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Brussels Study Trip 2012

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Every year POLSIS MA students have the opportunity to take part in a week-long study trip to Brussels. This gives students the opportunity to visit some of the international organisations based in Brussels - both those that are part of the European Union and of NATO - to learn about and see at first hand how they operate.

Report by Andreas Themistocleous (MA International Political Economy):

On January 21-26, the POLSIS trip to Brussels was held with great success. Twenty-eight MA students participated accompanied by three lecturers, Dr. Eleni Vezirgiannidou, Dr. Isabelle Hertner and Dr. Felix Heiduk. The group's programme, in the intellectual capital of the European Union, included a series of visits to various European and global institutions such as the Council of the European Union, the European Parliament, NATO Headquarters and others.

We arrived in Brussels late Saturday evening and the next day the whole group visited the Flemish town of Bruges, which is not only **famous for its magnificent architecture**, but also its tasty waffles.

On Monday the purely educational part of the programme began. The first stop was a **visit to the University of Birmingham's Brussels office which is located in the heart of the European quarter.** There the group was warmly welcomed by Sophie Lainé who gave us a comprehensive presentation on the actions of the university and explained the support they offer to visiting students and researchers.

In the afternoon NATO was on the agenda. Initially, the visit started with a **briefing on NATO's "Current Political Agenda" by Mr Jonathan Parish**, (Press and Media Section, Public Diplomacy Division) followed by a briefing on **"Looking into Future: NATO and Emerging Security Challenges" by Dr Knut Kirste** (Engagement Director, Public Diplomacy Division).

During both presentations the group and NATO staff engaged in a very interesting conversation which focused on current challenges facing international security such as the "Responsibility to Protect" (R2P). The third and last meeting was with Mr Ian Millar, member of the Political Team of the United Kingdom-Joint Delegation to NATO.

The next day, seizing the opportunity of a free morning the group had the chance to visit various sights and museums including the famous "Atomium", the mini-Europe, and the Museum of Modern Art. Early afternoon, **a visit to the Council of Ministers** followed, during which Mr. Kyle Galler gave a very interesting talk about the Council and its role in the management of the current Eurozone crisis.

On Wednesday, the group visited the European Parliament which began an introductory speech by Mrs Katrin Metz-Van Issen on the work of the European Ombudsman. Following the speech, a **tour of the Parliamentary Chamber** took place and finally, Mr John Fordham introduced us to the work, the role and 'nature' of the European Parliament.

The last event that took place in the European Parliament was a meeting with two of the elected representatives of the United Kingdom (MEPs); Mr Michael Cashman and Mr Malcolm Habour. On Wednesday afternoon - the last day in Brussels - **the group visited the European Commission where discussions revolved around "The role of the European Commission in the European Union policy-making processes"** – a topic introduced by Ms Ruth Seitz, (Policy Officer Directorate General for Education and Culture).

To sum up, the POLSIS annual educational trip in **Brussels was a fantastic and unforgettable experience** for all the participants, both in terms of the high quality group entertainment and the unique opportunity to learn more about European politics.

More information about the Brussels Study Trip (/schools/government-society/departments/political-science-international-studies/teaching/enhancing-student-experience/brussels-study-trip.aspx) .

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