

PROGRAMME REVIEW

# Master of Arts in Transatlantic Affairs

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College of Europe and the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy at  
Tufts University

Brussels - May 2021

## PROGRAMME REVIEW

### Master of Arts in Transatlantic Affairs

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## PREFACE

This assessment report deals with the programme review of the Advanced Master of Arts in Transatlantic Affairs (MATA) of College of Europe and the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy at Tufts University. This programme review was conducted by an independent panel of experts in February 2021.

This report is intended for all stakeholders of the programme and provides a snapshot of its quality following the Standards for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes in the European Higher Education Area. As chair of the VLUHR Quality Assurance Board I hope that the panel's findings, judgements, recommendations and commendations will advance this unique transatlantic programme. Additionally, this report intends to provide information regarding the quality of the programme to a wider audience. For this reason, this report is published on the website of VLUHR QA.

I would like to thank all members of the panel for the time they invested and the dedication they showed carrying out this programme review. At the very same time, this review was only possible because of the commitment of all those involved at the MATA programme. I hope this assessment report does justice to their efforts.

**Petter Aaslestad**

Chair VLUHR Quality Assurance Board

# PROGRAMME REVIEW

## Introduction

This assessment report presents the findings, judgements and recommendations regarding the quality of the Advanced Master of Arts in Transatlantic Affairs (MATA) of the College of Europe and the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy at Tufts University. For the administrative details of the institutions involved and the programme see Annex 1.

This programme review was carried out in accordance with the VLUHR QA manual for the European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes.<sup>1</sup> Dieter Cortvriendt, Policy Advisor of VLUHR QA, was project manager of this programme review.

## Panel composition

The proposal of candidate panel members was approved by the VLUHR Quality Assurance Board on the 10<sup>th</sup> of June 2020. The composition of the panel was ratified by the VLUHR Quality Assurance Board on the 20<sup>th</sup> of November 2020.

The panel was composed as follows:

- **Madeleine Hosli**, Professor International Relations, Leiden University (chair of the panel)
- **Erik Jones**, Professor European Studies and International Political Economy, Johns Hopkins
- **Bart Kerremans**, Professor American Politics and International Political Economy, KU Leuven
- **Alexandra Faveaux**, Student International Relations and Diplomacy, Antwerp University

A short cv of the panel members is included as Annex 2.

## Assessment standards

The MATA programme review was conducted in accordance with the nine Standards for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes in the European Higher Education Area. This ‘European Approach’ is based on the European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area and on the Qualifications Framework for the European Higher Education Area. The nine standards and underlying substandards are:

1. Eligibility
  - 1.1 Status
  - 1.2 Joint design and delivery
  - 1.3 Cooperation agreement
2. Learning outcomes
  - 2.1 Level
  - 2.2 Disciplinary field
  - 2.3 Achievement
  - 2.4 Regulated professions
3. Study programme
  - 3.1 Curriculum
  - 3.2 Credits
  - 3.3 Workload
4. Admission and recognition
  - 4.1 Admission
  - 4.2 Recognition
5. Learning, teaching and assessment
  - 5.1 Learning and teaching
  - 5.2 Assessment
6. Student support

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.qualityassurance.vluhr.be/documents>

7. Resources
  - 7.1 Staff
  - 7.2 Facilities
8. Transparency and documentation
9. Quality assurance

More information regarding these (sub)standards can be found in the assessment report.

## Decision rules

The rules set out below are applicable to each standard and substandard.

- 'Compliant': The programme acts in accordance with the standard, and its implementation is effective.
- 'Partially Compliant': Some aspects or parts of the standard are met while others are not. The interpretation of the standard is correct, but the manner of implementation is not effective enough.
- 'Non-Compliant': The programme fails to comply with the standard.

## Preparation

In preparation of the MATA programme review, the programme compiled a self-evaluation report in accordance with the VLUHR QA manual for the European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes. The panel received the informative and conclusive self-evaluation report well in advance and studied this document and its annexes thoroughly. The panel also studied a wide selection of Master's theses and consulted the virtual learning environment (containing the ECTS-files) of the programme.

On the 7th of January 2021 the panel members attended a training session organised by VLUHR QA. During this session, the panel members were informed about the programme review process. Special attention was given to the status of the MATA programme, quality assurance in Flanders and Europe, the Standards for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes in the European Higher Education Area and interviewing techniques. Also, a schedule for the site visit was agreed upon, enclosed as Annex 3. Finally, the self-evaluation report and the consulted Master's theses were discussed in depth to prepare the site visit.

Additional documents were provided in advance of the site visit, including teaching and learning materials, minutes of joint governance body meetings, examples of internship reports and examination examples.

## Site visit

Given stringent COVID-19 regulations, the review of the MATA programme was conducted online on the 4th and 5th of February 2021. During this 'site visit', the panel conducted interviews with all those involved in the programme in order to gain insight into the quality of the programme, including management, students, teaching and supporting staff, alumni and employers. These interviews took place in an open and constructive atmosphere and provided the panel, in addition to the documents studied (see Annex 4 for an overview), relevant insights regarding the quality of the programme. In order to give all stakeholders the opportunity to talk confidentially to the panel there was a free consultation. The panel attended a presentation about the facilities at the Bruges and the Natolin campuses of the College of Europe as well as at The Fletcher School. At the end of the site visit, the panel discussed its findings, judgements, recommendation and commendations with the programme management in a co-creative session. After a final panel meeting, the panel shared its main conclusions with the programme management in an oral report.

## Assessment report

In the subsequent assessment report the panel provides the findings, judgements, recommendations and commendations regarding the quality of the MATA programme as a whole and all study tracks. At the end of this report an advice for accreditation is formulated, as well as a list of recommendations and commendations. The MATA programme management was given the opportunity to respond to the draft of this report before finalisation.

# ASSESSMENT REPORT

The Advanced Master of Arts in Transatlantic Affairs (MATA) is jointly organised by College of Europe (Bruges, Belgium and Natolin, Poland) and The Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy at Tufts University (Medford, greater Boston area, United States). The MATA programme is a two-year (120 ECTS), international postgraduate training, awarding a joint Master's degree. The programme has been running since 2017 and so far fifteen students graduated. Each year, approximately ten students are admitted to the programme. Students can enrol at both sides of the Atlantic.

MATA is a unique programme, given that there are no other international (cross-Atlantic) postgraduate programmes offering a joint degree in transatlantic affairs, broadly defined as the economic, legal and political relations between the United States (and North America) and the European Union (and its member states) both in a bilateral and multilateral context as well as transnationally. The programme aims at training both academic and professional competences on a postgraduate level. The programme consists of a 'truncus communis', providing a general framework of US-EU relations, and five study tracks, by which the students are able to specialise. To complete their curriculum, all students must spend time on each side of the Atlantic, including a three/four-month internship, and have to complete a Master's thesis.

The Joint MATA Committee is the joint governing body of the programme, co-chaired by a representative of the College of Europe and Fletcher (the so-called MATA coordinators) and consisting of equal numbers of academic and administrative staff from each of the two institutions, as well as two student representatives. This committee meets two to three times a year and is responsible for the organisation of the programme, including keeping the curriculum up to date, defining the admissions requirements and carrying out the selection procedures, setting the parameters of the internship and the Master's thesis supervision arrangements. As such, this committee is responsible for the organisation of the programme, under the final authority of the Academic Councils of the College of Europe and The Fletcher School.

## 1 Eligibility

*The panel assesses standard 1 as compliant*

### 1.1 Status

The institutions that offer a joint programme should be recognised as higher education institutions by the relevant authorities of their countries. Their respective national legal frameworks should enable them to participate in the joint programme and, if applicable, to award a joint degree. The institutions awarding the degree(s) should ensure that the degree(s) belong to the higher education degree systems of the countries in which they are based.

*The panel assesses substandard 1.1 as compliant*

Based on the relevant documents and the interviews conducted, the panel states that the College of Europe (the College) and The Fletcher School (Fletcher), the institutions offering the MATA programme, are both recognised as higher education institutions by the relevant authorities.

The College is a public utility foundation and registered as an institution of higher education by the Flemish government. Its degrees are officially recognised by it as Master's degrees (Level 7) in Flanders, and consequently in the European Higher Education Area (EHEA). The programmes of the College, including the MATA programme for its initial accreditation, have been accredited by the Accreditation Organisation of the Netherlands and Flanders (NVAO).

Fletcher is the oldest postgraduate-only school of international affairs in the United States. It is part of Tufts University, an American private research university located just outside of Boston and accredited by the New England Association of Schools and Colleges (NEASC). The MATA programme is accredited in the United States by the New England Commission of Higher Education (NECHE).

The panel concludes that the legal status of both institutions enables them to organise the programme jointly and to offer a joint Master's degree, in accordance with the degree systems of the countries in which the programme is based.

### 1.2 Joint design and delivery

The joint programme should be offered jointly, involving all cooperating institutions in the design and delivery of the programme.

*The panel assesses substandard 1.2 as compliant*

The MATA programme is a unique, two-year (120 ECTS), international programme with strong engagements of two renowned 'schools' awarding a joint degree. The MATA programme involves academic and administrative staff of the College and of Fletcher. All decisions regarding the programme are based on common accord, and thus the frequent consultation among both institutions.

Regarding the design, the programme was established by a cooperation agreement defining the terms and conditions of the MATA programme, signed by the Rector of the College and the Dean of Fletcher. The Joint MATA Committee, the governing body of the MATA programme, was responsible for the operationalisation of the design, departing from the strong points of both organising institutions.

Regarding the delivery of the programme, there are joint admissions requirements and selection procedures in place, a number of jointly organised course modules, co-monitored internships and a co-supervised Master's thesis. It is important to stress that all students must study at least one semester on each side of the Atlantic, be it at the College or at Fletcher. As such, the students' learning experience is transatlantic in nature. It is the responsibility of the Joint MATA Committee to oversee the delivery of the programme. The panel states, based on the interviews conducted and the documents studied, that this committee and its composition is well suited to guarantee the quality of the programme.

Based on the documents provided as well as the interviews conducted, the panel concludes that both institutions are involved in the organisation of MATA programme as equal partners. There are high levels of trust between both institutions and clear synergies, for example regarding specialisations in the field of transatlantic affairs, which result in a well-integrated programme.

### 1.3 Cooperation agreement

The terms and conditions of the joint programme should be laid down in a cooperation agreement. The agreement should in particular cover the following issues: Denomination of the degree awarded in the programme; Coordination and responsibilities of the partners involved regarding management and financial organisation; Admission and selection procedures for students; Mobility of students and teachers; Examination regulations, student assessment methods, recognition of credits and degree awarding procedures in the consortium.

*The panel assesses substandard 1.3 as compliant*

The panel examined the cooperation agreement thoroughly and concludes that the terms and conditions of the programme are laid down in a sound way. The cooperation agreement covers all key aspects of the partnership, including the denomination of the joint degree awarded, the admissions requirements and selection procedures, mobility arrangements for students, examination regulations, financial aspects, the responsibilities of the partners and the structure of the curriculum. The panel concludes that the cooperation agreement provides a comprehensive and detailed framework to organise the MATA programme jointly and to anchor the cooperation in a sustainable fashion.



## 2 Learning outcomes

*The panel assesses standard 2 as compliant*

### 2.1 Level

The intended learning outcomes should align with the corresponding level of the Framework for Qualifications in the European Higher Education Area (FQ-EHEA), as well as the applicable national qualifications framework(s).

*The panel assesses substandard 2.1 as compliant*

The programme has defined, in accordance with the mission and vision of both institutions, intended learning outcomes that are equivalent to Level 7 (the Master level) of the European and Flemish Qualifications Frameworks. In the United States, the MATA programme is accredited by NECHE and must meet its accreditation standards. As such, MATA's intended learning outcomes are recognised at a Master level in the US as well. According to the panel, the intended learning outcomes are clearly defined, known by the different internal and external stakeholders and focus on high level professional and academic competences in the 'niche' area of transatlantic affairs.

### 2.2 Disciplinary field

The intended learning outcomes should comprise competences in the respective disciplinary field(s).

*The panel assesses substandard 2.2 as compliant*

The panel states that the formulated intended learning outcomes are in accordance with the academic and professional requirements of the field of transatlantic affairs, broadly defined as the economic, legal and political relations between the United States (and North America) and the EU (and its member states) both in a bilateral and multilateral context as well as transnationally.

The intended learning outcomes indicate that the MATA students develop conceptual and methodological, academic and professional competences in transatlantic affairs on an (advanced) Master level; this is done in a multidisciplinary, analytical and critical fashion. As such, the students get a broad training in US-EU relations. Simultaneously, the intended learning outcomes allow students to specialise (by means of choosing a study track) and develop their own 'narrative' in the field of transatlantic affairs.

It is the responsibility of the Joint MATA Committee to keep the curriculum (and the intended learning outcomes which steer the curriculum) in check with the interests of stakeholders. This includes, for example, conducting a Critical Friend's review, but also acquisition of input by internship providers and visiting professors. Based on the interviews conducted and the documents received, the panel concludes that the intended learning outcomes comprise the required competences in the 'niche' of transatlantic affairs, but also leave room to the programme to keep up with innovations and trends in this field.

### 2.3 Achievement

The programme should be able to demonstrate that the intended learning outcomes are achieved.

*The panel assesses substandard 2.3 as compliant*

The panel states that the programme (including the structure of the curriculum, the content of the course modules, the learning formats and the assessment criteria), the quality of the internship reports and the Master's theses, the overall satisfaction of the students with the programme and the employment opportunities of the graduates demonstrate that the students are able to achieve the intended learning outcomes.

The intended learning outcomes of the MATA programme are realised by a comprehensive, well-structured two-year curriculum, which starts in the first year with course modules on either side of the Atlantic and two joint activities and then has students move to the other side of the Atlantic with a compulsory internship and additional elective course modules during the second year. The Master's thesis (26 ECTS) is carried out mainly in the second year and is seen as the 'capstone' of the programme. The panel studied more than ten Master's theses and was impressed by the quality of these products, which clearly demonstrate the conceptual and methodological competences of the students. In sum, the study programme ensures that all competences are trained. As a

sidenote, the panel advises the programme management to reflect about the format of the Master's thesis and of the internship report, aiming to give students more flexibility to showcase their products (and achievements).

The students the panel spoke with mentioned that they can achieve the intended learning outcomes and that studying on both sides of the Atlantic is an important aspect of their learning experience. They are overall very satisfied with the programme. Similarly, the alumni highlighted the relevance and the quality of the programme. The list of alumni and their profiles shows that graduates are employed at high level institutions. Graduates move into different 'sectors' of employment, like intergovernmental organisations, public service institutions, private companies, NGOs and think tanks. The programme is of clear added value for the career opportunities of the graduates, a fact that was also stressed by the employers the panel met. The graduates also expressed the view that the programme is not just about knowledge acquisition, but also about skills and attitudes. However, based on these discussions and as a point of attention and to further improve the programme, the panel believes that the alumni network should be developed further.

## 2.4 Regulated professions

If relevant for the specific joint programme, the minimum agreed training conditions specified in the European Union Directive 2005/36/ EC, or relevant common trainings frameworks established under the Directive, should be taken into account.

*This sub-standard is not applicable to the MATA programme.*

## 3 Study programme

*The panel assesses standard 3 as compliant*

### 3.1 Curriculum

The structure and content of the curriculum should be fit to enable the students to achieve the intended learning outcomes.

*The panel assesses substandard 3.1 as compliant*

The panel examined the curriculum thoroughly and the content of the various course modules was an important topic during the discussions held with the different stakeholders. The curriculum, counting 120 ECTS in total, is comprehensive and well-structured, while allowing for space for innovations and the inclusion of new trends in the area of transatlantic affairs. Based on the interviews conducted, the panel was impressed by the multidisciplinary nature of the curriculum (by means of the joint course and project, the choice of study tracks and the content of the course modules) and was pleased to hear that the programme management aims to even further develop this multidisciplinary angle, given the challenges that US-EU and international relations face are likely to become increasingly 'multidimensional' and need answers based on multidisciplinary.

The curriculum shows a high level of coherence, no superfluous overlaps, and a good balance between the training of academic and professional competences on the one hand, and 'joint' as well as 'specialisation' activities on the other. The joint part or so-called 'truncus communis' comprises, besides the internship and the Master's thesis (26 ECTS), a joint Transatlantic Course in the first and a joint Transatlantic Project in the second semester. This ensures a broad perspective on transatlantic affairs for all students. In the specialisation part of the programme, students choose a study track: Economics, International Relations and Diplomacy, Legal Studies, Political and Governance Studies or an Interdisciplinary Track. The students made it clear to the panel that the programme challenges them and triggers them to explore new aspects of the relations between the US and the EU. Given many course modules have not been developed specifically for MATA, the faculties involved ensure that the content is geared towards the interests of the MATA students and the intended learning outcomes of the programme.

Throughout the programme, competences are gradually trained to attain the 'milestones' of the programme: the project, the internship and Master's thesis. The Transatlantic Project is, according to the panel, an excellent initiative that tackles very different topics at a high level and is attuned to the interests of the students. The internship is a crucial component of the programme and seen as a unique selling point by the students in terms of their professional skills set. The internship is compulsory and lasts three/four months, conducted at a

prestigious intergovernmental organisation, public service institute, private company, NGO or think tank. Finally, research (methodology) seminars are offered to help students prepare well for their Master's thesis.

In spite of this overall very positive impression, the panel has two points of attention regarding the programme curriculum. First, as some students face difficulties to choose a Master's thesis topic early on (as they sometimes do not know yet what will interest them the most to work on), the programme should ensure that all enrolling students really know well what the programme is about and what added value it offers. By setting expectations straight from the very start, students can make better informed choices regarding their Master's thesis topic, and will be able to develop their own 'narrative' within the programme further. Second, more focus should be placed on the US system, given the curriculum at the moment focuses more on the EU rather than the US-side of transatlantic affairs. The panel would like to see more balance in the curriculum, with a more equal focus on both sides of the Atlantic, according to the intended learning outcomes. Although most students have prior knowledge on the EU and on the US and reading courses on both are provided, the panel believes that this imbalance must be addressed in a more systematic way.

The panel concludes that the overarching, broad perspective on transatlantic affairs provided by the 'truncus communis' on the one hand and the different study tracks on the other allow the MATA students to achieve the intended learning outcomes.

### 3.2 Credits

The European Credit Transfer System (ECTS) should be applied properly and the distribution of credits should be clear.

*The panel assesses substandard 3.2 as compliant*

The MATA programme counts 120 ECTS. Each semester is approximately 30 ECTS. The students are provided with ECTS-files which contain the number of credits awarded to each course module, information on the teaching, learning and assessment formats, the content of the course modules, reading suggestions and contact information of staff. Accordingly, the panel finds that the distribution of credits is clear and balanced across the programme.

### 3.3 Workload

A joint bachelor programme will typically amount to a total student workload of 180-240 ECTS-credits; a joint master programme will typically amount to 90-120 ECTS-credits and should not be less than 60 ECTS-credits at second cycle level (credit ranges according to the FQ-EHEA); for joint doctorates there is no credit range specified. The workload and the average time to complete the programme should be monitored.

*The panel assesses substandard 3.3 as compliant*

As mentioned above, the MATA programme counts 120 ECTS. The programme is developed for students to complete it in two years. The programme management monitors students' workload on a regular basis, by means of course and programme evaluation questionnaires and consultations with the student representatives. MATA is an intensive programme, as the students testified in discussions with the panel, especially during the second year of studies. But in general, the workload is feasible. The panel did not find any indication that students encounter problems finishing their programme within the foreseen two-year period. So far, all students have completed MATA in the time span of two years. As a point of attention, according to the panel, it could be appropriate to allocate more credits to the joint course modules. In this vein, in the respective discussion with the panel, the programme management indicated it is exploring to attribute more weight in the curriculum to the joint Transatlantic Project; this step could further increase the 'jointness' of the programme and simultaneously enhance its multidisciplinary angle.

## 4 Admission and recognition

*The panel assesses standard 4 as compliant*

### 4.1 Admission

The admissions requirements and selection procedures should be appropriate in light of the programme's level and discipline.

*The panel assesses substandard 4.1 as compliant*

The College and Fletcher cap the size of the MATA programme to around ten students, with ideally five students starting at each of the two partner institutions each year. The admissions requirements are clearly spelled out and geared towards selecting students that have the appropriate qualifications and motivations to successfully complete this postgraduate training. The respective admissions requirements are: four years of university studies, at least six months of professional experience, a proven interest in transatlantic affairs, a disciplinary background in accordance with the study track choice, a high level of proficiency in English and 'leadership potential'. It is the panel's opinion that the programme has a good perspective as regards the desired profile of the candidates, enabling it to select suitable candidates to keep the group of those starting at a size no larger than 10. As a point of attention, the websites of both institutions have to communicate the admissions requirements in the same way, to avoid potential confusion.

The selection procedures are rigorous, but fair and transparent. Candidates wishing to spend their first year in the US apply directly through Fletcher's admissions system. Students wishing to spend their first year in Europe apply through the system of the College. Following the close of the application deadline, the two institutions decide jointly which candidates they consider to possess the necessary qualifications and motivation to succeed and should be invited for a selection interview. The interviews are conducted by a panel consisting of the MATA staff and one additional senior representative of each study track. Consequently, based on the interviews conducted, the selection panel establishes a ranking, including a short list of at least five candidates to start MATA at the College and at Fletcher, respectively, as well as a reserve list of candidates. In case an admitted candidate decides not to join, his/her place is offered to a candidate on the reserve list until the contingent of ten students is filled.

Actual admissions have been somewhat unevenly distributed, with more MATA students starting at the College than at Fletcher. Recruitment in the US seems to be a challenge and is a concern for the programme management. More scholarships could be helpful in this respect to increase the number of candidates on the US side, as well as alumni that function as 'ambassadors' of the programme. The panel suggests letting students who have applied at Fletcher start their programme in Europe, so that they can do their last year in the US, which is important for US(-based) students, given the 'location' of graduation is very important to enter the US job market.

### 4.2 Recognition

Recognition of qualifications and of periods of studies (including recognition of prior learning) should be applied in line with the Lisbon Recognition Convention and subsidiary documents.

*The panel assesses substandard 4.2 as compliant*

The MATA programme, being an (advanced) Master programme, explicitly looks for students already possessing a Master's degree. However, the programme also welcomes applicants with a four-year (240 ECTS) Bachelor degree that is equivalent to Level 6 of the European Qualification Framework, providing that the candidate has a convincing, outstanding academic and professional track record and thus the competencies to complete the programme. According to the panel, both institutions have extensive experience in terms of selecting international students based on different types of qualifications across the globe. Hence, the panel concludes, the MATA programme management is able to adequately acknowledge prior learning experiences and is in tune with the Lisbon Recognition Convention.

## 5 Learning, teaching and assessment

*The panel assesses standard 5 as compliant*

### 5.1 Learning and teaching

The programme should be designed to correspond with the intended learning outcomes, and the learning and teaching approaches applied should be adequate to achieve those. The diversity of students and their needs should be respected and attended to, especially in view of potential different cultural backgrounds of the students.

*The panel assesses substandard 5.1 as compliant*

The panel finds that the learning formats are in line with the content and the structure of the MATA curriculum and the intended learning outcomes. There is a good mixture of activities, ranging from lectures to seminars, project work to case studies, and from role playing to negotiation exercises, of which many encompass high levels of interaction among students. The students stated they are very pleased with these different forms of training. The formats support the goals of the various course modules, ranging from 'understanding' to 'applying' and from 'analysing' to 'creating'. The students often have to engage in group work, but also demonstrate high levels of autonomy in the course of their studies.

The different backgrounds of the students are taken into account, so that all students are able to achieve the intended learning outcomes. Just as is the case in other programmes offered at the College and at Fletcher, the composition of the student body is diverse in terms of both national and disciplinary backgrounds. According to the panel, both schools have extensive experience in working with this kind of diversity and fostering respective student communities. Accordingly, the panel concludes that the learning environment is of a high quality, supported by a highly motivated and very committed team and excellent facilities.

### 5.2 Assessment

The examination regulations and the assessment of the achieved learning outcomes should correspond with the intended learning outcomes. They should be applied consistently among partner institutions.

*The panel assesses substandard 5.2 as compliant*

The MATA programme is based on an adequate assessment system, including the respective examination regulations, guaranteeing its validity, reliability and transparency. The assessment formats are diverse, include both written and oral exams, papers and presentations and are well in tune with the curriculum and the competences to be trained. The panel has studied a number of assessments given and states that the assessment criteria are found to be aligned with students' gradual achievement of the intended learning outcomes. The panel also observed, based on respective documents and discussions, that feedback plays a major role in the learning experience of the MATA students.

The students the panel spoke with were of the opinion that the assessments are well-organised and that they know what is expected from them during the exams. The students receive sufficient feedback regarding exams and, if needed, a complaint procedure is in place. The grades are generally perceived to be fair by the students. The grade conversion table, however, is a source of ongoing confusion to some of the students. The panel suggests being clear from the very start and inform the students that - beyond 'the truncus communis' - the grades are attributed on the local scales at the two institutions. The panel believes that 'managing expectations' is important in this regard.

Based on the quality of the internship reports, the Master's theses and the exams and their assessments the panel has studied, it is clear that the students realise the intended learning outcomes. The assessments tackle all competences the students must acquire, and this is done in a consistent way across the two institutions.

## 6 Student support

The student support services should contribute to the achievement of the intended learning outcomes. They should take into account specific challenges of mobile students.

*The panel assesses standard 6 as compliant*

Based on the interviews conducted with the different stakeholders, the panel states that the student support services at both the College and Fletcher contribute to the achievement of MATA's intended learning outcomes. The students the panel spoke with clearly stated that the respective support is very well organised and that they find their way to the services offered, both at the Bruges and Natolin campuses of the College and at Fletcher. The supporting staff is eager to provide the students with tailormade support, as the panel observed during the respective interview.

At each partner institute, support is provided for students. Students in need of information or help regarding scholarship opportunities, visa requirements, campus life or career opportunities can consult the different support offices. In addition to this, workshops are organised in areas where students would like to improve, for example, their networking skills. Similarly, language skills can be trained at the different locations of the programme. Moreover, psychological counselling is available when needed. Additionally, academic support is provided by the professors and by assistants. The panel appreciates that the students receive support to integrate well into the campus community, especially given the students at Bruges and Natolin actually live on the campus.

Based on the interviews conducted, it became clear to the panel that the programme is paying special attention to the challenges students face when they have to move from one side of the Atlantic to the other. There is a well-designed follow-up monitoring of students when they go overseas. Although the persons the panel spoke with in the respective session did not signal any shortcomings in this respect, the programme should ensure there is no gap in service coverages. The panel suggests that a buddy system could be helpful to ensure no student 'falls between the cracks'.

There is financial support available for students eligible for this; the panel supports the programme's ambition to search for more scholarships and sponsors (especially on the US side, in view of the financial burden many students are already facing), to increase enrolments on the US side and, with this, obtain an even more balanced student population.

## 7 Resources

*The panel assesses standard 7 as compliant*

### 7.1 Staff

The staff should be sufficient and adequate (qualifications, professional and international experience) to implement the study programme.

*The panel assesses substandard 7.1 as compliant*

The panel observed that the key MATA staff is very committed to the programme and motivated. The students are very satisfied with the MATA staff in general, including the administrative staff. The panel examined the curricula vitae of the different members of the teaching staff and finds that the programme's members of faculty have an impressive academic and professional track record. They are highly qualified and internationally renowned in the field of transatlantic affairs, both as teachers and as researchers. The students the panel spoke with praised the pedagogical and didactical competences of the teaching staff, which is further substantiated by the CVs the panel has studied. Faculty and staff members of one institution regularly visit the other institution. Moreover, guest lecturers are regularly invited to address specific topics. In sum, the panel can state that the programme has sufficient and adequate staff available to implement the study programme.

## 7.2 Facilities

The facilities provided should be sufficient and adequate in view of the intended learning outcomes.

*The panel assesses substandard 7.2 as compliant*

Given it was not possible to visit the College facilities in person because of stringent COVID-19 regulations in place, the panel attended a presentation about the facilities of the College of Europe Bruges and Natolin campuses and at The Fletcher School. In addition, the panel discussed the quality of the facilities with the different stakeholders. The panel finds that both institutions provide outstanding facilities to make the learning experience as positive as possible. This was confirmed by the students and graduates the panel spoke with. As all facilities in the two institutions are at the service of the MATA students, they can fully utilise them throughout their two years in the programme. The facilities available, including auditoria, classrooms, libraries, study areas, restaurants, sports facilities and student residences, are well-equipped and well-accessible at all campuses, which constitute safe environments and stimulate interaction among students (and staff). High level ICT services, including a secure Video Conference System, are provided and there is a helpdesk in case of problems encountered. Online teaching was already in place before the Covid-19 pandemic, but is becoming 'the norm' now. Altogether, the two institutions provide an excellent, complementary and rich learning environment, highly conducive to the realisation of the intended learning outcomes.

## 8 Transparency and documentation

Relevant information about the programme like admission requirements and procedures, course catalogue, examination and assessment procedures should be well documented and published by taking into account specific needs of mobile students.

*The panel assesses standard 8 as compliant*

The two institutions provide all necessary information about the programme to different stakeholders, and especially to applicants and students enrolled. The information strategy consists of written documentation available on the website and on digital learning platforms on the one hand and of the organisation of supporting information meetings on the other.

The MATA programme websites provide detailed information about aspects such as the structure and content of the curriculum, admissions requirements and selection procedures, and scholarship possibilities. Once admitted, students get access to the digital learning platforms of the College (intranet) and of Fletcher (Canvas). All relevant information regarding the course modules are provided, including the ECTS-files, assessment schedules and learning materials.

Additionally, Facebook or WebEx chats are organised to welcome students that cross the ocean to study at the other side of the Atlantic. Finally, students benefit from an open-door policy of the MATA staff and they can always meet with the MATA Academic Assistant upon short notice.

## 9 Quality assurance

The cooperating institutions should apply joint internal quality assurance processes in accordance with part one of the ESG.

*The panel assesses standard 9 as compliant*

Based on the documents provided and the interviews conducted, the panel states that the programme has the necessary quality assurance policies and processes in place to monitor and improve the quality of the programme in a systematic way. In order to guarantee the quality of the programme, there is a well-designed governance structure in place which comprises the level of the programme and involves different stakeholders, both internal and external ones.

At the level of the programme, the Joint MATA Committee plays a crucial role in monitoring and improving the quality of the programme, by reviewing the curriculum in a permanent manner based on the input obtained from stakeholders of both the academic and the professional field, including guest professors and internship providers. Regarding the student's input there is a continuous quality check built in to optimise their learning experience.



This allows the programme management to run a qualitatively convincing assurance system that is ‘fit-for-purpose’ and able to respond swiftly to students’ feedback to set up remedying action. Much feedback is informal, given the direct communication channels between staff and students. On the formal side, there are regular meetings with the two MATA student representatives (one at the College and one at Fletcher) to address student-related issues and students, on a regular basis, fill out course and programme evaluation questionnaires. Based on the results of these questionnaires and the feedback obtained from the students (both formal and informal), remedying actions have been set up by the programme management. Quality assurance also includes the conduct of a Critical Friend’s review. The outcomes of this review have also resulted in remedying actions. In sum, the panel appreciates the way in which the programme management deals with the feedback and the swift and constructive way remedying actions are taken.

Altogether, whereas the MATA programme benefits from the long-standing quality assurance systems in place at both the College and Fletcher, it has its own quality assurance system, with the Joint MATA Committee as a backbone. As a point of attention, the panel suggests finding ways to ensure that the evaluation of course modules not specifically designed for MATA are addressed on the MATA level as well, for example by initiating a focus group session to discuss MATA students’ experiences with such courses.

## ACCREDITATION ADVICE

As all the standards and substandards are assessed as compliant, the panel advises to grant accreditation to the Advanced Master of Arts in Transatlantic Affairs of the College of Europe and The Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy at Tufts University.



## RECOMMENDATIONS

The panel suggests the programme to further develop its alumni network.

The panel advises to reflect about the format of the Master's thesis and the internship report, allowing students more flexibility to showcase their products (and achievements).

The panel advises to set expectations straight from the very start, so students can make more informed choices regarding their study trajectory within MATA.

The panel recommends bringing more balance into the MATA curriculum in terms of addressing policies and politics of both the US and the EU.

The panel suggests attributing more credits to the joint activities between the institutions.

The panel advises to communicate the admissions requirements in the same manner on the websites of both institutions.

The panel suggests letting students who have applied at Fletcher start their programme at the College and vice versa.

The panel recommends clearly informing the students about the grading scales used in the programme.

The panel suggests setting up a 'buddy system' to welcome students who join from the other side of the Atlantic.

The panel advises to find ways that the evaluation of course modules not specifically designed for MATA are addressed on the MATA level as well; MATA students' feedback in this context can, for example, be collected based on focus group sessions.

## COMMENDATIONS

The panel applauds that MATA, with its selective admission and selection procedures, ensures that all students are talented, engaged and highly interested in transatlantic affairs.

The panel is very pleased that the programme explicitly bridges academic insights with professional skills and allows students to benefit from and get trained in both.

The panel finds that MATA provides a good example of how high-quality internships can be secured in a competitive environment for such positions.

The panel finds that the programme's staff is very well dealing with a talented and motivated group of international students willing to engage in new experiences at two institutions across the Atlantic.

## ANNEX 1: ADMINISTRATIVE DETAILS

### **Details College of Europe:**

Status: Public interest foundation registration number: 0409.518.855

Dijver 11

8000 Bruges

BELGIUM

### **Details The Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy at Tufts University:**

Status: Private institution accredited by the New England Commission of Higher Education (NECHE)

160 Packard Avenue

Medford, Massachusetts 02155

USA

### **Details MATA programme:**

Degree and the qualification of the degree and, where appropriate, the specification of the degree: Master of Arts in Transatlantic Affairs (Advanced Master)

Location(s) where the programme will be given:

- College of Europe: campus Bruges, Belgium, or campus Natolin, Poland
- The Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy at Tufts University: Medford (greater Boston area), Massachusetts, USA

Language in which the programme will be given: English (at the College of Europe, students who master French may also choose courses taught in French)

Study load, expressed in credit points: 120 ECTS

Study area, part of study area or study areas in which the programme is categorised: International and EU Law; Diplomacy, History and Politics (US, EU and international); International and European Economics

ISCED code and name for the study area in which the programme is categorised: 031 (Social and behavioural sciences) and 042 (Law)

## ANNEX 2: SHORT CV PANEL MEMBERS

**Madeleine O. Hosli** is a full Professor of Political Science (International Relations) at Leiden University. Her main research interests are in international political economy, international organisations and European integration. She is author of *The Euro: A Concise Introduction to European Monetary Integration* (Lynne Rienner 2004), co-editor of *Decision-Making in the European Union before and after the Lisbon Treaty* (Routledge 2017), *The Changing Global Order* (Springer 2020), *The Future of Multilateralism* (Rowman and Littlefield 2021) and has published widely in peer-reviewed journals, including *International Organization*, *International Studies Quarterly*, the *Journal of Common Market Studies*, *European Union Politics*, the *European Journal of Political Research* and the *Review of International Organizations*.

**Erik Jones** is Professor of European Studies and International Political Economy and Director of European and Eurasian Studies at the Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies. He is also a senior research associate at the Istituto per gli studi di politica internazionale (ISPI) and a visiting fellow at the Robert Schuman Centre for Advanced Studies at the European University Institute. Professor Jones is co-editor of *Government & Opposition* and contributing editor of *Survival*. He writes on European integration, US foreign policy, and the transatlantic relationship.

**Bart Kerremans** is Professor of American Politics and International Political Economy at the Institute for International and European Studies at KU Leuven. He is also part of the interdisciplinary Leuven Research Centre for Global Governance Studies. His research focuses on the trade policies of the United States and the European Union, political processes and decision-making in this area and trade relations between the European Union and the United States in the context of the World Trade Organisation. He has published widely on these themes, inter alia in the *Journal of World Trade*, *Journal of World Investment*, *Regional and Federal Studies*, the *Journal of Common Market Studies*, *Governance and Comparative Political Studies*.

**Alexandra Faveaux** is a Master's student at the University of Antwerp. After a Bachelor's in Literature and Linguistics (English-German), she continued a Master's in International Relations and Diplomacy with a focus on security and organisation. She is currently a student representative and a board member of UNYA Antwerp, which is currently being reinstalled.

## ANNEX 3: SITE VISIT SCHEDULE

### Thursday 4 February 2021

11:30-12:00	Welcome
12:00-14:00	Preparatory panel meeting
14:00-15:00	Interview programme management
15:00-15:30	Panel meeting
15:30-16:30	Interview students
16:30-17:00	Panel meeting
17:00-18:00	Interview teaching staff
18:00-18:30	Panel meeting
18:30-19:15	Interview supporting staff
19:15-20:30	Dinner
20:30-21:15	Interview graduates and employers

### Friday 5 February 2021

09:00-10:00	Presentation facilities Bruges, Natolin and Fletcher campuses
10:00-11:00	Free consultation
11:00-13:30	Concluding panel meeting
13:30-14:45	Co-creative session programme management
14:45-15:30	Preparation oral report
15:30-15:45	Oral report

## ANNEX 4: DOCUMENTS CONSULTED

### **Self-evaluation report Master of Arts in Transatlantic Affairs, including the following annexes:**

- Annex 1: Programme-specific intended learning outcomes of the MATA programme
- Annex 2: MATA Critical Friend's Report (Professor Bindi, May 2020)
- Annex 3: Chart of the Flemish Higher Educational System
- Annex 4: CVs of key MATA academic and administrative staff
- Annex 4 bis: Overview of administrative and support staff at the College of Europe Bruges and Natolin campuses and at The Fletcher School
- Annex 5: Cooperation Agreement between the College of Europe and The Fletcher School
- Annex 6: Overview tables linking courses across each of the MATA study tracks to the MATA intended learning outcomes
- Annex 7: Detailed description of the contents of the MATA programme study tracks
- Annex 7 bis: Typical study trajectories of MATA students in selected study tracks - examples
- Annex 8: Overview of applications for the MATA programme, of the admitted students and the final composition of the MATA student body (academic years 2017/2018 to today)
- Annex 9: Grading systems at the College of Europe and The Fletcher School and grade conversion table for the Master of Arts in Transatlantic Affairs
- Annex 10: MATA Internships (2018-2020)
- Annex 11: Completed MATA theses (2017-2020)
- Annex 12: Overview of the MATA internet website
- Annex 13: Overview of the MATA joint repository of key documents (College of Europe intranet)

### **Additional documents tabled during the site visit:**

- Teaching and examination regulations
- Minutes of joint governance body meetings
- Samples of teaching and learning material
- Examples of internship reports
- Samples of written examinations
- Overview of MATA alumni's employment opportunities