

EUTOPIA Certificate of Internationalisation (EUCI)

On topic of
Shaping a Global Ethic: Personal and Intellectual Growth Across Borders and
Disciplines



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Introduction

As a globally-minded and ethically-driven individual, I see international experiences not only as opportunities for academic enrichment but as essential catalysts for personal and professional growth. Engaging across borders—whether through academic collaboration, intercultural dialogue, or exposure to diverse perspectives—has allowed me to better understand both the world and myself. I believe that in today’s complex global environment, meaningful development arises from stepping outside one’s comfort zone and embracing the challenges of international engagement. Through this portfolio reflection, I aim to illustrate how my participation in academic events and studies abroad has significantly contributed to shaping my worldview, strengthening my sense of purpose, and preparing me to make a thoughtful, informed impact in my future career. These experiences are not isolated achievements but deeply integrated moments in my journey toward becoming a more capable, reflective person.

Beyond Experience: How Reflection Shapes Who I Am

Reflecting on international experiences is essential to fully grasp their impact—not just academically, but personally and professionally. During my journey, from presenting research paper at an international youth conference in Greece to studying international business at the heart of Europe in Brussels, I encountered diverse perspectives, ethical dilemmas, and real-world complexities that challenged my assumptions and expanded my thinking. Reflection transforms experience into insight. It bridges action and intention, helping me become not only a more competent global professional but also a more self-aware, empathetic, and purpose-driven individual.

How Have EUCI Seminars Helped Me

The EUCI seminars have played a significant role in shaping both my academic perspective and my personal development. By bringing together students from across Europe and beyond, these seminars created a dynamic space for dialogue, intercultural exchange, and critical reflection on global challenges. Engaging with peers, experts, and diverse viewpoints helped me sharpen my analytical thinking, deepen my understanding of complex international issues, and gain confidence in presenting and defending my ideas in an international setting. On a personal level, these seminars encouraged me to listen more actively, to question more thoughtfully, and to appreciate the richness of perspectives that come from different cultural and academic backgrounds. Most importantly, they reminded me that internationalisation is not just about mobility—it is about mindset.

Among the many experiences that have defined my international outlook, two stand out for the depth of their impact and the growth they inspired in me. To better convey the depth of my journey, I will present two key experiences that have significantly influenced my growth in an international context.

From Conference Halls to European Classrooms: A Journey of International Insight and Self-Discovery

1. *Speaking Ideas, Living Values: My ASECU Youth Conference Experience*



Participating in the 12th ASECU Youth International Conference and Summer School in Chios, Greece, was a deeply enriching experience that combined academic exploration with

intercultural exchange. The event brought together students and young researchers from across Southeast Europe and beyond to engage with the theme “*Common Good in a World of Increasing Asymmetries and Global Challenges.*” Through lectures, workshops, and group discussions, we explored economic issues from ethical, environmental, and social perspectives. Presenting my paper on the global minimum corporate tax and its implications for Bulgaria’s FDI appeal was a professional milestone, giving me the opportunity to receive feedback from international peers and faculty. Beyond the academic value, the event fostered meaningful personal connections, cultural understanding, and a sense of shared responsibility. The immersive setting encouraged collaboration, reflection, and dialogue—benefiting me not only as a student of international business but also as a globally conscious individual eager to contribute to inclusive and sustainable solutions.

- *Personal impact*

Participating in the ASECU Youth Conference in Chios was deeply transformative on a personal level. Immersed in a diverse, intellectually vibrant environment, I found myself engaging with peers from across different cultures, backgrounds, and disciplines. This experience taught me to listen more openly, embrace ambiguity, and develop empathy towards perspectives vastly different from my own. Living and learning alongside others in a collaborative setting challenged my comfort zones and enhanced my adaptability. I returned with a stronger sense of who I am, not just in relation to my goals, but in the broader context of a global community committed to ethical dialogue and shared responsibility.

- *Professional impact*

Professionally, the conference offered a unique platform to present and critically examine my research in an international academic forum. Discussing the implications of the global minimum corporate tax and its effects on foreign direct investment in Central and Eastern Europe—particularly Bulgaria—allowed me to deepen my understanding of international taxation policy and its intersection with regional development. Engaging with students and faculty from various disciplines refined my ability to communicate complex economic ideas clearly and confidently. The experience strengthened key skills such as public speaking, academic writing, and cross-border collaboration—skills essential for a career in international business and policy.

Research in intercultural psychology supports the idea that international experiences foster personal growth and adaptability. For example, a study by Maddux and Galinsky (2009) found that individuals who live abroad develop **higher levels of creativity and problem-solving skills**—especially when they engage deeply with local cultures rather than staying within familiar environments. This is because adapting to different cultural norms requires cognitive flexibility, open-mindedness, and a greater capacity to see issues from multiple perspectives.

In a similar way, my experience at the ASECU Youth Conference in Chios challenged me to think beyond national frameworks and economic models I was familiar with. Collaborating with peers from diverse academic and cultural backgrounds pushed me to re-evaluate

assumptions in my research and improve how I communicated my ideas in a globally accessible way.

The ASECU Youth Conference laid a strong foundation for my evolving global perspective—one that continues to be shaped and refined through my Master's studies at Vrije Universiteit Brussel.

2. *Studying at the Heart of Europe: My Growth at VUB*



My engagement with political and diplomatic affairs has been a long-standing personal pursuit—one driven not by obligation, but by conviction. I have always felt a deep responsibility to stay informed and critically engaged with the pressing political issues shaping Europe and the wider world. My deep-rooted engagement with political and diplomatic affairs naturally informed my decision to pursue a Master's in International Business at Vrije Universiteit Brussel. I saw it not only as an academic step, but as a continuation of my

commitment to understanding how global systems—economic, political, and institutional—interact and influence one another. Studying in Brussels, at the centre of European policy-making, has given me unique proximity to the conversations and decisions that shape regional and international affairs. It has allowed me to explore how business and governance intersect in real-world contexts, and to sharpen the skills needed to engage with both critically and constructively. Today, as I continue my studies at VUB, I find myself constantly challenged to think beyond traditional boundaries—between sectors, between nations, and even between disciplines. The academic environment in Brussels, enriched by its international community and proximity to European institutions, provides daily opportunities to connect theory with practice. Whether through coursework, dialogue with professors and peers, or exposure to policy debates unfolding in real time, I am continually expanding my understanding of how economic strategies and political decisions influence one another on a global scale. While my experience at VUB has been deeply enriching, it has also presented meaningful challenges. Adapting to a new academic environment, engaging with demanding study materials, and managing life in a different cultural and linguistic setting have all required significant adjustment. However, these difficulties have only strengthened my determination to persevere. I remain fully committed to my academic and professional journey, confident that each challenge contributes to my growth and prepares me for the international career I aspire to build.

- *Personal impact*

Living and studying in Brussels, away from familiar environments, has required me to step into discomfort and grow through it. One of the most transformative aspects has been learning to rely fully on myself—navigating complex administrative systems in a new language, managing daily responsibilities independently, and adjusting to unfamiliar cultural expectations. These were not minor shifts, but meaningful challenges that taught me resilience, adaptability, and a stronger sense of personal discipline. Each step outside of my comfort zone became a step towards greater self-reliance and maturity.

One of the first real tests of my independence came even before my arrival in Brussels. Starting with the challenge of finding reasonably affordable yet suitable accommodation, I had to engage in careful research, negotiation, and planning from afar. Once here, navigating the often slow and complex administrative processes, such as registration and paperwork, has tested my patience and persistence. At times, I found myself wondering whether I had chosen the right country for my Master's studies, especially since I had previously considered Denmark as an option. However, reflecting on my experiences, I realize that the challenges I've faced are likely inherent to studying in any foreign academic system. The complexities of adapting to new administrative procedures, cultural norms, and academic expectations would probably have been present regardless of the country. This understanding has reinforced my commitment to embrace the learning process fully, knowing that growth often comes through navigating such challenges.

There are moments when my self-esteem is shaken—such as when exam results do not fully meet my expectations or when promising internship opportunities become scarce. These setbacks are difficult to face and often test my confidence. I have had many restless nights, wrestling with how to move forward without being overly harsh on myself amid the uncertainties. As someone who has always been my own most brutal and uncompromising

critic, learning to balance self-discipline with self-compassion remains one of my greatest personal challenges.

I aspire to work within one of the major European Union institutions, driven by a desire to contribute directly to policy and governance on an international scale. However, at this moment, I find myself unable to grasp or seize such opportunities, often facing disappointment and rejection. While these setbacks can be disheartening, I remain steadfast in my belief that persistence and dedication will ultimately open the right doors. I hold onto the faith that with continued effort and growth, the path forward will become clearer, and meaningful opportunities will arise.

- *Professional impact*

Professionally, living in Brussels and studying at VUB has positioned me at the heart of Europe's decision-making landscape. The city itself is a hub of international dialogue, policy formulation, and institutional cooperation—exposing me daily to the mechanisms of diplomacy, governance, and economic integration. VUB as a university has not only enriched me academically but has also served as a powerful gateway to global diversity. Being part of such a multicultural environment has exposed me to nationalities, cultures, and perspectives that I had previously never encountered—some of which I was hearing about for the first time. One particularly impactful experience was getting to know students from Burundi. Through conversations and shared experiences, I gained insights into a country and culture I had known very little about. This connection sparked a genuine interest in learning more about the region's history, politics, and economic context. It reminded me that international understanding is not just built in classrooms, but through everyday human interaction. Among these connections, I feel especially attached to friends from the Maldives, whose perspectives, warmth, and shared moments of support have left a lasting impression on me. What has moved me most deeply, however, is meeting peers from countries affected by conflict or political instability. Their resilience, drive, and optimism in the face of hardship have been a quiet but powerful source of inspiration.

In addition to our academic collaborations, we often gathered in the evenings after long, demanding days at the university—sharing meals, exchanging ideas, and reflecting on our varied paths. Working together on several group projects further strengthened our bonds, and taught me the true value of cross-cultural cooperation, mutual respect, and the collective pursuit of knowledge. The relationships I've built—with individuals from South America, Southeast Asia, Eastern Africa, and beyond—have expanded my worldview and deepened my appreciation for the complexities and beauty of global interconnectedness. These encounters continue to shape my values and sharpen my sense of purpose as I move forward.

Despite the many enriching opportunities at VUB, I have also faced significant professional challenges. The high level of competition among students, particularly when applying for internships, has made it difficult at times to secure meaningful positions. Many promising roles are highly contested, which has tested my confidence and forced me to continually reassess and refine my goals. Additionally, the academic pressure and the difficulty of passing certain exams have sometimes caused me to lose faith and question the direction of my future. Yet

even in these moments of uncertainty, I remain anchored by my ultimate aspiration: to stay in the UK, work in public service, and pursue a doctoral degree in politics. This long-term vision continues to guide me forward, reminding me that persistence, not perfection, is what builds a lasting career and personal growth.

There are times when the uncertainty of the future feels overwhelming. No matter how carefully I plan or how hard I work, there's always a lingering fear that things may not unfold the way I hope. The path ahead is not clearly defined, and the unpredictability of global events, job markets, and personal circumstances often leaves me questioning whether I am making the right choices. This fear is not rooted in a lack of ambition, but rather in the awareness that even with strong intentions, outcomes can be beyond my control. Still, I've come to realise that uncertainty is not a sign of weakness—it is part of what makes growth possible.

Conclusion

As this reflective journey comes to its close, I find myself not merely summarising experiences, but tracing the quiet arc of transformation they have inspired. These months across borders—academic, cultural, and personal—have shaped not only my intellect but my sense of purpose. In Greece, I learned to speak into global debates; in Brussels, to listen deeply to the chorus of international voices that shape our world. Between the intensity of scholarly demands and the subtle lessons of everyday life, I have discovered that true education lies as much in perseverance as in insight, and as much in humility as in ambition.

There have been moments of doubt, when the future felt elusive and the path ahead uncertain. Yet, in those moments, a deeper conviction took root—an understanding that growth rarely announces itself with fanfare. It arrives quietly, in the forming of character, in the strength to try again, and in the grace to remain open to change. This portfolio, then, is not simply a record of endeavours, but a testament to that unfolding—of becoming someone ready not just to work across borders, but to understand, to serve, and, in time, to lead with integrity.