn about the inner workings of the European and American society as they meet leaders from politics, businesses, think-tanks, and the academic world.

Candidates have to be recommended by colleagues and are chosen through a series of interviews and tests. Besides MMF, GMF has several other networking programs such as the American Political Science Association congressional fellowship, a program that brings two mid-career German professionals for ten months into the American Congress, or the Manfred Wörner Seminar, where 30 young Americans and Europeans discuss the prospects of German-U.S. and EU-U.S. security interests.

Even though GMF belongs to the think-tank world, its research branch is rather small in comparison to its other fields of work. However, GMF holds some important research initiatives, like the Transatlantic Academy, a forum for a selected group of scholars from both sides of the Atlantic and different disciplines to examine a single set of issues that is crucial to the transatlantic relationship. Last year, the fellows examined Turkey and its evolving regional and global role. Another research project is the “Transatlantic Trends” (TT) poll series, which examines public opinion in Europe and the U.S. on transatlantic and societal issues. The original TT survey is complemented by “Transatlantic Trends: Leaders”, which poses the same questions to the political and economic elite, as well as “Transatlantic Trends: Immigration”, which focuses on immigration issues. Thirdly, GMF regularly produces research papers on different issues, such as the “Transatlantic Take” series, or the “Climate Change and Security Paper” series. These papers are written by GMF fellows, highly ranked individuals from academia, business and politics. Even though GMF’s agenda is to strengthen transatlantic cooperation, the research is intended to be non-partisan and objective.

GMF’s largest branch of activity is convening. The institution organizes several large-scale conferences each year, as well as hundreds of smaller seminars, lunch events, and panel discussions. The largest conference is the yearly “Brussels Forum”, organized by the Brussels office, which brings together influential opinion- and policy makers to discuss pressing issues of the transatlantic community. In 2011 these issues included the Arab Spring, security policy, climate change and the financial crisis. Other conferences, such as the Halifax Security Forum, the Stockholm China Forum, and the India Forum in London feature a similar structure, but focus on particular topics or regions.

The GMF Brussels office has 17 employees, including four to five interns. Four employees work in the associated Brussels Forum office, but also take part in daily activities of the main office. The other employees work for the different programs represented in Brussels: the Climate Program, the Asia Program, the Economics Program, and the

Wider Europe Program. During my time at GMF the office was undergoing a transition period, as our Director, Ron Asmus, was on medical leave since December 2010 and died in May 2011. During this time, Deputy Director Corinna Hörst and Communications Director Elizabeth Boswell-Rega overlooked the office's general performance. As an intern, I these structural changes did not affect me.

2.2. Working at the GMF Brussels Office

2.2.1. Organization, Resources, and Training

Working hours at the GMF office were flexible. Employees came to work depending on their workload and their affiliated program. Some programs, such as the Asia program, demanded intense communication with the Washington office which only opened at 3pm CET. Therefore, it was usually quiet in the office before afternoon. For us interns, working hours were from 9-18h. Supervision on our attendance was limited: we were free to work on other projects such as writing job applications, going to policy events or writing papers, as long as our workload allowed for it. I received a wage of 900€ net monthly plus 140€ in meal vouchers, which is far above the standard payment for interns in Brussels. Since most of my work at GMF was computer-based, office programs such as Microsoft Word, Outlook, Excel and the contact management system InterAction served as my main working tools. I was provided with a personalized email account and a remote connection account which allowed me to work from my laptop as well.

Each intern was designated to a specific program. As the foreign policy intern, I was part of the Climate Program. I reported to Christina Elvers, Program Officer for the Climate Program and responsible for the Marshall Memorial Fellows, as well as Corinna Hörst, Deputy Director for the Brussels Office. During my first weeks, I received a two-day training session for the InterAction program. Apart from that, I did not receive any additional specific training. Instead, the two senior interns introduced me to office-related tasks, while I directed questions related to my program work to Ms. Elvers. During the first three months, interns were also allowed to partake in a weekly French course.

2.2.2. Program Related Work: MMF, the Climate Program, and YTN

Much of my attention was focused on organizing the stay of the two MMF groups who would start out their tour in Brussels, one group in early February, and one in early June 2011. I set up individual appointments with Commission officials, MEPs and other professionals from the institutions, organized lunch briefings, booked hotel rooms, and guided tours in museums. Much of this work was purely organizational. However, I also did some research on local NGOs and neighborhood projects in Brussels the fellows should visit and prepared related briefings for the fellows. During the stay of the group, Ms. Elvers and I acted as guides and contact persons. We accompanied the fellows to their appointments in various institutions and organizations, such as NATO, the European Parliament, and the European Commission, and gave them city tours where we explained some of the old buildings. We also visited two local NGOs that work with underprivileged youth: the *École de cirque de Bruxelles*, a circus school for young immigrants, and an initiative that combines boxing and job training to help young unemployed immigrants find an occupation.

Another part of my work was related to the Climate Program. I researched and wrote a weekly internal newsletter about climate and renewable energies related news from Brussels. I also supported the planning of two larger events: a panel discussion on the prospects of regional and local climate action in the EU and the U.S. in March 2011, and an event on low-carbon policy proposals in May 2011. This work involved online research for briefing papers as well as organizational work, such as booking train and flight tickets, hotel rooms, and venues for the events. I was also responsible for the event reporting: I took minutes during the discussions and wrote event reports that included a summary of the discussion, photos, and an evaluation about the organization of the event. The reports were published on the website and on GMF's intranet portal. I also monitored the event's RSVP lists, and drafted and distributed the invitations. Shortly after the low-carbon roadmaps event, I interviewed Stephen Boucher, EU Director for Climate Policies at the European Climate Foundation, about the European Commission's "roadmap to a competitive low-carbon economy by 2050". The interview was published on the GMF website as part of the "Inside Brussels" podcast series. Since the head of the Climate Program, Thomas Legge, is based in Washington, communication in the Climate program was mainly done via email and group calls.

As I got more comfortable with my work, Ms. Elvers handed me the responsibility for the Young Transatlantic Network (YTN), a program that organizes monthly lunch briefings for Brussels-based young professionals to give them an opportunity to speak with high-level policy and opinion-makers. YTN operates on a grant from the U.S. Mission to the EU. I was responsible for the organization of the lunch briefings. This included the coordination with the U.S. mission and the speakers, setting of a time and date for the event, the drafting and distribution of invitations, the monitoring of RSVPs, and the preparation of the event venue. I also set up meetings with other American Brussels-based organizations, like the American Club in Brussels and the Fulbright Foundation, to promote YTN and expand its network.

2.2.3. Brussels Forum

Brussels Forum is the yearly climax of GMF's Brussels office agenda. From March 21 to 27, the week before the Forum started, the whole office moved its operations to the Hotel where the event would take place for coordinative purposes. Colleagues from other offices came to Brussels to help organize the different strains of the Forum: bringing the different groups from embassies and national congresses to Brussels, handling security issues, setting up the run of show for each panel discussion, maintaining press relations, and doing other preparations required almost 60 people to work twelve hour shifts during this time. In the preparation phase, the Brussels office interns were, together with about 15 voluntary workers, assigned to a variety of tasks. Most of the time, I conducted follow-up calls to collect missing information from participants, such as arrival and departure dates, printed out name badges, sorted name tags and assisted a bomb scan conducted by the Belgian police. During the Forum, I was part of the security team. Since Brussels Forum is intended to stimulate conversation between decision makers during and especially in between the panel discussions, it was important to restrict the access of journalists to certain areas. We also acted as contact persons for the participants.

2.3. Working Environment and Supervision

As an American organization, GMF values the entrepreneurial spirit of its employees. This feature expresses itself in various forms. First, the atmosphere in the office was rather casual. Even though the employees were expected to dress in business style, everyone, up to the president of GMF Craig Kennedy, operated on a first-name basis. The younger staff and interns, many in their mid- and late twenties, often went out after work together. This created an open and friendly atmosphere. Weekly staff meetings were held each Monday to update staff on recent developments in the office. During the staff meetings, the program associates reported on their projects. The interns were included into this process, which was instrumental to integrate us into the team, an openly expressed wish of the office's leadership. I had a good relationship with my colleagues, especially with Christina Elvers and the other program associates. The other interns and I became good friends. I had some initial problems with Deputy Director Corinna Hörst, one of my supervisors, because I felt that she didn't accept me as a capable part of the team. Thankfully, the open atmosphere at GMF enabled me to talk with Christina Elvers and other GMF employees, who put my thoughts into perspective and shared their view on the matter. These talks gave me a lot of confidence in my work, and my relations with Corinna Hörst somewhat improved afterwards.

During my entire internship, I felt adequately supervised. My tasks were clearly communicated and I never felt over-burdened. The interns were given much room for their own projects, which I was happy to use, e.g. for the podcast. I also enjoyed many of the responsibilities I was given: my work with YTN and MMF were the most gratifying, as I had my own area of responsibility.

3. Evaluation and Learning Experiences

My expectations for the second internship in Brussels were high. From the beginning on I viewed my first internship with the Green Group only as a starting point for a longer trip into the professional world. Whilst working at the EP, I gained a good insight into European politics and the structure of the EU, which I possessed little knowledge of beforehand. With GMF, I wanted to take this knowledge further and apply it to more com-

plex tasks. In contrast to the very administrational work at the Parliament that offered little room for an intern to grow, I hoped that a longer internship at GMF could provide me with the opportunity to become an integral part of the organization and contribute my own ideas to their products. I also expected to learn more about American politics and their approach to climate change. After six months, these expectations were only partly met.

On the one hand, the internship gave me valuable experience in general work related things, such as language skills, behavioral experience and organizational skills. I am much more confident now in my ability to communicate in English in a professional environment, both verbally and via email. After having studied for a year in the U.S., I feel that the internship at GMF contributed immensely to my overall English skills. I also had the opportunity to learn the basics of project and event management and how large organizations with multiple offices handle complex operations, such as the organization of the Brussels Forum. By having sole responsibility over parts of MMF and YTN, I developed techniques to keep an overview over the state of my projects. In addition to the acquired "soft skills", the focus of my internship on climate change helped me to find a topic for my magister thesis. A panel discussion on local and regional action against climate change in the U.S. and the EU I helped organizing, sparked my interest in the topic. This is why I am currently writing my thesis on climate change policies in the United States. I also acquired a deep insight into the political fabric of Brussels. Attending dozens of panel discussions, political lunches and meetings, I feel I understand much better how European politics work and how many interest groups, think tanks, and other organizations are involved into the decision-making process.

On the other hand, I often felt frustrated about the amount of administrational work, especially during the first four months of my internship. I spent the majority of my time booking hotel rooms, reserving flight tickets, sending out invitations via email, and updating GMF's contact database; a work that was extremely time-consuming and monotonous. While I understand that administration is a necessity in any job, I originally hoped for a much more intellectually challenging experience with GMF. The amount of administrational work mostly stems from the fact that GMF is much more focused on convening than other well-known think tanks that focus more on research. This is especially true for the office in Brussels, which not only organizes Brussels Forum, GMF's largest annual conference, but also competes for visibility with hundreds of other think-

tanks in Europe's capital. Visibility is generally increased by holding policy events rather than publishing policy papers.

In general, I feel that the internship at GMF provided me a great opportunity to test the waters of programmatic work in an international think-tank. While I found the content-related work very interesting, I was somewhat disappointed that the majority of my capacities were taken up by administration. While I won't rule out a career in think tanks based on my experience with GMF, I now know that I will focus the job search more on programmatic and content-related jobs rather than on jobs that are mostly organizational. Based on my experiences with the Climate program, I am also thinking about pursuing a career in the renewable energies sector, which ties in well with my previous internships and the topical focus of my Magister thesis.

4. Attachments and work samples:

- Work samples: Inside Brussels Podcast (Interview with Climate Group's Stephen Boucher, attached to the email)
- GMF Annual Report 2010 (attached to the email)
- Recommendation Letter