



EUCN MEP Internship Report

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The New Zealand European Union Centres Network (EUCN) has been providing internships at the European Parliament in Brussels for 2-3 post-graduate students every year since 2003. The goal of the 3 months in the EU capital is to better acquaint the students with the European institutions and also to assist them with their own research, while working for a Member of the European Parliament (MEP) as one of their assistants. As one of those lucky individuals able to take up this opportunity, the following report starts by giving a brief overview of my motivations and preparations for the internship and the background to my MEP. It will then outline what duties I assumed while in the Parliament, and also the opportunities I had while undertaking my internship. It finishes with some advice for future candidates for the internship.

Motivation

As I was about to embark on a Masters of European Studies at the National Centre for Research on Europe, it seemed beneficial to obtain a better understanding of how the European Union (EU) institutions functioned, while being provided opportunities and valuable information for my research, such as completing interviews while in the EU capital.

While my research interests are based around child rights and humanitarian aid, I was aware it was not guaranteed that I would get an internship with an MEP working in these areas. Any opportunity to be in the EP and see how it functioned would be useful and there would always be the chance to interview those that were involved with the research I am undertaking.

Preparation

While waiting to hear which MEP I would be working for, I acquainted myself with the functions of the Parliament: the Committees, the Delegations, and the Political Parties via the EP website, <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/>. When I did become aware that I would be working for Mr. Triantaphyllides, I looked more specifically at those committees and delegations he was on, and also background information on his areas of interest.

Luckily, I majored in French for my Bachelors degree, meaning that I didn't have to have French lessons before coming to Brussels so that was one less thing to prepare for. I do not, however, speak Greek, which made it slightly difficult talking on the phone in the office after the initial '*kale mera,*' to greet them. As I had found out my MEP two weeks before starting the internship, I did not have enough time to learn a substantial amount of Greek, which is a shame in hindsight because hearing it rattled around the office, it is a beautiful language.

I found accommodation before leaving for Brussels so that I didn't have to worry about it while travelling for a month before my internship. But I was very careful of scammers, as people have fallen for advertisements in the past that look legitimate but in fact do not exist. They may also try to guilt trip you into accepting with language in emails such as 'I realise this is rather thorough, but I've had tenants leave in the past without paying, so I need 2 months in advance'... If you do want to sign up to a place before you leave NZ, be very careful to check the person before you hand over bond (*'la garantie'*). While I was very wary of handing over any money, the Italians I ended up living with were only wanting a couple of weeks bond, not enough for a scammer to be bothered with.

You can check a site such as <http://www.scamdex.com/> for their name or email account. See below under "Advice for future interns" for accommodation websites and suburbs close to the EP.

Mr. Kyriacos Triantaphyllides

(Cyprus) GUE/NGL group

I interned at the Parliament under Mr Kyriacos Triantaphyllides, a Greek Cypriot who had NZ connections as he graduated from Wellington, and went to Teachers' College in Canterbury. Kyriacos has family still in New Zealand, his cousin started a fish and chip shop and went on to found United Fisheries. He had also worked for the Ministry of the Interior in Cyprus for a number of years, and represented Cyprus in many international committees.

He has been an MEP since 2004 with AKEL LEFT – the communist political party in Cyprus, thus his entry into the European Parliament coincides with the accession of Cyprus into the EU in 2004.

The whole island joined the EU but it is only the Republic of Cyprus (southern part) which has the rights/obligations of EU membership. However, the EU provides 259mill to help build Northern Cyprus infrastructure. The Republic of Cyprus apposed direct trade as ports/airports unrecognised.

The Political Party he represents in the EP, GUE NGL is the far left communist party of the EU and the smallest with only 35 members. This was to my advantage as I got to meet many of the party members and staff.

Kyriacos worked on the Internal Market and Consumer Protection Committee, and Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs Committee. Because of my background in human rights, trafficking, and child rights, it was more beneficial for me to work alongside his assistant, Danae, who worked with the Civil Liberties Committee, rather than with Charris, who was in charge of the Internal Market and Consumer Protection Committee.

Kyriacos was also involved with the Delegation for the Palestinian Assembly. The meetings for this Delegation were less frequent than those of the Committee, but there were several hearings from politicians, NGOs, scholars, relating to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict which were very interesting to sit in on and hear about different aspects of the conflict, and also how the EU perceived the conflict and intended to act etc.

The life of an intern

The main focus of my work surrounded the work of the Civil liberties committee. I was in charge of note taking for the meetings that Kyriacos (or other GUENGL members) were not able to attend. I also had to follow different directives that were currently being discussed in the Committee to brief him if he needed to comment on them, when he voted on them or if he needed to help the *rapporteur* in charge of that directive.

He was the MEP from GUE NGL involved in amending the Commission's proposal of the Directive on child abuse, exploitation and child pornography. Given my background in child rights, I was able to follow this Directive carefully and assist him with possible amendments, where the directive was too focused on the criminalisation of the offenders, where there was not enough

protection measures etc. The work involved included: the preparation of a comprehensive yet accessible summary of the Commission's proposal; an appreciation of this proposal in light of the work carried out by the Council of Europe, the international conventions on the rights of the child, and the work of NGOs in the field; and ultimately the drafting of the amendments to be submitted on behalf of GUE NGL.

Other work performed included preparing briefings on the readmission agreements and visa liberalisation between the EU and Georgia, a summary of the Rules of Procedure for MEPs, and a newspaper article on the impact of EU migration policies on the large Russian minorities in Cyprus.

Life as an intern also involved general administrative tasks, such as answering the phones, emails, attending interviews with lobbyists visiting Kyriacos to take notes for him and writing an article on the lobbyists' visit to be published for his constituency in Cyprus.

Interning for a Cypriot MEP, I able to get an insight into the Cypriot dispute so attended hearings in the EP on missing persons in Cyprus from the Turkish invasion in 1974, the Turkish accession etc. However, if other hearings were of interest but not directly relating to Kyriacos' work, I would attend and then write a brief report on what was discussed.

Plenary session

I was lucky enough to attend one of the plenary sessions during my internship, providing me a valuable insight into the elaborate system that is the European Parliament. Every month all MEPs, assistants, members from other institutions, descend on Strasbourg for the plenary session. I was also lucky to see Ban Ki Moon speak while in Strasbourg, speaking on the issues of fighting poverty, hunger and climate change while calling for action on the MDGS and collaboration between all nations at the Cancun conference on climate change.

With thousands of people in Strasbourg for that one week every month, it was very difficult to find accommodation, even a month out ([see advice below](#)), so I stayed with some Rotarians, as I had previously done a Rotary Youth Exchange. While not located centrally, this was a lovely family to stay with for the week of the plenary session, and allowed me an insight into what the Plenary session meant to those in Strasbourg. I also attended a Rotary meeting while there as it was just beside the Parliament, and spoke on the experiences of being an intern at the EP.

Cyprus study session

I was also fortunate enough to go to Cyprus for a week as there was a study session on during my internship. Twice a year each political party go to a different EU country for a few days to discuss topical issues. It was simply a coincidence that while I was there GUE NGL was going to Cyprus, which happened to be the country I was interning under. The study session was hosted by Kyriacos' party AKEL, which in one major state we visited had 65% of the votes.

I decided to go a few days early to visit the island and then met up with Kyriacos' assistants and the group at the study session in Nicosia, the capital. Nicosia is situated on the green line which separates the Republic of Cyprus and the Northern Turkish Republic of Cyprus. The session mainly focussed on the Cyprus dispute, to discuss reconciliation efforts, visit old refugee centres and the Ministry of the interior, and also a visit to the Prime Minister's estate, where he gave a brief talk on the current position of the Republic of Cyprus in the Cyprus dispute. Other topics included Cyprus' position on the situation in the Middle East and also the MDGs. There were also dinners in different towns, where on one occasion some local Turks joined us for dinner, illustrating the common desire to find a solution.

The costs of attending the session were covered by Kyriacos' assistants' expense fund. This excluded any additional travel I did before the session, but were solely for accommodation and travel expenses on the days of the study session. See below for additional information on reimbursements.

Advice for future interns

MONEY

- Be aware of withdrawal charges from an international account. Generally, this includes a set \$8 withdrawal fee plus the addition exchange fee. The best idea is to withdraw large sums at a time and work with cash rather than using your eftpos or credit card. Otherwise, set up and work out of a Belgium account. This might also come in handy if you intend to go to Strasbourg for the plenary session or travel with your MEP as reimbursements are obtained the easiest if going into a European account.
- If you plan to go to Strasbourg for the plenary session, you will need to look into travel and accommodation *well* in advance as everything books out very quickly. It can cost quite a bit, although you can be reimbursed. However if you don't have the money upfront, or everything is booked out, you can take a risk closer to the week of the plenary session, as usually emails circulate advertising rideshare options or rooms that are available.
- If your MEP or their assistant are unaware of how you can get reimbursed for Strasbourg or travel with your MEP, you can check this with the interns' office in Level 3 of the EP. Normally through the assistant's fund you can access travel and accommodation expenses for travel etc necessary for travelling with your MEP. You must fill out the correct forms found on the EP intranet website and also write a statement declaring the reasons why you had to go on the trip and keep all receipts! The money is reimbursed so you must have the money to start with. The papers have to be in by around the 18th of each month with the money being reimbursed the following month. The easiest way for reimbursement is for you to have a European account. Otherwise it could go through a third party, a paying agent, or be paid by your MEP and reimbursed to them, but this could prove complicated.

THE INTERNSHIP

- When you find out your MEP, go onto <http://www.europarl.europa.eu> to check out the Committees, Delegations and Party they're in.
- When you arrive at the EP, check the emails and EP website for interesting hearings or new exhibitions around the lobby.

Food in the EP

- There is a Canteen at one end of the EP which is very cheap, and a sandwich bar (similar to Subway) is reasonable at the other end of the EP, up the stairs.
- There is also a bookshop in the middle of the ground floor of the EP opposite the entrance which sells snacks and drinks
- Place Luxembourg is very close if you would like a restaurant or café
- -2 from the carpark lift in the EP lobby takes you to a supermarket.

ACCOMODATION

- Websites to use : <http://www.immoweb.be> or <http://www.expatriates.com/classifieds/belgium/>
If you're looking for furnished, look out for the French '*meublée*' (said 'merblay') or unfurnished '*non-meublée*' (*non merblay*)
- Suburbs close to the European quarter are: Etterbeek 1040, Schaerbeek 1030, Ixelles 1050

TRANSPORT

- Transport options include the bus, metro or tram. You can buy 10 ride concessions or singles from red machines at stops which are cheaper than buying from the bus itself. You can also get a monthly top-up 'Mobib' card from 'Kiosques' in the metro stations. There are reduced rates for those under 25. You have to pay a 5euro start up fee but you can get this reimbursed at the end of your trip.
- Main stops for the centre of town are 'La Bourse' and 'De Brouckere'.
- Bike stations are all around Brussels if you need transport quickly. You can drop them off at another different 'station' in another part of the city. Relatively cheap but be aware that if you damage it or don't return it they can charge approximately 200euros to your credit card.
- You can walk around the town centre easily enough. Walking from the European Quarter to the centre of town takes around twenty minutes.
- There is no direct metro station to the EP but the main metro lines have stops within 5-10minutes walk of the EP. Some busses go directly to Place Luxembourg which the EP backs onto.

Transport within Europe

- The Belgian train website is <http://www.sncb.be>. You can pick up really cheap fares to Brugges, Antwerp, Ghent and also into the Netherlands to visit Maastricht, Amsterdam etc.
- For travel between France – Belgium – the Netherlands- Germany, <http://www.thalys.com>
- Eurostar – useful to go to Paris and the UK
- The French train website is <http://www.sncf.fr>.
- For cheap flights look at <http://www.ryanair.com> or <http://www.skyscanner.net> to see a variety of prices for a flight.

SHOPPING AND TOURISTY STUFF

- La Grande Place in the centre of town is beautiful and a good place to start when visiting Brussels, also very close to Le Manneken pisse (or literally the little man pee) which is a number one attraction.
- La rue neuve has all the main clothes, electronic, shoe shops. Avenue Louise is also popular for chic clothes shopping.
- The *quartiers* (suburbs) for good bars / restaurants include:
 - St Catherine - centre of town
 - Place Luxembourg – Right outside the European Parliament
 - St Josse ten Noode, and Place Flagey in Ixelles
- Markets: The main market is on a Sunday morning at the Gare du Midi in the South Brussels, but easily accessed by bus, tram or metro.

Shopping is cheapest in the hypermarkets, generally on the outskirts of Brussels.

Hypermarkets sell appliances, clothes, and also food + drink (including alcohol). Cheapest supermarkets include ALDI, LIDL, Delhaize, or Carrefour, which also has little smart-marts in the middle of town.

Conclusion

This internship is an extremely valuable experience. It provided me with not only the opportunity to see how the parliament functions, but also access to many additional opportunities which were useful for completing my masters. The chance to live in beautiful Brussels for three months is also something which should not be passed up. Thanks must be given to the EUCN, for accepting me for this internship, and those at the NCRE, especially Sarah Christie, for all the added support during the preparatory stages and the internship itself. Thanks to Kyriacos, Danae and Charris for making me feel so welcome in the office, especially to Danae for showing me the ropes, answering silly questions, and providing me such a thorough insight into the functioning of the EP. I also must thank fellow interns and kiwi expats Nick Smith, Jessie Ford and Kathy Errington for so many good memories.