

EUCI 2021

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ESSAY – 1700 words

My name is Marie Marchand and I am a third year PhD student in British History and Political Sciences working on the British Liberal Democrats. My adventure in EUTOPIA started in April 2020. I've been a student representative for about one year and a half and I've been President of the EUTOPIA Student Council since October 2020.

Some may say that being a representative can be time-consuming and useless, especially when you are a student – because you know, students don't have their word to say. On a reflective note, I strongly disagree. Yes, being President of a Student Council is a lot of work, but I realize each day that I really love what I do. EUTOPIA is an alliance that truly gives students the possibility to speak their minds and as President of the Student Council, one of my main mission is to contribute to the improvement of education, which is one of the SDGs of the UN (Learning Outcome 4). Regarding my representation role, I've been able to be involved in many activities and I've been able to develop many skills.

A year and a half is a long time because this position requires to sacrifice time on my thesis and it is a unpaid full-time job. Started working within EUTOPIA was a real challenge in the beginning because I had barely heard about it. I had to learn everything quickly and, in that case, I was happy to be a fast learner. I instantly liked the missions that I was given, one of the first being to host the opening and closing ceremonies of the very first EUTOPIA week organized by my own university: CY Cergy Paris.

The opening and closing ceremonies are part of the most essential events of a EUTOPIA week since they are the first and the last meetings taking place. My role during these two events was to host the session with a team member to present the coming events (in the case of the opening ceremony), to interact with the participants such as the universities' Presidents and to motivate people to take part in the week. The real challenge for me was to register it in live in a studio with a real camera directed to me because you don't have any backup if something happened

in live. I also had to handle any unexpected technical problem (Learning Outcome 3). I just felt like a TV presenter, and I really enjoyed it! (Learning Outcome 1) This experience was also useful because later I got asked by CY to play in a video promoting the University and its territory.

After this first experience, hosting online meetings became something I got used to. As I became President of the Student Council in October 2020, I had to prepare and to host the meetings with the Student Council – which was not always easy to do because we have a high rate of rotation.

I also started to get more responsibilities, which is very important to me regarding the vision I have of a job. I took part in the most important meetings of the alliance. Seating in the Strategic and Executive Boards allowed me several things: first to get to know the working of the European institutions and of an Alliance of European universities. Then, to understand the strategies and the governance of EUTOPIA, and to take part in it. And finally, to speak out for the Student Community and to be able to stand for or against some “policies”. This has also been made possible through my participation to two different Work Packages that decide for the various strategies the alliance wants to choose. I’ve been able to discuss Learning Communities and Communications (Learning Outcome 3). I was a bit afraid in the beginning but I learned to work internationally.

As a President of the Student Council, I’ve also had to prepare some activities’ report, to present them to the boards using PowerPoint presentations (Learning Outcome 3). I must say that I’ve really loved taking part in those meetings with Presidents, Vice-Presidents, Professors, and staff from the six partners – even if it was a bit stressful in the beginning. I loved it because I like to have responsibilities and it’s a way to develop my professional network. However, I think that since all the meetings have been held online, it had made it easier and less impressive to talk than in a real meeting room (Learning Outcome 1).

All these activities obviously require to be fluent in English, which is not my mother tongue. In the beginning it was a challenge to express my ideas but it was also very useful for my PhD. I’ve also realized that language is a tool to build in an international community. It’s difficult sometimes to talk with people who are fluent and but it might also be the case the other way around. Working within EUTOPIA means working in an intercultural space made of six

universities that all have their own specific language (sometimes several, like Spain which uses both Catalan and Castilian), culture and civilization. Having the opportunity to work with such various profiles has undoubtedly developed my openness (Learning Outcome 2). Openness and challenge are two main features of our alliance, and this is what I really enjoy about it.

To answer to some *glocal* challenges, the Student Council is playing an important role by organizing specific events and advocating for action. One of the most essential action I've done within the Student Council is to contribute to the creation of our Student Think Tank. Within EUTOPIA, we think that students should benefit from a free and safe expression space to deliver messages that matter and that can change the world. In order to make this Think Tank work, we needed a coordinated team with a General Coordinator, a Director of Communications, a Director of International Relations and an Editor in Chief. The very first step was to identify the different positions we needed, what I did with three other student representatives. Afterwards, we communicated to all our students the call for applications. I then led the recruitment of the different team members. It really became an HR job, which I loved! I've learned how to deal with people in an international way for a common purpose (Learning Outcome 3). We received about 25 CVs and cover letters that I had to read and to mark to decide whether it would be worth meeting the candidates during an interview. I also had to prepare the questions for the interviews and to decide with the others who the best candidate for each position was. After leading the recruitment, I also coordinated the first meeting with the new team and I'm now making the interface between the EUSTT team and the Strategic Boards along with our Secretary General.

Another way to answer global challenges is to create spaces of discussion and debate about issues that are necessary to tackle in our era. That is why we've created the Student Forum, that I hosted once and organized twice. I decided to talk about Sustainability for the first one, and Gender Equality for the second (Learning Outcome 4). The organization of the first one was quite a challenge to me because I had to contact associations in the various universities of our alliance but also professors and members of staff to come and talk to the conference. I learnt many things on how local actions can have an impact on global issues. This forum even led to the creation of our Student Commission on Sustainability.

All these events and my position as President have globally helped me gain visibility (which is important for my research and for my professional development) and meet a lot of people at the

European level (Learning Outcome 1). I was invited to take part in events outside EUTOPIA such as a Paris Region Meeting where I was asked to share my views about the future of Campuses (Learning Outcome 3). The President of CY Cergy Paris Université also recommended me to participate to a workshop organized by the CPU (*Conférence des Présidents d'Université*) to give my opinion about “How to build the European space for education and research”. Being the only student there, I had to share my views with members from the European Commission. I felt truly blessed to have this opportunity to speak up for an entire community. These experiences also led me to deliver the kick-off speech of the enlargement of the alliance at the Italian Embassy in Brussels. I'm now also involved in the organization team of the European University Community, a collective of European students who are willing to contribute to the Future on Europe. We're planning 4 actions that will be defended during the next Conference on the Future of Europe in March 2022.

Overall, I would say that my role as a Student Representative and then President of the Student Council has changed the way I see my professional career. In about one year and a half, I've been able to considerably develop my professional network and to meet very inspirational people. I think I no longer want to be a professor but rather continue to be involved in European or International relations – especially in the University world. In the meantime, preparing my PhD have given me the possibility to develop my project management skills, my multi-tasking capacity, the ability to get a lot of information, to do some research and to synthesize my ideas. All my missions have also proved me that I was able to handle my PhD thesis, my role of representation and my teaching hours. However, if I had things to improve, I would say that I would organize some team building events with the members of the Council so that they can feel better integrated. I often feel that I'm all alone in this! Moreover, as a PhD student (and no longer a student), I can sometimes feel that I need to keep track to fully understand the students' needs. But I love to learn and I'm certain that the Youth is what one should focus on. My whole experience has allowed me to know the Youth and to help them raise their voices.