



EUROPEAN LEADERSHIP PROGRAMME

AGATHE JANSSENS DE BISTHOVEN

Agathe Janssens de Bisthoven is a 22-year-old Belgian student who just recently graduated with an Honors Bachelor's Degree in Liberal Arts and Sciences at the University College of Maastricht. Her main academic focuses include international relations, Middle Eastern politics, and migration studies. Her academic and adventurous drive led her to Seoul, South Korea, to complete a semester abroad at Seoul National University. Aside from her studies, Agathe took on a waitressing and bartending job in a bustling Italian restaurant at the heart of Maastricht to participate in and learn from largely differing facets of society and to meet people of various backgrounds. In her free time, she enjoys cooking and baking for her family and friends, reading, and traveling. Her sporting activities consist of going on long walks, biking, boxing, rock climbing, and horseback riding. Throughout her youth, Agathe was raised at the heart of the international world from Vienna, Austria, to New York and Washington D.C., USA, from the Netherlands to South Korea, and Belgium. Her experiences have shaped her into a welcoming, outgoing, and multi-dimensional person who can adapt to diverse environments as well as socialize and work in different settings. Agathe's motivation to make the world a better place strongly encourages her to volunteer and take on community service activities. Accordingly, she plans to work with non-governmental organizations and refugees in the future. Today, Agathe finds herself in a period of self-reflection, both professionally and spiritually. Nevertheless, her curiosity and her eagerness to continuously learn and grow encourage her to look forward and always greet unknown experiences with a smile and wide-opened arms. As an ELP Fellow, she plans on expanding her knowledge by attending European Union-related activities and deepening her spirituality to navigate her questions and grow as a person. While she looks forward to pursuing her studies, she will first benefit from the ELP to discern her vocation and professional development, whether in the international relations field or another specialization. In the meantime, you will find Agathe enjoying the present to the fullest and walking the path of life in Brussels alongside her new ELP friends.

ALESSANDRO BRUGIOLO

Alessandro is a 24 years old recent graduate from Italy. He just moved to Brussels for starting a traineeship at the European Business Summits, after completing his master in International Cooperation at the University of Turin and his working experience as Operations Officer Trainee at the Boston Consulting Group (BCG) in Milan.

He started his academic life with a Bachelor in Political Science and International Relations at the University of Padua, time during which he went for an Erasmus in Latvia (studying geopolitics and law at Riga Graduate School of Law) and a curricular internship in Uganda with a local NGO (AVSI-Uganda). With a strong interest in political



science and international relations, he decided to enrol in Area and Global Studies for International Cooperation at the University of Turin, degree obtained in November 2023 with a specialization in Africa.

In the meantime, he has always tried to improve and implement his practical skills, for this since the very beginning he has combined the academic sphere with the practical one: home-painter in Padua, international steward and bartender in Turin; he then covered corporate roles as Project Manager Intern at OCCAM, within the Horizon EU framework, and lately as Operation Officer Trainee at The Boston Consulting Group in Milan for the past 7 months.

He is eager to gain more international experiences, and he is confident both ELP and the traineeship would boost his career and personal life in Brussels. He would consider himself a creative and empathetic person, with a strong interest in literature and poetry in particular, two elements that eventually characterize his personality and lifestyle deeply. He sees problems and challenges as opportunities to grow, poems as lifeblood, curiosity as the main lens of analysis and relativism as the basic perspective for understanding the world.

ANTONELLO PISTRITTO

Antonello is an Italian civil servant, with nearly 5 years of experience, who works as a European Affairs Official at the Brussels representative Office of the Valle d'Aosta autonomous Region. In his work, Antonello deals on a daily basis with European funds, in particular in connection with the local deployment of cross-border Interreg cooperation funding programmes (such as those between Italy and France and between Italy and Switzerland) and of funding programmes managed directly by the European Commission. Passionate about classical literature, history and philosophy of law, he holds a double degree in Italian and French law at the Université Paris V Descartes and at the University of Turin, where he discussed a thesis on "Law and the Sacred in Dante's Comedy". In his free time, he enjoys playing the acoustic guitar, as well as choral singing and drama performing (with regards to the latter, he collaborayrd with Gabriele Vacis' "Institute of theatrical practices for personal care" in Turin). After living in Aosta, Turin, Paris and Malta, he has now settled in Brussels, although he never misses a chance to travel abroad so as to constantly get out of the comfort zone by exploring new realities. He is a member of several youth associations, such as AIGU (Italian Association of Youth for UNESCO), a rescue volunteer and he believes that when youths are brought together, in the name of a higher purpose, they become enthusiastic and passionate about making contributions in their respective walks of life.

BLANKA CSITE

Blanka, a 26-year-old young professional from Budapest, currently serves as a Blue Book trainee at the European Commission's Directorate General for Research and Innovation, where her main interests, research, innovation, and higher education policies intersect.

She pursued her Bachelor's and Master's degrees in International Public Service Relations and completed Erasmus+ semesters in Rotterdam, the Netherlands, and in Tampere, Finland focusing on EU affairs, sectoral policies, international political economy, and security studies.



Throughout her university years, Blanka volunteered for her local Erasmus Student Network, serving as a mentor and event manager. In her role, she assisted incoming exchange students, represented their interests, and liaised with the International Office of the university.

With over 2 years of professional experience at a Budapest-based research institute, Blanka contributed to large-scale EU and internationally-funded research projects including those under Horizon Europe, Erasmus+, EEA and Norway Grants, as well as the International Visegrad Fund. Additionally, she gained expertise in science communication and event management.

In her free time, Blanka enjoys reading, practicing yoga, visiting museums, and exploring new places.

BENJAMIN CHRISTOPHER ILG

Benjamin is 29 years old and comes from Esslingen in the South West of Germany. He has worked as Briefing and Communication Coordinator in the European Commission (JRC) for a year, after having done a traineeship in the EU Delegation to Mexico. His educational background is in international politics and economics. In his free time, Benjamin follows a variety of hobbies, ranging from Salsa dancing to Boxing. He enjoys cooking healthy meals and traveling. His most recent travel was a road trip in the Western Balkans and Central Europe in summer. Benjamin's motivation to become an ELP fellow was his desire to seek inspirational encounters both professionally and personally.

CAROLINE HALFVARSON

Caroline is a 26-year-old Swedish young professional currently in Brussels as a Blue Book legal trainee at the European External Action Service (EEAS). Before joining the EU bubble, Caroline has explored different corners of Europe, originally hailing from the university town of Lund, Sweden, from where she also gained her LL.M. During her studies, she spent one year as an exchange student at the University of Hamburg studying international law, a semester abroad as an intern at the Embassy of Sweden in Vienna, and as a French language student in France. Her professional journey has let her explore paths of diplomacy, legal services, foreign languages, and public speaking, in six different countries in four different languages. She always strives to seek new opportunities to learn, by for example competing in speech competitions and improving her language skills. Thanks to these opportunities, she has gained extensive professional experience, many friends and connections, and a fluency in English, German, and French. Nonetheless, she couples her curiosity with humility and a willingness to help others, something that led her to the European Leadership Programme with its focus on volunteering. In the wake of the covid-19 pandemic she decided to honour her personal and professional choices on another level than before, something that led her to exploring France by living at Cité Universitaire de Paris and following her dream of learning French for a year and by volunteering on a weekly basis in her home town of Lund, Sweden. Next to her professional path, she enjoys literature, being outdoors, visiting museums, singing in a choir, and staying in touch with and spending time with her loved ones.

DANIEL LAKATOS



Daniel is a 25-year-old young professional, originally from Budapest, Hungary. After graduating high school, he completed his higher education in the Netherlands, France, and the United States, but also lived in Switzerland when he was younger.

He is truly concerned about world issues and international law, studying European and Public International Law at university level.

Passionate about volunteering, they created a civil society organization with his high school friends called “MOST”, focusing on charitable activities. Afterward, he was introduced to refugee law and human rights protection at the Hungarian Helsinki Committee; was able to work on anti-corruption research at Transparency International Hungary; tried himself out in a legal clinic in the Bronx; while most recently, he completed a traineeship with the Greens/EFA in the European Parliament, focusing on constitutional affairs in the AFCO Committee. Currently, he will be conducting another traineeship at the European Parliament, in the team of Mr. Niklas Nienass, MEP. In 2023, he received the honor of being rostered in the United Nations Young Professionals Programme for Legal Affairs.

He is a semi-bad cook, a true football passionate (although Manchester United currently does not bring any joy into his life), and an affectionate reader (everything from philosophy through political theories to fantasy).

ELENA PEREZ-VELASCO

Elena Pérez-Velasco is a young Spanish professional starting her career as a trainee at the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC). Elena takes every opportunity she has to get to know human stories and immerse herself in heart-to-heart conversations. Some of her most inspiring experiences were an alternative stay at the Pine Ridge Reservation (South Dakota, USA), a development internship at A Safe Haven Foundation, which contributes to ending homelessness (Southeast Chicago, USA), the MAGIS experience at the JRS center in Villanova de Gaia (Portugal) and the summer camps of Misioneros de la Esperanza (Cordoba, Spain). She loves to develop her leadership through challenging roles, as she has done as president of the Loyola Andalucía Chapter of Alpha Sigma Nu (2019-20) and current president of its Young Alumni Advisory Council (2022-2024). Her international education has further shaped this ethos: Master in European Public Policy Analysis (College of Europe, 2022-23), double degree in Business and International Relations from Loyola Andalucía University (2016-2022), Bachelor of Business Administration from Loyola University Chicago (2017-2020) and Fellow of the 2021 cohort of the IAJU Global Citizenship Program organized by Georgetown University. With a strong commitment to social justice and equality, Elena wants to pursue a career in European public policy to contribute to reducing socio-economic disparities, with a particular focus on democracy, education and housing.

GERGŐ BARNA BALÁZS

Gergő is from Hungary and is currently doing an internship at the NATO Headquarters. An enthusiast of public international law, he studied law in Hungary, France and in the UK and gained experience in research and practice in the public and the private sector. Gergő's ambition is to drive positive change through a career in law combining research, practice and teaching. Beyond his legal ambitions, as an avid community organizer, enjoys visiting museums, attending theater performances and learning languages.

JEANNETTE BANGOURA



Logistics Manager

Jeannette is an Afropean logistics manager who has had the opportunity to work internationally for both large multinationals and start-ups. She spent 4 years in Germany and is now up to new adventures in Belgium; therefore she speaks fluent French, English and German.

She is ambitious, curious and open to the world. What drives her is to achieve her professional and personal goals, in order to inspire her peers. Globetrotter, hard-worker and athlete, that's what defines her best!

Geopolitics and economics are her favorite topics, and she is keen to learn more about them. Her roots are from Guinea, Senegal and Mali, which got herself getting more interested in Sub-Saharan African countries, in a way of knowing how they can develop their economy and foster their population's well-being.

In short, you could find in her someone to share deep conversations with, or your new gym buddy.

LUISA DORIANNA BEMBA

Luisa is a third-culture child of French and Italian nationalities, born in Germany, but the truth is her Europeanness was unveiled during her Erasmus in Potsdam. Polyglot, she effortlessly bridges cultural gaps, acutely epitomizing multicultural communication. Her international background has led her to develop a keen interest in international cooperation and diplomacy. What sets Luisa apart is not just her diverse personal and professional background (European External Action Service, Consulate General of France in Miami, Embassy of France in Berlin...) but also her ability to blend it with a deep commitment to fostering understanding and collaboration: she brings a unique perspective to the global stage, navigating complex diplomatic relations in a poly-crises world. As a first-generation graduate in her family, she is naturally curious and has an insatiable thirst for knowledge, which explains her commitment to lifelong learning (College of Europe, Sciences Po Strasbourg, and Sorbonne alumna) and excellence. Guided by the values she cherishes most - altruism, determination, and audacity - she is convinced that through compassionate leadership, one can change the world one step at a time. She aspires to be a catalyst for change and a source of inspiration. Beyond her academic and professional endeavors, Luisa is engaged in associative life, dedicating time and energy to causes that matter to her and to people in an attempt to give back to the community. Finally, to manage all her commitments, Luisa tries to live by the principle of *mens sana in corpore sano* practicing a wide array of sports activities (dance, yoga, archery, boxing, volleyball, among others). During her free time, she enjoys a good book or movie with fine food - rumor has it, she has discerning taste but she will be happy to try delicacies from ELP fellows' home countries. With passion and purpose, we can achieve remarkable heights!

MARIA CORDERO-FERNÁNDEZ

Maria Cordero-Fernández, a 27-year-old Nicaraguan woman, demonstrates a profound commitment to socio-environmental justice. Her journey through a Jesuit school provided her with the foundational elements to develop her passion for combating injustices. During this period, she volunteered in various projects, allowing her to get a closer look at poverty and social inequalities prevalent within her country. At the same time, she discovered her calling for environmental advocacy and organized a student-led environmentalist movement. Maria's connection with nature motivated her pursuit of Environmental Engineering in her homeland. She spent a



couple of years working as an environmental consultant for private industries. However, the shifting socio-political landscape in Nicaragua in 2018 prompted her realization that she wanted to redirect her professional trajectory towards more socially impactful avenues. She applied for a position as a research assistant at Nitlapan-Nicaragua, where she dedicated two years of service. During this interval, she came to comprehend the intricate nature of social-ecological systems, particularly in historically marginalized rural areas. This experience also facilitated her recognition of the pivotal role of participatory action-research as a catalyst for reflection and transformative change. In 2021, Maria was awarded with an Erasmus Mundus scholarship to pursue an International Master's in Rural Development. This experience required her relocation to a different EU country each semester, which not only enriched her academically but also challenged her positively on a personal level. Interacting with fellow international students enabled her to broaden her perspective on shared struggles and emphasized the importance of strengthening connections to address these issues collectively. Recently, she completed her master's program with outstanding academic achievements. Maria is now looking forward to continuing the next chapter of her professional journey, harnessing her privileges to contribute meaningfully to the betterment of society.

MARIA ILONA STARK

Mária is a young Hungarian expert of international environmental and water governance. Her training background is in international relations, as well as international environmental and water governance and diplomacy. She currently works as a Blue Book Trainee for the Directorate General for Environment (DG ENV), where she specializes in clean air policies. Throughout her professional career she has worked in a diverse range of institutions from environmental NGOs, like the Friends of the Earth Hungary to policy think tanks and youth leadership projects.

She is a systems thinker, a member of the Balaton Group, and an aspiring researcher in the field of sustainability science. Her research areas include environmental security, sustainable development and climate resilience. Besides work and research, she actively engages in volunteering activities and youth leadership roles. She served as a youth ambassador for the Game On! project on climate change mitigation, participated in projects and training courses of Oxfam, NytEuropa and Friends of the Earth Europe.

MARIANA PEREZ MEDINA

Mariana Pérez Medina is a dedicated and passionate professional with a strong academic background in Biology and Neuroscience. Her journey in the field of science is fueled by a personal experience that sparked her interest in understanding the complexities of the brain. Through her academic achievements, research endeavors, and commitment to scientific dissemination, Mariana exemplifies a driven individual eager to make a positive impact on society. Her blend of practical experience, academic excellence and a deep-rooted motivation have lead her to Brussels where she will be joining the Joint Research Center of the European Commission as a trainee. She has earned different fellowships, participated in several research institutes and universities in Mexico, France and the USA. Besides her native Spanish, she is fluent in English and French. Mariana likes to learn from new cultures, read and dance.



MILENA MACHAŁA

Milena is a 25-year-old Polish professional. Her academic journey took her from the University of Warsaw, where she pursued her law degree, to the University of Poitiers, expanding her international perspective. Additionally, she completed a British law course at the British Law Centre, a joint initiative by the University of Cambridge and the University of Warsaw. Professionally, Milena gained experience over nearly three years at an international law firm, specializing in competition and consumer protection law. Her interests primarily revolve around antitrust law, especially in the ever-changing context of digital markets and emerging technologies. Furthermore, Milena completed her traineeship as a Blue Book trainee within the European Commission's Directorate-General for Internal Market, Industry, Entrepreneurship, and SMEs (DG GROW) in Net-Zero industries, Sustainable and Circular Products unit.

Milena is passionate about twin transitions. She seeks opportunities to contribute to the development of policies and practices that drive the transition to a more digital and sustainable future. Beyond her professional pursuits, Milena has a passion for sailing. Whether it's navigating the Baltic or exploring the Mediterranean, she finds solace and excitement in the open waters. She's also an avid diver, exploring the beauty of the underwater world in her free time.

NINA DANISOVA

Nina comes from Košice, Slovakia's second-largest city, and is set to embark on an internship journey at COMECE from March until July 2024. During her university studies in Political Science at Comenius University, Bratislava, she delved deeper into theology, moral, and political philosophy through a two-year liberal arts residential program at the Collegium of Anton Neuwirth. Nina recently enriched her cultural horizons by immersing herself in Mandarin Chinese during a semester in Taiwan, and she is also keen on furthering her knowledge of Latin.

Professionally, she worked for the European Alliance for Innovation where she participated in fostering international collaboration by organizing scientific conferences. Additionally, as a project manager for the Collegium of Anton Neuwirth, she oversaw publishing operations and managed online courses spanning theology, art, philosophy, and psychology for the public.

With an insatiable thirst for adventure, Nina is always ready to embrace new experiences, whether it's exploring new city areas or talking to strangers about different topics. She loves all forms of art, so you can find her strolling around a gallery, reading a book or being excited about a theater play she just saw. Nina is particularly fascinated by people: their thoughts and motivations intrigue her. Hence, she delights in conversing with individuals and discussing an array of topics that randomly come to life.

REBECCA SCHÖLER

Rebecca Schöler is a 22-year-old German ELP fellow currently completing an internship at the public affairs agency Erste Lesung GmbH in Brussels. After participating in various cultural exchange programs in France, the US, the UK, and Brazil during and after high school, she decided to major in International and European Governance, a binational and interdisciplinary double-degree between Sciences Po Lille and the University of Münster, where she



momentarily pursues a master's degree after already obtaining her bachelor's degree. She specialized her French master's in communication and media and wrote her bachelor thesis about the SPD's communication strategy during the 2021 federal elections. Rebecca could already gain experience in the work with political institutions during her internship at the state parliament of North Rhine-Westphalia in Düsseldorf and as a Representative for social affairs and housing at the General Student's Committee in Münster. Moreover, she worked as a Working Student in Communications at Uniper SE, where she became enthusiastic about Public Affairs and the crossover between politics and the private sector. Rebecca is passionate about volunteering, which has been a big part of her life especially due to her political engagement at the university of Münster and due to her participation in Rotaract Service Acts in Münster, Gelsenkirchen and Lille.

REGINA BUONO

Regina Buono is a young Italian professional who graduated with a master's degree in Languages and Cultures for International Cooperation and Communication from the University of Milan. She also holds a bachelor's degree in Intercultural Mediation. Born in Ischia, an island in Southern Italy, Regina has always been passionate about languages and cultures. She is fluent in Italian, English, Russian, French, Spanish, and has a basic understanding of German. With a keen interest in migration, human rights, and humanitarian action, Regina believes in fundamental values such as the right to life, freedom, and equality. Having moved to Brussels a year ago, she worked as a project management intern at the World Youth Alliance, focusing on human rights. Following that, she worked for another NGO, ECOS, on environmental sustainability. Currently, Regina serves as an integral ecology research and policy network assistant for the Laudato Si Research Institute. She is committed to standing with the poor and marginalized, advocating for social justice, and working towards reconciliation on social and environmental issues. Regina is a curious person with diverse interests, ranging from writing, reading, caribbean dances, and cooking to trekking and volunteering. She is always in search of new experiences, considering them a unique opportunity to get involved and continue learning. Volunteering holds a special place in her heart, and she actively cares about issues such as environmental sustainability and humanitarian action.

SARA ZONTA

Sara is an Italian young professional originally from Uganda. She always felt a calling for helping others and her family always involved her in volunteering activities since she was young, both in Italy and Uganda, being exposed to marginalised and fragile communities she then decided to pursue her university studies in Political Science and Human Rights at University of Padua where she then participated for an Erasmus + Programme in Latvia at Riga's Graduate School of Law where she attended aa full semester. After successfully completing the Erasmus she decided to pursue a Master Degree in Political Science and Government in Milan, with the aim of putting the acquired knowledge at the service of people in need of protection.

Across various policy domains, she takes pleasure in leveraging her legal knowledge to contribute to EU policy development and execution. This encompasses extracurricular pursuits and voluntary commitments within pro-European associations, all of which have enriched her understanding and impact within the European context.



Professionally, Sara gained some experience during her internship at OCCAM, Observatory on Digital Communication in consultative status with UN-ECOSOC in Milan, contributing to the organization and drafting the annual Infopoverty World Conference which takes place in New York.

Having always been genuinely curious and open towards other cultures, she studied several languages, she now speaks Italian, English, and knows French fairly well. She characterizes herself as highly energetic, embracing a diverse array of activities. Running, swimming, training, cooking, reading, dancing, and singing all find their place in her daily routine. Enthusiastically advocating for a balanced lifestyle, she finds equal joy in both physical pursuits and artistic expressions. Traveling and exploring museums are among her cherished pastimes, reflecting her multifaceted interests.

ZUZANA BOHÁČOVÁ

Zuzana is a programme manager and former civil servant coming from the Czech Republic. She holds a Bachelor's degree in International Territorial Studies and a Master's degree in International Security Studies, both earned from Charles University in Prague. She also completed study exchanges at the University of Twente in the Netherlands and at Sciences Po Lille in France. Zuzana's academic pursuits were fuelled by a keen interest in human security, climate security, and the intricate human-technology nexus. This led her to undertake a Blue Book Traineeship at the Health and Digital Executive Agency of the European Commission and later she joined the Czech Ministry of Environment during the Czech EU presidency. She also developed her interest in sustainable development and intercultural learning through her internships and volunteering experiences in a consulting firm and a few NGOs and she spent ten months as a volunteer in the Brittany region of France. Having moved around quite a bit she speaks English, Czech, French and Spanish, and always loves to learn about different cultures and travel to new countries.

