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Hartmut Mayer studied history, political science and drama at the Free University of Berlin (B.A. equivalent 1988-1991) before undertaking graduate studies in International Relations at the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy/ Tufts University (M.A.L.D. 1993), at Harvard University, at Cambridge University (M.Phil. at Gonville and Caius College, 1994) and at Oxford University (D.Phil. at St. Antony's College, 2001). Visiting researcher positions brought him to the European University Institute in Florence (1995), the Finnish Institute for International Affairs in Helsinki (2002), the Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik (SWP) in Berlin (2004) and, for 10 months, as JSPS research fellow to Waseda University in Tokyo (2006-07). Prior to his academic career he worked as a journalist, among others with Sueddeutsche Zeitung in Munich and DIE ZEIT in Hamburg. Since 1999 he has also been a Political Consultant with Oxford Analytica.

Most recently, he also served as a sherpa to Prof. Kalypso Nicolaidis in her capacity as a Member of the Felipe Gonzales Reflection Group on the Future of Europe, a highest level expert group mandated by the European Council.