

## **MEP Internship**

My report on my time in Europe is a little unusual, as I was the first intern not to be placed with a member of the European Parliament. Instead, my internship was spent in the New Zealand Embassy to the European Union. I worked with the embassy staff on a range of topics – climate change policy, agriculture, financial services reform and trade were the main ones.

## **Work**

My work was really interesting and I was glad to have the chance to be based in the embassy. It meant I got to see across the range of European institutions, and look at the tensions between them from the point of view of advancing New Zealand's interests. My thesis is looking at the topic of illegal immigration, and the embassy were very generous in allowing me time off to go to seminars on this, including a full day conference, and later on they gave me a few days to go and meet with an academic based in Barcelona. They were truly great to work for.

The day to day details of what I did at the embassy changed depending on who could use an extra hand. I often did research summaries for diplomats heading off to meetings. On other occasions I went to conferences, the most impressive of which was the ASEM – or Asia Europe Meeting. I say impressive because it was held in a palace in Brussels, and it had free restaurants for us to go to, one of which had a fountain in the middle of it. I was staffing the delegation office, which meant I was answering calls and bringing things to people who needed them. As Bill English and Murray McCully were attending, there was always something that needed to be passed on to make sure they made their engagements. Another highlight was attending The ARF Seminar on the International Security Implications of Climate Change, from the 18-19 of November. I actually got to go to this one alone, and take notes for the embassy, and send back a summary to Wellington. The most informative time at work came when the embassy hosted a two day seminar to teach New Zealand diplomats based in Europe about what was happening with the financial crisis. Much of it focused on complicated issues surrounding regulating financial markets, which are currently taking aim at European countries like Spain and Italy. I was amazed at how interesting I found it, as it was not mathematical at all; it was more political, explaining why certain initiatives to deal with problems are failing. The web of

competing interests makes it very hard to see how the existing weaknesses in regulatory systems can be fixed.

### **Living in Brussels**

I was lucky to have a friend in Brussels who helped set me up with a flat and two lovely flatmates. However, as some of the other intern reports say, if you don't know people who can help you find accommodation be very careful about searching on the internet. There are endless stories of people being ripped off this way. Coming, staying in a hostel and then looking for a place may well be a better idea.

In general Brussels is an expensive city; I would say you will pay between 350 Euros a month rent to 500 Euros a month. If you want an apartment to yourself, it will be more. The up side is that is a great base to use to travel around the rest of Europe – I made it to Paris, Barcelona and Amsterdam, as well as seeing Ypres and the First World War historic sites in Belgium. Ghent and Bruges are also lovely and worth visiting.

Public transport in Brussels is good, but it can be very creepy to use at night. I went by bus to work, which meant I got freezing in winter. The upside though was not being annoyed by dubious looking guys who hang around metro stations. Future interns should make sure to get one of the city wide public transport concession cards (they sell them in the central station) as they save you a lot of money.

### **Social Life**

My biggest tip is to try and meet one of the many EU interns who are working in Brussels. Look up their facebook groups as well, as these post notices about upcoming parties and events. Once you get 'in' with a good group of friends you will feel a lot less isolated. I also found French classes a good way to meet people my own age.

Finally, I would like to thank the New Zealand European Union Centres Network. Their support while I was away was invaluable, and I am so grateful I had the chance to do the internship. Also the New Zealand embassy staff in Brussels were wonderful, and I'm very thankful they put up with my often inept attempts to help out. A special thanks has to go to Melanie and Keawe, who took care of me the most.

Katherine Errington

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