

**NCRE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT INTERNSHIP
SEPTEMBER – DECEMBER 2005:
A REPORT**

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1.INTRODUCTION

This Report documents the key events of the three months I spent as a Parliamentary Intern for the Office of Baroness Sarah Ludford MEP at the European Parliament (EP) in Brussels, Belgium. The internship, which was sponsored and organised by the National Centre for Research on Europe (NCRE) in conjunction with the New Zealand Embassy in Brussels and the offices of the Members of the European Parliament (MEPs), was indeed a worthwhile experience for me as a student of European Studies, particularly in the early stages of my doctoral thesis. In addition, having previously worked in the areas of immigration and refugee law, and with my thesis topic focusing on these areas at the European Union (EU) level, I cannot emphasise enough how fortunate I have been to work for Baroness Ludford MEP, who is actively involved in immigration and refugee affairs in the EU. Finally, on a personal level, the internship provided me with the opportunity to experience life “at the heart of Europe”, and to establish friendships with a number of wonderful people from different parts of the world who, like myself, are trying to make sense of the complexities created by the multinational political giant that is the EU.

1.1 Motivation

The NCRE EP Internship Programme was set up to provide post-graduate students in New Zealand with an opportunity to experience working for an MEP and to enable them to conduct research in Brussels. I submitted my application hopeful that the selection panel would recognise the fact that at the doctoral level, I needed to travel to the EU for research purposes. I was also interested to know of any employment opportunities available in the EU for European Studies graduates, particularly those specialising in refugee and immigration issues, as like any project, my thesis will *eventually* be completed and used as a “stepping stone” for academic or career advancement. I saw the internship as an excellent opportunity to network and investigate, given the number of trainees, *stagiaires* or interns who enter the EU institutions with the same objective in mind. Finally, being one of the inaugural students of the NCRE, and having focused my undergraduate and post-graduate studies on EU politics, I felt prepared for the rigours of political life in Brussels.

1.2 The ‘honeymooning’ stagiaire

Jeff McNeill categorised himself as an “ageing stagiaire” in his internship report.¹ I was in the “honeymooning” category, having married my husband seven days prior to departing NZ for Brussels. My husband, also an EU politics post-graduate student, had to immediately put his wedding vows into practise by unconditionally agreeing to uproot himself and join his wife in Brussels. For practical reasons, my husband and I decided to make the internship a part of our honeymoon, and therefore, unlike

¹ McNeill, Jeff. *Inside the Caprice des Dieux: NCRE European Parliament Spring 2004 Internship – Trip Report*.

Lucy, Jeff, Sara and Jamie², I would not be able to provide budget or accommodation advice to prospective interns. First, for obvious reasons, I spent way beyond what the stipend allowed. Second, unlike the previous interns who had their accommodation organised prior to their arrival in Brussels, my husband and I arranged our accommodation after a week of sightseeing. We were quite fortunate to have found the Schuman Business Flats in the EU Quarter and to have secured a flat three days before I was scheduled to begin working at the EP. On our last day as “tourists”, we wheeled our cases from our room at Euroflats Hotel on rue de Charlemagne to our new home at rue Stevin 109, apartment 3B, and thus began our new, albeit temporary, life in Belgium. Around the corner from our flat stood the star-shaped Berlaymont, the European Commission building, which was all very inspiring indeed for two starry-eyed students of EU politics. Our thrice weekly shopping routine involved walking past the Berlaymont, Committee of the Regions, and the all-important Justus Lipsius, the office of the Council of Ministers, before arriving at the GB supermarket at Place Jourdan.

The social scene for the “honeymooning” *stagiaire* also differs quite significantly from that of a young and unattached intern. Being in Brussels with my husband meant that I was never lonely or homesick, and did not feel compelled to attend 80s style parties hosted by young EP interns to meet new people. We were, however, quite fortunate to have met other “attached” Parliamentary Assistants and their partners, with whom we tried out the bars and restaurants in Brussels and beyond.

1.3 The non-European New Zealander

The previous NCRE Intern, Sara Peary, remarked in her report³ that her Californian accent “did throw a few Europeans for a curve at first”, but that her representation of the diversity of NZ was immediately accepted “in such a diverse environment as the EP”. Being an Asian New Zealander, I too caused some initial confusion at the EP as to my representation of NZ. As a result, when meeting EP staff for the first time, my introductory speech often included such information as where I was born, when I moved to NZ and when I was granted NZ citizenship. Due to Belgian law requiring all foreigners to carry their passports with them at all times, I had my passport ready if I needed to substantiate my claims. However, as Sarah observed, the EP is a diverse environment, not to mention tolerant and “enlightened”, and there was never any need for me to show documentary evidence of my nationality to EP staff, with the exception of course, of the security personnel responsible for issuing Parliamentary IDs.

The experiences that Sara and I had as foreign-born representatives of NZ and the NCRE at the EP demonstrate that the opportunity to experience being at the centre of the democratic seat of the EU is open to anyone interested, regardless of age, race, background and experience. The only prerequisite of course, is a commitment to EU

² Previous NCRE EP Interns.

³ Peary, Sara. *International Business or Institutional Politics: The European Parliament Agenda*.

studies. However, once in Brussels, do expect to be asked a number of questions about the All Blacks, particularly by French and Belgian Parliamentary Assistants.

2. EP PLACEMENT

The wonderful and ever-helpful Ms Janet Lowe, Counsellor at the New Zealand Embassy in Brussels, helped secure my placement at the Office of Baroness Ludford MEP. I was determined to work for Baroness Ludford due to her passion and commitment to human rights, immigration and asylum issues. However, I was warned by the selection panel at the NCRE that whilst every effort would be made to match the Intern with the MEP according to research interests, placement at the EP is ultimately dependent on the resources and willingness of the MEP to accommodate a *stagiaire*. Fortunately, and much to Janet's relief, Baroness Ludford granted my request to work for her, and was confident to provide me with work that was related to my professional background and research interests. More important, however, was the fact that Baroness Ludford's office had not previously accepted any interns, making me their first experimental *stagiaire*. Given Baroness Ludford's high political profile both in her home country, the UK, and in Brussels, I felt quite fortunate indeed.

2.1 The MEP

Baroness Sarah Ludford MEP is London's Liberal Democrat Euro-MEP and a life peer at the House of Lords. At the EP, she is the spokeswoman for the British Liberal Democrats on the Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs Committee (LIBE), Rapporteur for the proposed Visa Information System (VIS), and is particularly active in the construction of a common EU asylum system and coherent migration policy, and combating organised crime and terrorism via cross-border law enforcement. Baroness Ludford is also Vice Chair of the EP's Inter-Group on Anti-Racism and Diversity, Chair of a subset of the Intergroup known as the European Muslim Forum, and EP lead member on anti-racism, rights for EU resident legal immigrants and the internment of prisoners at Guantanamo Bay. Outside the LIBE Committee, Baroness Ludford is involved with the Economic and Monetary Affairs Committee (EMAC) and the EP Delegation to South-East Europe and the Balkans, and among her other interests include Turkey, the Kurds and Cyprus.⁴

A tireless defender of human rights and a highly respected MEP, Baroness Ludford is also known for her strict, no-nonsense approach, and to those who have not had the chance to work closely with her, the general perception is that her intelligence and mere presence can be quite intimidating. I was warned prior to my arrival in Brussels that being "cool, calm and collected" is a requirement when working for such a high profile political personality. Amazingly enough, I continued to receive

⁴ For further information, visit <http://www.sarahludfordmep.org.uk>.

wishes of “good luck” and warnings to “be very careful” two months on in my internship from different EP staff, and one went so far as to instruct me to “Hide!”. However, such warnings were unsubstantiated, as I found my working relationship with Baroness Ludford to be one of mutual trust and respect, albeit at a formal level.

Baroness Ludford prefers to be called by her first name, Sarah, and ensures that she lunches with her staff at the humble ASP canteen rather than at the more exclusive MEPs only restaurant, whenever she is stationed in Brussels. On the number of occasions that I had the chance to “do lunch” with Baroness Ludford, we discussed a whole range of different issues, from New Zealanders and Australians being the largest groups of overstayers in the UK, to the AIDS epidemic in Africa. It was a fascinating experience obtaining a politician’s opinions on important issues freely and casually over lunch. However, regardless of the topic of conversation, one thing is clear in her words and actions – Baroness Ludford is a devoted Londoner, and is committed to serving both her city and her constituents.

2.2 The Staff

The Office of Baroness Ludford MEP is run by two Parliamentary Assistants: Jenny Pack and Alexandra Cupsan-Catalin. Jenny provides administrative support and research assistance, and has been working for Baroness Ludford for approximately five years. Jenny therefore knows *everything* about Parliamentary business and is a veteran in handling Baroness Ludford’s busy diary. Alexandra works tirelessly with Baroness Ludford on Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs issues, and is completely committed to her work that she could be considered a “permanent resident” in the office! Both Jenny and Alexandra liaise with Baroness Ludford’s Assistants in London, Lucy and Jennifer, in regard to casework, invitations, speeches, and press releases amongst other things.

Baroness Ludford and her all-female staff are a hardworking and multi-talented group, and I am proud to have been a part of this team. However, whilst they may appear to be strong and tough, they have one common weakness – Belgian chocolates! In fact, I found it quite easy to break Jenny’s office yoga routine by distributing bars of Cote d’Or in the office every afternoon, to keep the energy levels up and the stress levels down.

2.3 Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe (ALDE)

Baroness Ludford is a prominent member of the ALDE group, the third largest political group in the EP. The group, which is made up of 90 MEPs from 20 different EU Member States, holds the balance of power “in the centre of Europe’s only directly elected institution”⁵. Consequently, as a result of my internship with

⁵ ALDE website, <http://alde.euoparl.eu.int/Content/Default.asp?>

Baroness Ludford, I became involved with the activities of the ALDE group and thoroughly enjoyed the experience. The Liberal Democrats whom I observed and admired at the EP were far from the loud, petition-seeking, backpacking vegans that cynics and critics portray them to be, and I must admit that due to the time I spent with the ALDE staff, particularly the *stagiaires* and Parliamentary Assistants, and also after meeting and observing a number of fascinating and inspiring ALDE MEPs (Graham Watson, Ignasi Guardans, Istvan Szent-Ivanyi, Jean Marie Cavada, and Alexander Alvaro Nuno to name a few), I became quite loyal to the party that I served in the short time that I spent at the EP.

2.4 Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs Committee (LIBE)

With Baroness Ludford being the spokeswoman for the British Liberal Democrats in the LIBE Committee, I was given the greatest opportunity of attending LIBE meetings with Alexandra, and thereby became privy to the activities of this hardworking group. As a student and former practitioner in the areas of asylum and immigration, being involved in the activities of this Committee was such a great honour and opportunity, and something I could only have dreamed of had I not gone to Brussels. During my internship, the LIBE Committee was hard at work on a number of issues, including the EU's approach to managing economic migration, and the proposed Visa Information System (VIS). I was also present at a number of meetings which Commissioner for Justice, Freedom and Security Franco Frattini attended, and was surprised and impressed by his quiet and calm demeanour, particularly given the reputation of his predecessor!

3. THE INTERNSHIP

My internship at the EP can be summed up in three words: work, work and work. Future NCRE interns should note that for most interns or *stagiaires* in Brussels, the internship is a means to an end, a way to obtain permanent and well-paid employment in the institutions of the EU and ultimately, a high profile political career. Therefore, it is not surprising to see interns and Parliamentary Assistants working late nights in the office and even at home and on weekends, in order to complete all the tasks assigned to them and meet their deadlines. Fortunately, having previously worked in a busy and deadline-driven government department, I felt quite at home in such a stressful political environment. This was carefully noted by Baroness Ludford and her Assistant Jenny, who filled in my work diary with tasks that matched my level of skills and experience. However, this did not mean that I was exempt from such tasks as photocopying documents, posting letters, running supermarket errands or being sent running down to the Members' Lounge with four of Baroness Ludford's black handbags, hoping that one of them was *the* handbag she needed for the next function she was attending. In fact, being able to juggle such tasks with "more serious" office work is part and parcel of being a Parliamentary Assistant, and Baroness Ludford's staff in Brussels, myself included,

divided the work equally between the three of us, to ensure the smooth running of the office.

3.1 Work hours

Given the long list of activities Baroness Ludford is involved in, her Brussels Office is open for business *whenever* there is work to be done. Whilst in a number of offices in the EP, the standard hours of work are between 9:00 a.m. to 6.30 p.m., the Office of Baroness Ludford is already hard at work at around 8:00 a.m., and closes, thanks to the never-ending emails from British constituents and the workaholic staff of the European Commission, at approximately 8:00 p.m. In my case, I made every effort to start and leave work at the standard hours. Being a former member of the Public Service Association (PSA) in NZ, feeling guilty for being at the office after 5:30 p.m. was second nature to me. However, the nature of the work at the EP is such that it is often difficult to predict what activities one would be involved in on any given day. On a number of occasions, I received last minute requests to begin or complete tasks that the other members of staff were unable to work on due to time constraints or other urgent matters that needed attending to. On 1 November 2005, a bank holiday in Belgium, I was one of the few interns who queued up outside the ASP entrance hoping to be allowed entry into the building, in order to complete a draft that needed to be sent to London. It is unclear as to whether the EP security personnel's decision to turn us away was due to their support for work-life balance, but the fact that a number of Assistants and *stagiaires* would voluntarily turn up for work on a cold winter's day when they were required, by law, to stay home is testament to the dedication and commitment of Parliamentary Assistants to their work.

3.2 Work station

As the busy office of Baroness Ludford could only accommodate up to three people, I did not have a permanent work station. However, whenever Baroness Ludford's busy schedule prevented her from being at her office in Brussels, I was given her own private office to use, and this happened quite often, particularly during my first month at the EP, when she was on leave for the entire month. It was not at all difficult for such an arrangement to fan the political fantasies of a star-struck student of EU studies, and I must admit that I grew quite accustomed to it! However, it was not long before Baroness Ludford's EP activities resumed and I was back to being the superfluous member of staff. At these times, I had the option of using one of the desks at the EP library (Level 5D) or at the Info Centre (Level 1E). On one occasion, I was also stationed at the Office of UK Liberal Democrat Sajjad Karim MEP, while working on an EPQ and collating the contact details of *all* of the European Commission staff.

It is not uncommon for interns to operate on a "hotdesk" basis, and whilst being uprooted can indeed be quite disruptive particularly when work is piling up and deadlines are looming, this is part and parcel of being the office supernumerary and

can also be a positive experience. Not being at the office meant that I was exempt from doing administrative tasks such as sorting the mail or answering the telephone. It also gave me the freedom to do some sightseeing and celebrity spotting en route to Level 1 or 5, and past interns would agree that at the EP, celebrity spotting is easy to arrange!

Being stationed at the EP Library is ideal for research, as it is staffed by a group of friendly and helpful people who are all fluent in English, and all willing to supply whatever document you ask for. Unfortunately for myself and the wonderful Madame Mette Scheel, not even the latest technology could make some ancient COM documents, such as the Statute for a European Mutual Society, accessible on-line. The Info Centre is also an inspiring place to work in. As it is open to the public, subject to security clearance of course, most NGOs and lobbyists use the PC and Internet facilities there, and they are never silent about their opinions on the Commission and indeed, some MEPs!

3.3 Activities

For the duration of my internship, I had a busy work schedule. My tasks and duties as an Intern for the Office of Baroness Ludford MEP can be categorised and summarised as follows:

➤ *Administrative*

I carried out a large number of administrative tasks, which included responding to and following up on internal and external telephone and written inquiries and invitations, booking rooms for meetings, organising trunks for Strasbourg, and updating Baroness Ludford's diary on Outlook. I also attended Assistants' meetings, and on one occasion was the designated minute taker. However, the highlight of all of my "administrative" activities at the EP was liaising with Vodafone UK, the BBC and the UK Department for Constitutional Affairs, in regard to arranging interviews with Baroness Ludford to obtain her views on a range of civil liberties issues.

➤ *Research*

As with the experiences of the previous NCRE Interns, my role was largely research-based. Much of the work I was given focused on research and writing. For the duration of my internship, I sent out written responses to Baroness Ludford's UK constituents who had expressed their concerns in regard to such issues as the arrest and detention of the members of the opposition party in the Maldives, Ken Livingstone's political statements, the human rights situation in Tibet, the immigration policies of the Home Office, the draft Religious Liberty Law in Romania, and the forced repatriation of Roma to Kosovo. A significant amount of time was spent ensuring that the responses contained accurate and up-to-date information in regard to the activities of the British Government and the EU

institutions in these particular areas. Also known as “casework”, this area of research forms the bulk of the activities of a large number of Parliamentary Assistants.

I also drafted press releases on such issues as the rights of the Roma in Kosovo and the need for the EU to have a clear and comprehensive policy on economic migration, was involved in the drafting of an EPQ regarding the draft Religious Liberty Law in Romania, and produced speech drafts on a number of different topics, such as volunteerism in the UK, diversity and inclusion in the workplace in the EU, and migration governance. In my experience as an Intern, I found speech drafting to be an interesting and exciting exercise, as it allowed room for creativity. With Baroness Ludford being an excellent writer and orator, I made sure that every draft I presented was of a very high standard and reflected the principles and philosophies of the Baroness both as a Liberal Democrat and as a humanitarian.

Finally and most importantly, I had the opportunity to co-author an article with Baroness Ludford for a book published and edited by ALDE President Graham Watson MEP. The book, *Liberal Democracy and Globalisation*⁶, is a compendium of liberal thoughts on globalisation, and the article that Baroness Ludford and I wrote focused on the role of globalisation in the promotion of human rights. I consider myself very fortunate indeed to have been given the opportunity to be involved in the publication of this book.

➤ *Representation and Reporting*

I attended a number of ALDE group meetings and LIBE Committee meetings with Baroness Ludford and Alexandra. When I entered the EP, Alexandra and Baroness Ludford were in the middle of laboriously going through each of the provisions of the Report on the Visa Information System (VIS), and making the necessary amendments to the document prior to presenting it to the EP, the Commission and the Council for a first exchange of views. My introduction to the complex world of *codecision* thus came early, in fact during my first few hours at the EP! I attended a three-person meeting which focused on reviewing the existing provisions in the VIS Report and amending those which did not meet the requirements of the EP. Having had previous work experience in immigration, I participated in the meeting by explaining immigration and border control principles and by providing NZ examples. As my background in this area was derived from working as a civil servant, I may have come across as being sympathetic to the interests of the Council and the Member States!

I also attended a total of twelve meetings and conferences as the official representative of the Office of Baroness Ludford MEP. These were meetings and conferences that she would have personally attended herself, but her busy schedule prevented her from doing so. For each of the meeting or conference I attended, I informed Baroness Ludford of the issues covered, the participants and their views,

⁶ Watson, Graham and Durrant, Katharine (eds). Liberal Democracy and Globalisation. Bagehot Publishing, Langport, 2005.

and produced a detailed report which was then placed in one of the yellow folders containing other documents on the same topic, and which Baroness Ludford constantly refers to whenever she is based in Brussels.

My first “solo act” was the preparatory meeting for the EP meeting with Members of National Parliaments, specifically held to discuss issues of liberty and security, in particular, the European Arrest Warrant, Eurojust and the exchange of sensitive data in the EU. I was instructed to attend this meeting, and was surprised to be the only non-MEP to attend the closed session. Whilst I was worried about being expelled for “gatecrashing”, I was also determined to show my MEP that I was a risk taker and decided to stay and write down every single word uttered by the politicians in attendance. However, any feeling of nervousness eventually dissipated, and shortly after I found myself deeply immersed in the world of event planning EP-style. Discussions of whether or not to have canapés and drinks on the second day were quickly followed with suggestions of inviting NGOs to the event, with one MEP commenting that “politicians can learn most by listening rather than talking”. I left the meeting wondering how EU textbooks could have failed to capture such an interesting and refreshing facet of the EP political process!

The subject of Turkey joining the EU dominated much of the activities and discussions at the EP towards the end of September 2005, and two conferences were held, one of them a two-day event attended by Turkish and EU politicians, NGOs, Kurdish interest groups and Commission representatives. The notable absence of pro-Kurdish DEHAP President, Mr Tuncer Bakirhan, who was at the last minute prevented by the Turkish authorities from attending the conference in Brussels, served as a reminder that the Kurdish question is very much a factor in Turkey’s accession negotiations with the EU. That same week, a pro-Turkish supporter managed to bypass security and replace the 15th EU flag with the Turkish flag outside the Commission building, much to the embarrassment of the security personnel.

The issue of ethnic violence in Southeast Europe and the Balkans was also a dominant theme, and a public hearing on the situation of minorities in Vojvodina was organised at the EP by the Delegation for Relations with the Countries of South-East Europe and the Committee on Foreign Affairs (AFET). The hearing provided an open forum for debates and discussions between representatives of minority groups, international human rights groups, representatives of the EU institutions, and government officials from Serbia and Montenegro. For an outsider, witnessing the EP act as a mediator between the government officials and minority groups was inspiring. However, the reality for the EP is that the question of rights for ethnic minorities is seen by the national governments as a sovereignty issue, as argued by the Serbian Minister for Human and Minority Rights, Rasim Ljajic, who remarked that the internationalisation of the ethnic situation in his home country would not encourage the nationalists to “make any effort in Serbia, when it is the people in Brussels who are making the decision”.

I was also given the opportunity to attend a number of other interesting and high level meetings such as the EP Observers Delegation meeting on Azerbaijan, during which the MEPs involved were briefed on what to expect and what to watch out for in the November 2005 elections. I also attended the launch of the European Civil Liberties Network organised by Statewatch, and the Minority Rights in Practice in Southeast Europe Roundtable, which was organised by the King Baudouin Foundation. However, out of all the meetings and conferences I attended, it was the Conference on Sex Work, Human Rights, Labour and Migration that stood out for me. The three-day conference, organised by the International Committee on the Rights of Sex Workers in Europe, aimed to put an end to the exploitation and violation of human rights of sex workers, and looked at related issues of labour rights, health and safety and trafficking. The conference ended with the presentation of the Sex Workers' Rights Manifesto, which nine sex workers from different EU Member States read out in their own respective languages. It was indeed an emotional moment for both the participants and spectators.

➤ *Writing and proofreading*

My activities at the Office of Baroness Ludford MEP also involved providing assistance in report-writing and proof-reading drafts. Due to the number of letters and reports that needed to be completed by Baroness Ludford's Assistants on a daily basis, I provided assistance in this area whenever my assistance was needed.

➤ *Representation of constituents*

Whilst I enjoyed all of the activities mentioned above, I found representing the interests of constituents vis-à-vis the Home Office to be the most rewarding. Having previously worked in immigration and refugee determination, I was assigned cases that involved dealing directly with the Home Office staff, and I thoroughly enjoyed playing the role of advocate. Through this experience, I found out that name dropping *can* make a difference in the speed and quality of service provided, and that if you ask to be given information about the complaints procedure, problems immediately disappear! The experience also made me realise that despite the "free movement" of goods and services in the EU, and despite the issuance of EU Passports to Member State citizens, immigration and citizenship procedures are not as straightforward as they may seem.

3.4 Extra-curricular activities

Despite the long list of activities I was involved in as an Intern, my time in Brussels was not at all a case of "all work and no play".

Among the extra-curricular activities that my husband and I took part in during our time in Belgium, one of the more memorable was strolling at the Parc du Cinquantaire on the car-free weekend on a very warm September's day. Other activities included walking in the snow (and losing two pairs of shoes in the

process!) and braving the blizzards of late November whilst out shopping and dining in Brussels. Our experience also encompassed a number of visits to historic sites with our good friends Belgian Deputy Crown Prosecutor, Monsieur Moigny and his lovely wife, Alexandra, who acted as our tour guides. We visited the Palais du Royal and Palais du Justice, had fresh bread and soup at the Ferme du Hameu du Roy after walking through a forest leading to a castle that belonged to one of Leopold II's closest friends, and most importantly, we refreshed our knowledge of European history when we visited Waterloo. We also experienced Eastern European culture at the infamous Russian tea house at the centre of Brussels where we sampled their vodka. However, one event that I will never forget was the time I stopped and offered a handful of Euros to a Roma woman outside the Place du Luxembourg entrance to the EP. Having written my MA thesis several years earlier on the rights of Roma in the EU, this encounter finally gave a human face to a 50,000 word document that would have otherwise remained lifeless.

In addition to playing tourists with my husband and visiting the major attractions in the city, we also enjoyed the hospitality of the NZ Embassy staff, who introduced us, among other things, to Indian wine. Ambassador Wade Armstrong also personally introduced us to our very own NZ PM Helen Clark during a breakfast policy briefing at Hotel Renaissance in Brussels. We were honoured to be invited to the wine reception held by the NZ Embassy in honour of the NCRE's very own Prof Martin Holland, and had the privilege of being treated to a succulent meal of duck à l'orange and Pierre Marcolini treats by Janet Lowe and Deputy Ambassador Stephen Payton.

4. ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Whilst originally designed as one of the "stepping stones" towards thesis completion, taking part in the NCRE EP internship programme is also an achievement in itself. As Lucy Cassels noted in her report⁷, gaining an internship independently at the EP is a difficult process, given the large number of young and highly qualified citizens of Member States, Candidate Countries and indeed a number of non-EU countries competing for places each year. Second, most of the work at the EP is deadline-driven, and even the most experienced Parliamentary Assistants find meeting deadlines to be quite challenging. Therefore, interns who have successfully carried out and completed all the work allocated to them should be proud of their efforts. Finally, whilst the three-month placement in Brussels could potentially accelerate an intern's academic and professional career, prospective interns should note that the internship could also potentially cause some *temporary* disruptions in their personal lives, and affect the lives of those around them. The ability to uproot oneself and return to normality after having experienced life at the heart of Europe is something that requires energy, courage and motivation, and I salute those who have been able to successfully do so.

⁷ Cassels, Lucy. *Report: Inaugural NCRE European Parliament Internships*.

With this in mind, I would like to thank a number of people for making the EP internship possible. As always, I am indebted to Professor Martin Holland, Director of the NCRE, for his tireless efforts to promote the EU in NZ and NZ in the EU, and for arranging such life-changing opportunities for NZ students. I would also like to thank the NCRE for the wonderful opportunity to experience life in Brussels and the EP, and particularly to Nicholas Mason, who is always willing to help. To Janet Lowe, Stephen Payton, Ambassador Wade Armstrong and the NZ Embassy staff, my deepest thanks for the support, advice and hospitality that you have shown a newly married couple in a strange country!

To Baroness Sarah Ludford MEP, Jenny, Alexandra, Jennifer and Lucy, thank you all for the opportunity to work with such an amazingly talented group of *superwomen*.

I also met some wonderful people during my time at the EP, and I would like to briefly mention them in this Report. Mr and Mrs Yves Moïny, Alistair, Jenny, Eric, Virginie and Carol, thank you all for making a newcomer feel welcome.

Finally, thanks to the Sipaco-Warner family for the never-ending support, most importantly to my husband Carl, who left everything behind in NZ to join me in Brussels, and who made the internship experience a wonderful and unforgettable adventure.