

“The best from two university environments” Mixed language and teaching cultures have prepared Hanna Petri very well for her EU career.

Completing a bilingual course of studies in the Social Sciences in Stuttgart and Bordeaux have earned Hanna Petri a place with the European Commission in Brussels. The wide-ranging study programme and cultural interchange laid the foundations for her career in the field of collaborative development.

Petri found her study period both challenging and exciting. After completing her Abitur (university entrance qualification) and spending a year as a voluntary aid worker in Bolivia, she relocated to Bordeaux to begin her first semester in the “Filière intégrée franco-allemande” – or FIFA – degree course. From then on, she regularly moved between the capital of Baden-Württemberg (Stuttgart) and the university town in south-west France. She found the continual relocations quite stressful, especially in the beginning: “By the time I was getting to grips with being back in Germany”, she remembers, “I’d have to head back to Bordeaux. I did find it difficult to get used to the university and the way they do things in France”. Yet, as time passed, her appreciation of the fact that the dual course structure was giving her an insight into different scientific approaches in addition to the French language and culture increased: “The two completely different ways of thinking and learning have made a lasting impression on me”. Whereas the content taught at the institute in Bordeaux, which is part of the Grandes Écoles, a network of elite schools in France, was extremely wide ranging, the young student learned a lot about methodical approaches to empirical social research. “For me, the thematic variety on the one hand and the methodical training on the other combine the best from two university environments”, says Petri.

Like a Personalised Degree Course


For 20 years, the Social Sciences degree pro-

gramme has been a successful collaboration between the University of Stuttgart and the Institutes of Political Studies in Bordeaux, incorporating an advanced French language course and the opportunity to participate in the Voltaire Student Exchange Programme. The young Petri, a native of Hessen, was extremely well-positioned to benefit from this and also saw this diversity as her personal chance: “I didn’t want to consolidate my French language skills in a dedicated language course”, the 29-year-old explains: “instead, I wanted to do so in combination with another discipline entirely”. As such, the FIFA programme was tailor-made for her as, in addition to politics and economics, it also covers law and the French “culture générale”, including languages and history.

Following the bachelor-level education, the master’s programme offered a wide range of opportunities to specialise. Here, Petri, whose passion for Latin America was first awakened by a Chilean girl who lived next door, set the course of her future career. “From an early age”, she says, “I could imagine myself working in the field of collaborative development. That’s why I chose the very specific “Risk Management in the Southern Hemisphere” master’s degree”, in the course of which she focused on the features of party-affiliated German foundations as actors in the field of collaborative development.

Interest-led in the Best Sense

With a German and French degree as well as a Dual-Graduate’s Certificate in her pocket, she was able to rapidly establish her professional career. “Just being bilingual was a great advantage when it came to landing a job in the proximate EU environment. But, my master’s degree was certainly also instrumental in preparing me for a career in collaborative development”, Petri explains with conviction. Following a traineeship with the Eu-



“The two completely different ways of thinking and learning coupled with thematic variety on the one hand and methodical training on the other have made a lasting impression on me”, says Hanna Petri with reference to her degree studies in Bordeaux and Stuttgart.

Photo: University of Stuttgart / Uwe Noehte

ropean Commission, she worked for the German Corporation for International Cooperation GmbH (GIZ) and the Directorate-General for Development and International Cooperation (DGCID) in Brussels. The Director General of the European Commission is responsible for the administration of the European Union's foreign aid programme and ensures the provision of European aid around the globe. In this context, she worked as a project manager, providing support for environmental and climate-related projects funded by the EU, which included editing project reports and reviewing general development-policy agreements relating to the EU-funded projects. She also had editorial responsibility for the “Green Development News” newsletter. As such, her work not only involved an exciting scope in terms of content, but was also very diverse in terms of its international dimension. “My colleagues came from all over Europe and had very different backgrounds in terms of their careers. Our team included everything from legal practitioners and political scientists to biologists and cultural scholars”. It was multicultural, diverse and extremely demanding, as Petri now had to switch back and forth between three different foreign languages in her daily activities. “The dy-

amic atmosphere is good fun”, says Petri, “but one could definitely also sense an air of competition, as there are a lot of highly-qualified people working in Brussels”.

Profession and Passion United

Yet, she did remain true to her passion and is currently working in the GIZ's EU Liaison Office, where she is involved in climate and environmental protection in Latin America. In which role she advises her overseas-based colleagues on such things as the sequence of events relating to EU co-funding procedures, explaining the relevant processes and contract formats and responding to questions of any sort relating to the EU. In terms of where she may end up in the future, Petri is open to anything. The past has also shown her that many things can come about by pure coincidence. “I can well imagine returning to Latin America, either as a GIZ employee or as part of an EU delegation”, says Petri, “but there's no pressure right now, so I'll just see what happens”.

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