

– Long Report –

A Change Made to Stick

European Women's Academy 2018

Session 2: Potsdam, Germany

As liberals, we want to bring about positive change in our communities and enable individuals to be free, independent and fully empowered. Since 2016, the European Liberal Forum together with the Friedrich-Naumann-Foundation, NEOS Lab and the ALDE Party has worked towards this goal by envisioning, financing and organizing the European Women's Academy (EWA) workshop. This high-level training consists of three annual sessions of three days each, where female aspiring politicians from all over Europe come together to learn and help each other achieve their ambitions. More concretely, the aim of the programme is to improve the participants' chances to win in the respective upcoming elections. The second session of EWA 2018 took place in Potsdam, Germany from the 8th to the 11th of June. 30 talented and ambitious women gathered together and advanced their campaigning skills under the guidance of first-class trainers and speakers.

Day one opened up with two trainings led respectively by Laura Laussade, EWA Director and ALDE Party's Campaigns Adviser, and Max Sundermann, ALDE Party's Data Analytics Manager. Laura illustrated to the participants how to successfully canvass and build an effective script, while Max explained how online tools and data maps can make a difference. At the following welcoming dinner, Bettina Stark-Watzinger, who is herself a EWA alumna as well as the Chair of the Finance Committee in the German Bundestag, shared her successful story through a compelling and passionate speech, which motivated the participants throughout the whole session.

On the following day, Johanna Hans, Friedrich-Naumann-Foundation EWA Coordinator, welcomed the group in the historical Truman Villa, which is located next to the foundation's head office on the Lake Griebnitzsee in Potsdam. After the following welcoming remarks by the ELF Board member and Treasurer Airis Meier, the day proceeded at full speed. "What is the change you want to achieve through a speech? What do you want to change in the way your audience thinks, feels and acts?" Asking yourself this question is, according to the speaking expert Simon Bucknall, the key to improve the quality of your speeches. Public speaking is challenging and it requires constant practice. Yet, it can be learned and that is exactly what the session with Simon was about. Each participant identified her public speaking weaknesses and was given the tools necessary to work on them. Main tips that came out? Public speaking is not a test of knowledge, adrenaline can be fatal but walking helps turning it down, make a point by telling a story and, most important: it's all about the audience!

On the same morning, ALDE Party Consultant Ian Marquardt led another extremely effective workshop on campaign planning techniques. When planning a campaign, it is essential to distinguish between your opponents and your competitors, as the way you prevail on the former differs from how you prevail on the latter. To come clear on this point, each participant was asked to indicate 2 strengths and 2 weaknesses for themselves, for their opponent and for their competitor. The workshop then continued with the identification of "Voter Personas". "Voter Personas" represent targeted voter groups and are a way to apply the human element to policy areas. In other words, a "Voter Persona" is a character you create to help you tell your story and communicate your message.



However, delivering your message effectively doesn't come easy. Katrien Van den broeck, Communication Advisor to the Deputy Prime Minister of Belgium and former Social Media Manager of Guy Verhofstadt, elucidated how to successfully reach out voters on social media. What, how, when and with whom you post matters. Different content goes on different platforms and it is always better to post less, but more powerful messages. These and further guidelines revealed to be of precious value to the ladies, who then had a clearer view on how to operate on digital platforms such as Twitter or Facebook.

The workshop on Sunday was led by Grace Pardy from made2matter, Austria. She focused the session on the importance of having a "core idea" at the centre of your speech. The core idea is the corner stone of your speech and it's made to stick. With Grace's guidance, the participants worked on improving their storytelling techniques. For instance, in order to connect with people they learned that they need to combine abstract numbers and data with practical daily life experiences. They need to show your humanity and build a story around it. The session with Grace continued in the afternoon and turned to the analysis of the participants' videos, which had previously been submitted to her. After some personal feedback, the ladies were given time to work on their videos individually and to ask Grace for further advice. Very useful was also the study of Anne Hathaway's speech at the UN Women General Assembly.

At dinner, guest speaker Ria Schröder, who is the Federal Chair of the FDP youth's wing JuLis, and the first female in this position since 25 years, motivated the group by emphasising the importance of working together as women. Not competition but unity and cooperation make women stronger: "Women should not see each other as enemies, but as allies".

On the last morning, the ALDE Party Vice President Annelou van Egmond officially concluded the second session of EWA 2018 with an insightful discussion on navigating politics as a woman. Being a female politician today is a challenge, but it is every day less challenging than the day before. Why? Because there are women such as those who participate, organise and contribute to European Women's Academy that every year are bringing about the change we need. A change made to stick.

