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Alessandra Bitumi. “Building Bridges Across the Atlantic: *The European Union Visitors Program. A Case Study for Public Diplomacy and the Transatlantic Relationship in the 1970s.*” *International History Review* 35:3 (2013). DOI: 10.1080/07075332.2013.820770.
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The early 1970s are often seen as a difficult period in transatlantic relations. The imbroglio around Kissinger’s 1973 “Year of Europe” initiative, as a proposal for a ‘new Atlantic Charter’ that received a very mixed reception in Europe, was only one episode in a series of hiccups that impacted not only on bilateral relations across the North Atlantic, but also on the United States’ relationship with the European Communities. The European Community Visitors Program (ECVP), set up in 1974, was an attempt to build new bridges across the Atlantic, as Alessandra Bitumi’s new article convincingly argues. In an attempt to foster mutual understanding, the ECVP organized short-term visits to Europe for rising American leaders. While taking inspiration from the Fulbright scholarship scheme, it also aimed to project the image of a united Europe, Bitumi asserts.

She is not the first to study this program, but rather follows the lead of a 2005 article by Giles Scott-Smith.¹ In fact, there is notable overlap in empirical focus and argument between the two pieces, for instance when it comes to the key actors involved in setting up the program on both sides of the Atlantic, the complications of implementing the scheme on the American side, and its limited success. In comparison to Scott-Smith, Bitumi focuses more on the intra-European perspective and devotes considerable space to the wider contexts against which the creation of the program has to be seen. She stresses that the program “embodies the spirit of the *relance européenne* triggered by the Hague Conference of 1969” (2). Against this backdrop, the ECVP not only appears as a reaction to

¹ Giles Scott-Smith, “Mending the ‘Unhinged Alliance’ in the 1970s: Transatlantic Relations, Public Diplomacy, and the Origins of the European Union Visitors Program”, in *Diplomacy and Statecraft* 16 (2005): 749–778.

the crisis of the Atlantic community but also as an attempt to define Europe's distinctive role in the world.

This is an interesting argument, and it would have been useful to see more information elucidating the views and motives of actors in the European Parliament (which was in charge of the program). Moreover, it is not quite correct that the ECVP was the Community's first professional exchange program (1). Long before the 1970s, the European Commission's Directorate-General (DG) VIII for the overseas countries set up an internship program for African civil servants, as Martin Rempe has recently demonstrated.² Meant to strengthen links to African states in an era of decolonization, it had the same kind of soft-power aspirations as the ECVP developed roughly a decade later. Transatlantic elites in both Brussels and Washington (like Bitumi) did not refer to this template and instead highlighted the Fulbright program as a role model for the EC. It remains unclear whether European actors were ignorant of this existing public diplomacy scheme or if learning from an EC-Africa program seemed inappropriate in a transatlantic context. Interestingly, some of the frustrations ECVP participants experienced were quite similar to the shortcomings of DG VIII's initiative—besides the lack of cross-references, there certainly was a lack of learning from the earlier program's mistakes.

At a more general level, the contributions of Bitumi, Scott-Smith, Rempe and others represent excellent examples of the new directions in which European integration history has been moving over the past years. Beyond classic diplomatic history, attention is increasingly devoted to transnational actors, public diplomacy efforts, and identity politics. In that sense, this specific field of research is also building new bridges to wider developments in international history.

Kiran Klaus Patel is Professor of European and global history at Maastricht University in the Netherlands. Recent publications include: *European Integration and the Atlantic Community in the 1980s* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013) (edited with Kenneth Weisbrode); *The Historical Foundations of EU Competition Law* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013) (edited with Heike Schweitzer); *The Cultural Politics of Europe: European Capitals of Culture and European Union since the 1980s* (London: Routledge, 2013) (edited); *The United States and Germany during the 20th Century: Competition and Convergence*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010) (edited with Christof Mauch).

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² Martin Rempe, *Entwicklung im Konflikt: Die EWG und der Senegal, 1957–1975* (Cologne: Böhlau, 2013), 223–240.