

INTERNSHIP REPORT – TIMOTHY ARMITAGE

MOTIVATION

When the application round for the MEP internship opened late 2008, it didn't take me long to decide that this was something that I wanted to get. In essence, the internship offered me the ability to realise a number of immediate and long term goals. Firstly, my thesis is surrounding around the public policy process within the European Union, specifically interest representation. Given that by its nature the policy process is defined through its complexity, having the possibility to experience it first hand was the primary goal. My undergraduate training within international relations meant that approaching a topic which has its roots within a comparative political approach was a conceptually difficult undertaking for myself. This firsthand experience would allow me to really overcome this. The role of the European Parliament, specifically within the agricultural sector, with joint decision making defiantly allowed for some relevant viewing. With a longer view in mind, I believe that the MEP internship would be a strong CV builder and make that first break into the political job market, something which can be difficult. From a personal standpoint, as a member of a Dutch immigrant family, being based in Belgium allowed me to meet most of my 23 great uncles and aunts, and all the extended family, a big undertaking in itself.

PREPARATION

Preparation for my internship was a rather haphazard experience due to the institutional changes that were occurring at the time. Europe had just voted in a new Parliament which meant the political dynamics and pieces of the 'power pie' were being redistributed. I was informed pretty early on that this would be the case so ended up booking my flights a month or so ahead of my date to arrive. So when the dust settled in August, Prof. Holland, through friends within the European Liberal party had managed to find someone to take me. Once a date of the 1st week of September was agreed as a starting date I had about three weeks to get the ball following in regards to accommodation and improving my French from 'Bonjour ' and 'Merci'.

I considered myself very lucky with my accommodation arrangements. After talking to past interns that were still present within the National Centre for Research on Europe (NCRE), I was quickly informed of the basics of living in Brussels i.e. which districts to live in, which not to, how to get around, the cost of living. Their wealth of knowledge was a fantastic resource and defiantly not to be underestimated. I used the internet, specifically one site (<http://www.appartager.be/>) to find a place to live. Employing the spray and pray technique, I just began emailing potential places in English, usually to quick response. The site itself is constantly being updated with new places, almost to the extent that you get sick of your inbox filling up. After collecting of phone numbers and promises to call as soon as I arrived in Belgium to organise a viewing, I had about 3 properties in mind. For when I arrived I booked a week at the 'Vincent Van Gough Youth Hostel' (<http://www.chab.be/>) which was decent enough, came with free breakfast and some nice people to introduce me to being surrounded by Europeans. The next day I called my eventual roommate, Phillippe, and moved in the next day.

PLACEMENT

I was placed with [Mr. Vittorio Prodi](#), who represented the Italian territory of Bologna. Under the previous legislature, Mr. Prodi had been a member of the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe (or ALDE), yet had moved to the newly formed, Progressive Alliance of Socialists & Democrats (or S&D group). As a member of the Environment, Public Health and Food Safety Committee (ENVI), and given Mr. Prodi's very passionate stance on environmentalism it was ENVI which would take up most of our time. Other committees of which he was a member of were the Subcommittee on Human Rights (DROI) and Delegation for the relations with the Mercosur Countries. He was also substitute member on the Committee for Foreign Affairs (AFET) and the Delegation for relations with the People's Republic of China.

As mentioned, Mr. Prodi is a passionate campaigner for action on climate change, and given his experience (compared to the newer members) within the ENVI committee meant for an exciting workplace. This was especially the case in the lead up to the Copenhagen Climate Change Negotiations where the office was extremely busy with regards to the formulation of the policy position of the EP and the general politics surrounding this.

Mr. Prodi is a very open, kind man who has a clear vision of his political goals, and how he wants to impact during his time at the European parliament. By nature, the environment within the parliament is highly politically charged, but his ability to rise above it is a testament to his professionalism, nature and passion for his work. In short, it was very infectious to all working for him.

THE INTERNSHIP EXPERIENCE

From day one I was made to feel very accepted within the office. Apart from Mr. Prodi, there was one other permanent staffer, his advisor and assistant Oriana Grasso, and another American Intern Michael. In order to keep us both busy, based on our political interests we were both allocated a committee, for me it was ENVI (see below).

From the outset, the political environment was non-stop with a lot of rewarding but late nights. Not only had we just seen the arrival of the new legislature, and the political nominations and games surrounding the delegation of political positions and shadow positions within parties, but also with the occurrence of the Irish 'Yes' on Lisbon, it was a very forward looking time to be in the parliament. Although Lisbon was an important landmark for the EU, I must say that although I witnessed its implementation and the eventual selection of the new positions, it didn't really impact on my work. This is purely its effects hadn't been in effect at the Meso level which the majority of the work I was doing was located.

At this point I would like to recognise the role of Oriana in helping me to settle in and feel welcome within Europe. We quickly formed a great working relationship and friendship, and it was her years of experience within the EP that became critical for me to feel out the ropes and do my work successfully. I cannot overestimate her help enough and felt privileged to be working with someone of her calibre.

ENVI

For those of you that do not know much about the ENVI committee, although during the 1990's it was considered a weaker committee, with the rise of climate change up the political agenda this has changed rather significantly. This has meant that the open sessions of the Committee was always full to the gunnels with both business interests and environmental NGO's, and furthermore, there were always meetings to be had with them. My day-to-day tasks included preparing material for the meetings of ENVI that more often than not occurred twice a week, for the two weeks that the Parliament was sitting in Brussels. Specifically, that meant attending all relevant NGO functions and presentations on the behalf of Mr. Prodi in order to take notes and produce summaries of their points. Specifically there were two pieces of policy that I had the biggest role in:

WHITE PAPER ON THE ADAPTATION TO CLIMATE CHANGE

In April 2009 the European Commission presented a policy paper known as a White Paper which presents the framework for adaptation measures and policies to reduce the European Union's vulnerability to the impacts of climate change. Mr. Prodi as rapporteur for the ENVI committee meant that it was his responsibility to form the initial opinion, with debate to follow. Prior to the drafting of our opinion, we had meetings with a range of interested parties from the European Commission, national government representatives and the various shadow rapporteur from the other parties. My role whilst within the meetings was to take notes and continue familiarising myself with the debate. However I was included within the actually draft process as Oriana and Mr. Prodi had me present recommendations. One of my amendments eventually made it into the original text and to my knowledge still stands today. So although you might be thinking that photocopying and coffee retrieval may be your primary tasks, this is certainly not the task.

EARTH OBSERVATION – GMES

The regulation on the global monitoring for environment and security (GMES) and its initial operations is the latest element of a multi annual strategy aimed at providing Europe with its own capacity for Earth's observation in environment and security domains. Much like the White Paper on climate change I was present throughout all the initial meetings and drafting of our position. The initial consultation processes with the European Environmental Agency and European Space Agency where the most exciting as we became advocates on their behalf. It was great to actually see a lot of what I had been reading about the role of epistemic communities within the policy process, and the 'supply demand' relationship between the European institutions and external actors occurring right in front of me.

As I mentioned, Mr. Prodi's long standing place on the ENVI committee has meant that he had formed a lot of important relationships with like-minded NGO's. Maintaining these relationships, as well as attending their policy meetings and discussing upcoming drafts became an important part of my day-to-day work. Most of the time, whilst ENVI wasn't sitting, there would be a range of presentations from a range of groups upon the current issues going through debate, or ones that would be coming up so for someone that was thrown into the thick of it, it was a good means of just getting feelers for the dynamics of the environment.

Within the office itself, I also undertook a lot of the administrative work, whether it be responding to meeting requests, answering phones, preparing car's to pick up Mr. Prodi etc. all things to make his life as easy as possible. Also due to my native English speaking ability I was

given a lot of speech writing and editing to do on the occasions that Mr. Prodi was asked to speak.

THE ITALIAN DELEGATION AND S&D GROUP

In 2007, the group was the second largest group in Parliament, with MEPs from all but two member states, Latvia and Cyprus. But the 2009 elections saw a reduction in PES MEPs. The group sought members from outside the party, and found them in the Italian Democratic Party of which Mr. Prodi was a member. For the majority of Parliamentarians, their national delegation and political party form an important framework for their policy positions and means of gaining political support. With our work, this was not always the case given his recent move to the Socialist party, and scope of his work, Mr Prodi has strong working relationships with like-minded politicians across the political and nationality range which meant that when setting up political working groups, or other political activities (especially around environmental issues) there were a range of networks we tapped for support as well as using the other members for support. A good example of this was when we jointly organised and hosted the showing of 'Dirt: The Movie' - a great film outlining the degradation of soils associated with modern agricultural methods. Presenting along with Mr. Prodi were, Cristina Gutierrez-Cortines MEP, Corinne Lepage MEP, Bas Eickhout MEP, and Sandrine Bellier MEP, which had members from each of the major European political parties, and representing four of the member states. This is not to neglect the continued importance and support of the S&D group, but to emphasise the fluidity of our particular working style.

CONCLUSION

This internship came for me at a very important time within both my professional and private life, and I can best summarise its influence as the culmination of six years of university study. It was the perfect way to consolidate my own understandings of the international political environment, whilst giving me a drive and passion that I hope will lead me towards contributing in much the same way that Mr. Prodi has done during this time. The hands on experience to the institutions, their processes and people will be the corner stone of the success of my thesis and for that I am extremely grateful!

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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In Europe, I have to thank Mr. Vittorio Prodi and Oriana Grasso, whose welcome attitude and passion for their work has been inspiring to say the least. The close relationships I have formed

with them are currently manifesting themselves through the continued opening of opportunities for me. I couldn't have asked for a better office.

Finally, my friends and family, both within New Zealand, Europe and around the rest of the world. It was your help and friendship once before, during, and after which made this experience everything it could have been.