

SLUG: YJA 2014

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The European Union is a culture unique unto itself.

It is an organized, multi-hierarchical system made up of complex layers cultural diversity and the political economy. Every single function is rooted in compromise. In order to report on the 28-member, multi-national state, journalists should first understand the basics of the beast.

In the world of Canadian journalism university education, there is hardly a facet dedicated to making sense of European Union affairs. Unfortunately, there is no universal map to navigate its waters either. The EU-Canadian Young Journalist award aims to bridge this gap, through a study tour dedicated to providing insight into how to cover the EU's domestic and foreign policy operations. In 2014, this mission was all the more relevant due to both the upcoming EU elections and CETA.

It in was January when I answered a call for applicants for the award. Now, five months later, I, along with two other national winners, I began to watch the adventure unfold outside an Airbus 8330's window. For me, it was my first ever trip to Europe, an experience I wouldn't soon forget.

Seven hours later, I'd eventually arrive in the heart of the European Union in Brussels, Belgium.

The first stage of this five-day study tour, sponsored by the European Delegation to Canada, and facilitated by the College of Europe, began by laying a foundation of understanding of the EU - from the political history to its current structure. On our first day, tour coordinators Katinka Koke and Leticia Vicario presented us with an intense week-long agenda filled with information on the numerous guest speakers that awaited us.

Journalism is defined by the quality of a reporter's sources, and the provision of varying viewpoints. The course never felt too short in this regard. The College of Europe invited more than 20 speakers to educate us on the inner-workings of the European Council, Commission and Parliament. Their subjects ranged from domestic and international public affairs issues, foreign policy and militaristic issues, as well as the government's responsibility to the EU as a whole and to the individual 28-member states. At first, it seemed the most influential speaker would be Christophe Manet who gave us insight into his workplace at the External Action Service's Canada Desk. While his conversation, like many others, remained off the record, geo-political navigation is the base of which how the EU conducts itself around the world.

Another incredibly influential speaker was Alexandros Koronakis, a Greek national who operates New Europe Studios, a studio/bar in downtown Brussels.

“We bash whoever needs to be bashed in order for Europe to be better,” he said while explaining the role of New Europe, the paper he helps manage. It was interesting to hear how the media operates outside of the EU bubble and how reporters are close to monitor its various inner departments and proceedings. One of my favourite media speakers was perhaps Tim King, the editor-in-chief of European Voice. The weekly paper is distributed throughout the EU and is mainly political in nature. His honesty and approachability kept us asking questions well after his scheduled time.

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Prior to this course, I had little knowledge of the EU and even less of how it interacted with Canada. I still believe there is much to learn, but at least now the tip of the iceberg has been uncovered. Now, I am much more interested in EU stories, and yearn to explore the political landscape further. If I had not taken this study tour, I probably wouldn't have considered embedding myself in Brussels, or any European country for that matter. Now it is something that I could see myself pursuing through internships with the contacts I made during the study program. A large part of this course, for me, was listening, seeing, and interacting with those who help make the European Union machine function.