

Atlantic Expedition



Modernizing Transatlantic Relations

a project by Atlantische Initiative

ATLANTIC ACTION PLAN

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I. INTRODUCTION TO THE ATLANTIC EXPEDITION

The Atlantic Expedition (AE) is a German-US fellowship program initiated by the non-profit organization Atlantische Initiative e.V. It aims to empower a younger and more diverse generation of leaders from both sides of the Atlantic to explore ideas for modernizing transatlantic relations and broadening the scope of stakeholders who consider themselves part of the public debate.

The fellowship consisted of two “Expeditions” and an Atlantic Basecamp with 30 participants each. The first Expedition took place in Germany in spring 2017. Participants joined an online discussion, a memo workshop, and a joint trip to Hamburg, Dresden, and Berlin to exchange ideas, network, develop policy recommendations, and create an analytical memo titled **“Transatlantic Relations in a New Era: The Next Generation Approach.”**

Fellows of the second AE joined forces in the summer of 2017 to develop new strategies for communicating transatlantic relations to a diverse audience and making the transatlantic relationship more inclusive. Teams collaborated online to develop their respective project proposals and memo drafts, regularly joining feedback sessions with their peers. In October 2017, participants joined a trip to Chicago and Houston. This group produced the strategic memo **“Atlantic Expedition II: Towards a More Inclusive Transatlantic Partnership.”**

Fellows from both expeditions had the opportunity to discuss their ideas with stakeholders from politics, business, academia, media, law enforcement, and civil society. The diversity of meeting partners allowed for unique input to contribute to a more inclusive political debate.

Results from both Expeditions have been compiled in an Atlantic Action Plan and will be presented during the **Atlantic Basecamp** in Berlin from 8–13 April 2018. Fifteen representatives of each Expedition will convene in Berlin to network, connect with today’s and tomorrow’s transatlantic leaders, present and discuss recommendations of both groups, explore Berlin and take in the many cultural landmarks the city has to offer.

The Atlantic Basecamp will include internal working sessions, meetings with transatlantic stakeholders, a panel discussion on the future of transatlantic relations, as well as a **Next Generation event** with interactive formats, discussions and networking possibilities.

Throughout the entire program, the Atlantic Expedition served as a transatlantic learning community and offered space to discuss and work on various ideas and proposals on the future of modernizing transatlantic relations. While results summarized in this Atlantic Action Plan might not necessarily reflect individual opinions of all fellows, they do provide an overall impression of this next generation’s approach to transatlantic relations.

II. CALL TO ACTION:

A. NARRATIVE AND STRATEGY

To realize innovative policies and future modes of transatlantic cooperation, the Atlantic Action Plan proposes to strategically expand the scope of transatlantic actors and allies and to increase the presence of underrepresented communities. Accordingly, next to strengthening established forms of cooperation, the Action Plan calls for the targeted use of inclusive online communication, promotion of charismatic individuals, and facilitation of transatlantic educational opportunities. Overall, the transatlantic narrative needs to emphasize a new and more diverse set of stakeholders.

A New Narrative is Based on New and More Diverse Actors: The communication on the transatlantic partnership currently relies on a post-World War II narrative upheld by a limited number of established stakeholders, but not reaching major parts of the population on both sides of the Atlantic. It has been constrained to elite spheres, circulating scholarly verbiage in an echo chamber. However, the people a new narrative seeks to engage are no longer limited to a select few in the capitals on either side of the Atlantic. Hence, a new transatlantic narrative, transmitted via contemporary communication channels, can create sustainable support and awareness among different groups within society and thus foster a sense of inclusion on common issues.

While relationships between traditional actors erode, the inclusion of new players is necessary to tackle shared challenges. New actors include those that have been impacted by transatlantic relations, but have neither been given a primary role nor voice within the relationship in the past: local government and political actors; domestic and civil society organizations; local companies, startups, and online platforms; individuals including immigrants, visionaries, and celebrities; as well as academic institutions.

Diversifying the narrative requires to challenge the perception that the transatlantic relationship works only for an elite few. Currently, the following groups are not sufficiently involved into the debate: rural communities, working class, communities of color, and migrant communities. Including them holds great merits: it broadens the debate; fosters social cohesion; informs a majority of the benefits; and shares communal best practices.

Strategic Use of New Communication Tools: In order for a narrative to resonate, it needs to foster an easily accessible dialog. It should avoid political jargon and refrain from determining how transatlantic engagement 'ought' to be. By broadening the scope of engagement, previously overlooked voices in the debate can be incorporated, especially youth and citizens with a less formalized education. A strong multilingual component of the new narrative is critical since people will feel more connected to a narrative that speaks to them in a familiar manner.

New narratives can originate from films, podcasts, songs, poetry, memes, or even snapchat stories. Social media platforms provide easy access to information and have increasingly

become the main arena for sharing and debating ideas. Audiovisual and “shareable” online content should be further capitalized, while maintaining a consistent presence on traditional sources. Prominent “transatlantic ambassadors” and online influencers should expand the public audience to include and involve people who are currently not politically active, and who are not part of the conventional transatlantic dialog. Modernizing international educational opportunities through technological innovation and digitalization is key. Online learning and virtual reality technology can reinvigorate education by creating transatlantic learning experiences and a transatlantic learning community that communicate shared history, culture and values.

B. KEY THEMES AND POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

This section outlines the six most important themes on which to focus transatlantic engagement.

Climate Change: The United States and Germany were regarded as climate leaders and policy pioneers. While the US officially pulled out of the Paris Climate Agreement, this provides an opportunity for sub-national actors such as cities or districts to enforce their own agenda independently from the federal government. For a successful energy transition, cities and district leaders must share expertise with one another at home and abroad, they must mitigate the downsides and amplify the positive effects of this transition to those citizens most affected by it.

Digitalization and Technology: Technological development touches several levers in transatlantic relations. Robotization and automation have influenced voting behavior by threatening traditional manufacturing jobs and other work. Political leaders and civil society must acknowledge these trends by highlighting the benefits of international partnerships and addressing fears that trade is detrimental to the economy. At the same time, a focus should be on technology and the opportunities it yields. For example, digital platforms can foster connectivity in lieu of physical travel. The International Tandems project, highlighted later in this report, illustrates potential benefits for students who cannot afford to travel abroad. Furthermore, science and technology offer one of the most promising areas in US-European cooperation. In short, this policy field is a particularly promising one for prosperous transatlantic cooperation.

Education: Up to two-thirds of young adults in both Germany and the United States do not obtain four-year college degrees, which is when most international educational opportunities present themselves. Therefore, both sides must implement more macroeconomics and international relations education into high-school level curricula. The goal is to (1) build an understanding of why trade and economic engagement does not occur in a zero-sum environment and can be beneficial to all parties and to (2) facilitate personal intercultural connections and awareness of challenges and values in other societies.

Populism: Rising populism on both sides of the Atlantic is one symptom among many of dissatisfaction with the representativeness of political institutions and changing economic realities in the twenty-first century. Additionally, isolationist sentiments contributed to the deterioration of the US-European relationship. Voters, in larger numbers than previously, support protectionist economic and immigration policies, which decades of research have shown are typically detrimental to the host country. Hence, strengthening the political culture and regaining respect for public institutions is essential in order to obtain a more resilient civil society.

Security and Development: Policymakers should continue to give transatlantic security cooperation the utmost priority. The security challenges the Alliance faces can only be successfully confronted if the US and Europe continue to deepen their cooperation. We recommend that NATO members meet the 2% spending target by 2024; develop a burden sharing score as a more comprehensive metric; address weaknesses in systems for electronic warfare, as well as further develop cyber capabilities. Decision-makers on both sides of the Atlantic should keep in mind that security cannot only be viewed through the traditional lens of deterring and countering threats. A holistic approach to security should emphasize the intricate relation between military aspects and development efforts. It should therefore include investing in building strong institutions; curbing climate change; and helping other governments to address the causes of migration. More effective development aid can help to address the root causes of conflict and fragility, reducing the pressures of forced migration at the source. At the same time, more open, inclusive, and integrative policies at home serve to buttress our credibility as a value-based community, making our efforts to address global security challenges more effective.

Trade (TTIP): The goal of a comprehensive trade agreement between the US and the European Union should be maintained. Yet, rather than advocating for a single large trade deal, such as TTIP, an incremental approach under a common framework should be implemented. Accepting current realities, the transatlantic partners should introduce sub-agreements that focus either on individual subjects or individual industries. Once trade deals are established in certain industries or subjects, it will become more feasible to reach an agreement in other more contested areas. Moreover, the transatlantic partners must proactively inform the public about the details of the intended trade deals. Not only will this step allow for an open public dialog, but it will also minimize bias and misconceptions and thus allow for an easier transition into new trade agreements.

C. CONCRETE PROJECTS

The participants of the Atlantic Expedition designed three projects to deepen transatlantic engagement and counteract the political forces that have cast doubt as to the existing world order. They consider (1) the importance of decentralized, local-level engagement between the two sides; (2) the goal to deliver international educational experiences to students who cannot obtain a university degree or study abroad; and (3) the need to

outline why strong US-European cooperation is still the optimal policy in a world that has changed considerably over the last two decades.

City-to-City Cooperation: The potential of city-to-city engagement is underutilized. Transatlantic city partnerships can help identify and address needs and concerns within the broader bilateral relationship by yielding feedback that can be used in making policy adjustments. This project aims to identify, encourage and support cities that are interested in facilitating transatlantic exchange. Interested actors are introduced to a ten-step process to reach an appropriate degree of cooperation. Additionally, the project group provides a sample letter to be sent to mayoral offices so as to establish a first contact. Separately, it outlines a framework for supporting participating cities and facilitating engagement with NGOs, such as Sister Cities International.

Next Steps: Fellows from this project group propose to identify potential city-to-city partnerships and prepare bilingual letters that initiate a first contact and allow city officials to signal their interest. Once a new pair is matched, direct communication between the cities should be established and a personalized roadmap for each participant should be laid out. If needed, external actors can be included to help with the establishment of a long lasting cooperation. Fellows of this project call upon all local actors who are interested in city-to-city cooperation to begin this process and get involved. All stakeholders are invited to reach out to the project group to receive further information, to benefit from contacts to already established partnerships, and to receive additional letter drafts. Fellows will continue to analyze these connections and pledge to support all efforts that are tailored in this direction to enhance the transatlantic community.

International Tandems: This project directly addresses the conclusions and recommendations of the Atlantic Expedition as to the Education section. International Tandems is a proposed virtual exchange program with a focus on high school students in low-income areas, who are less likely than high-income individuals to obtain a four-year college degree. For example, the project could foster an e-exchange between an American high school class with an equivalent German class, providing students with the possibility to collaborate on a mutually-relevant assignment in transatlantic pairs. Students will learn how another culture might approach an issue; experience the challenges and rewards associated with cross-cultural communication; and build a relationship with an individual across the Atlantic. There are opportunities to partner with **an existing virtual exchange program** to drive adoption in the United States and Germany as a subject matter expert. The **Houston-Leipzig Sister City Association** offers a promising opportunity for a beta rollout.

Next Steps: Fellows engaged in this project previously met with a representative of Youth for Understanding (YFU), a virtual exchange program, to understand its structure and delivery model. Currently, group members are looking for potential cooperation partners. In a next step, objectives and requirements for a youth-focused, digital intercultural exchange program will be aligned. Then, fellows will reconvene with the representative from YFU for a discussion regarding how the potential cooperation partner could adapt the

program for its objectives and serve as an intermediary to drive adoption of the program within Germany and the United States. This would likely be beta-tested in schools within Houston and Leipzig, leveraging contacts and subject matter expertise from the aforementioned Sister City Association.

New Transatlantic Declaration: The New Transatlantic Declaration (NTD) has been developed by fellows of the second Atlantic Expedition and is based on **the Transatlantic Declaration of 1990** and **the New Transatlantic Agenda of 5 December 1995**, which outlined cooperative commitments and shared interests between the United States and Europe. The NTD addresses massive shifts in technology, geopolitical power, policy preferences, and the isolationist sentiments that have proliferated on both sides of the Atlantic since that period. It reasserts mutual values in social, political, cultural, and economic spheres based on mutual respect, acceptance, and support. The Declaration groups today's critical transatlantic issues into Peace and Security, Cultural Values, Migration, Freedom, Sovereignty, and Rule of Law. Each section acknowledges challenges but outlines the mutual advantages of engagement. The Declaration is a pledge open to all signatories who support engagement and recognize that both sides are stronger together.

Next Steps: The NTD is a document that reiterates the underlying common goals of transatlantic partners. Therefore, in the first step all current stakeholders are asked to engage and sign the declaratory NTD. These persons could become ambassadors of the NTD. The second step is to broaden its outreach. It must be easily accessible for all generations and persons that want to commit to it. It will therefore be published and discussed on the website of the Atlantische Initiative e.V. An online signing mechanism and the use of social media would further enhance the declaration's scope across the Atlantic. The third step requires the commitment from each signatory towards the NTD and its inherent values. This important individual act would strengthen transatlantic relations, when individuals take action and responsibility to engage in international affairs. Lastly, the declaration would require periodic reviews and inclusive discussions to remain a core document for every transatlantic stakeholder.

If you are interested in getting involved in any of the projects, please reach out via atlantic-expedition@atlantische-initiative.org.

III. ATLANTIC EXPEDITION: FELLOWS

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An overview of all fellows including pictures and bios is available at <http://atlantic-expedition.org/>.

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Questions, Feedback, Comments?

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APENDIX: FINDINGS FROM THE FIRST AND SECOND ATLANTIC EXPEDITION

The Atlantic Action Plan is based on the results that have been developed by the fellows of the first and second Atlantic Expedition between December 2016 and November 2017. This section provides a summary of the findings in the respective memos, pointing out the main strategies and recommendations on how to modernize transatlantic relations.

Overall, the Atlantic Expedition fellows identified **four key transatlantic trends**. First, the **proliferation of stakeholders** and the diffusion of power mark a shift from traditional actors to a more diverse audience, as one can discern in the second trend, the increased **grassroots action** that spans the Atlantic. Third, **digitalization** has an enormous impact on how transatlantic affairs are perceived and responded to, with social media channels allowing individuals to have a voice in transatlantic affairs. Finally, **populism** within the US and Europe presents a counter-movement to the liberal order that must be taken seriously. Combined, these four trends – proliferation of stakeholders, grassroots action, digitalization, and populism – allow for an understanding of current opportunities and obstacles within transatlantic affairs.

Apart from these general trends, the **first Expedition's memo** investigates specific themes that shape the current transatlantic discussion and offers concise ideas on how to modernize these areas of cooperation. First, trade remains key, despite the current US-administration's threat to withdraw from free trade. Instead of aiming for a single large trade deal, the focus should be on an incremental approach under a common framework that establishes an industry-to-industry or subject-to-subject agreement.

Second, security and development continue to guide US-European affairs, with NATO at its core. While meeting NATO's 2 percent spending target is advised, so is the development of a burden-sharing system that will increase other development and defense cooperation besides monetary means. Finally, education and digitalization remain pivotal for future development: Technology could become a major driver of transatlantic collaboration and thus must be included in educational programs on both sides of the Atlantic.

The **second Expedition's memo** takes these trends and themes and creates **new narratives** and **strategies** to better communicate transatlantic relations to a diverse audience and hence realize the proposed actions. Authors argue that transatlantic relations rely on a post-World War II narrative upheld by a limited number of elites, thereby excluding major parts of the population on both sides of the Atlantic from the debate. A new transatlantic narrative, transmitted via contemporary communication channels, should be based on depth, diversity, durability and discourse and can create sustainable support and awareness among different groups within society and thus foster a sense of inclusion on common issues. In a subsequent stakeholder mapping exercise, fellows identified and present an overview of classic stakeholders, portraying the status quo of transatlantic relations. While overlapping in some instances, established stakeholders are contrasted with new actors and allies, among them local government and political actors; domestic and civil society organizations; local companies, startups, and

online platforms; individuals including immigrants, visionaries, and celebrities; as well as academic institutions. A shift towards these new actors and allies can already be observed and should be furthered, as their involvement can lead to the inclusion of formerly marginalized groups, such as rural communities, people of color, migrant communities, and the working class.

The **strategic tools** identified to establish this new narrative of diversity and inclusion encompass online tools, transatlantic promoters, educational tools, as well as state, local and private cooperation. Building upon these tools, specific projects could enhance the number of people involved in transatlantic relations. Online collaboration for example can enable the formation of international tandems of high school students participating in a virtual exchange program. Further, traditional forms of transatlantic engagement should be broadened: City-to-city cooperation could include smaller towns to foster connections between rural areas. Also, exchange programs for blue-collar workers could be established. Finally, the New Transatlantic Declaration (NTD) drafted by the fellows of the second Atlantic Expedition aims to (re)affirm common tenets of the transatlantic society. Fellows call upon a broad range of stakeholders to acknowledge, sign, and promote the NTD.

A detailed elaboration on the recommendations and projects mentioned above can be found in the **first Atlantic Memo “Transatlantic Relations in a New Era: The Next Generation Approach”** and in the **second Atlantic Memo “Atlantic Expedition II: Towards a More Inclusive Transatlantic Partnership”** on www.atlantic-expedition.org.