

## Globalization of Marketing & Education



### **A college for the worldly student with big plans**

Photo: The College of Europe in Bruges. (Paul Ames/GlobalPost)

BRUGES, Belgium — The new students at the College of Europe are nothing if not ambitious.

Mohammed Sameh plans to return to his native Egypt after his master's in European Integration and Business to see if the nations on the southern and eastern shores of the Mediterranean can build something similar to Europe's economic union.

Maksim Karliuk wants to help Belarus finally make a clean break with its Soviet past. "My idea in coming here was to become a professor in EU law in order to make changes in Belarus," said the 23-year-old from Minsk. "What I want is to bring about changes through law."

Such aspirations are a tall order, but consider the heights scaled by previous students of this elite European studies center and they may not sound so unrealistic.

The college, which celebrated its 60th anniversary last year, lists among its alumni Britain's deputy prime minister; senior government ministers from Norway, Austria and Finland; a deputy secretary general of the United Nations; and a slew of senior lawmakers, diplomats and European Union officials.

"The college is very likely the best place to study the European integration process in depth, but also experience at first hand Europe in its diversity and complexity," said Paul Demaret, the rector.

Created in 1949, the college was founded in this medieval Flemish city to bring together leading young minds from nations that had just been tearing each other apart during World

War II. The aim was to promote peace and unity through a study program forged from a pan-European perspective that eschewed narrow national interests.

Although the college predates the founding of the European Economic Community by almost a decade, it soon established itself as the pre-eminent finishing school for officials hoping to launch a career in the organization which grew to become today's European Union.

"It's pretty famous in France as the best school if you want to work for the EU institutions," said newly enrolled French student Valerie Enjolras. "Everybody who wants to work in the European Commission wants to come here."

The London Times has described the college as representing for "the European political elite what the Harvard Business School is to American corporate life." Its law master's is the only one offered by a school outside Britain or America to make it into the world's top 10, according to a poll of Spanish lawyers organized by the Madrid business daily Expansion last year.

The college has expanded over the years, opening a second campus in Natolin, a leafy suburb of Warsaw in 1993. This year there's a record 438 students from 55 nations enrolled for the five master's courses in European law; politics and administration; economics; international relations and diplomacy; and economic integration and business on offer in Bruges and the interdisciplinary masters taught in the Polish capital. However competition for places is tight.

Students must be able to study in both English and French besides holding a good university degree. A third already hold a master's from another university before they come to Bruges. About 70 percent of students receive a scholarship, mostly from their national governments, to help cover the 21,000 euros in annual fees and tuition costs in Bruges. Grants from the European Union, Belgian and Polish authorities cover most of the college's remaining funding, along with smaller contributions from other governments, private sponsors and money raised through consulting and training services.

The college is keen to attract more students from outside the 27 nations of the EU and this year there are about 50 EU-funded scholarships available for students from neighboring nations to the east and south. Thirty-year old Sameh is the only Egyptian, but Karliuk is among eight students from Belarus.

Overall, Italy has most students, with 57 enrolled for 2010-11, year followed by France, Spain, Germany and Poland who have more than 30 students. Turkey and Ukraine, nations with aspirations to eventual EU membership, are both sending over a dozen.

While neighboring countries are anxious to gain insights into the EU's complex inner workings through the college, Demaret is disappointed at a lack of interest from the United States and Asia. There are just two U.S. students enrolled this year, down from five last year, and none from China or India.

The college has relaxed the language requirements for its international relations course in an effort to attract more overseas students. They can now start the first semester with a lower level of French, provided they take French lessons while at the college.

Teaching at the college puts much emphasis on practical, rather than theoretical study. Students participate in role-playing exercises to help understand the EU's decision-making processes. Much of the teaching is done by outside lecturers who include leading diplomats, EU officials, business leaders and lawyers as well as academics.

Chancellor Angela Merkel of Germany will be the guest speaker at the formal opening of the year on Nov. 2, the latest in a long line of presidents, prime ministers and monarchs to address the student body.

Rector Demaret insists that the widespread view of the college as an easy step into a career within the governing bodies of the EU is an over-generalization. About half of the

students end up in the private sector, often for the law firms and lobbyists which surround the EU headquarters an hour down the road in Brussels.

Of those who end up as in public service, many go on to national administrations rather than the EU.

Nevertheless, the year spent at the college is a powerful tool for would-be Eurocrats and not only for the prestigious academic qualification. Graduates can also tap into the influential 10,000-strong alumni network.

"The college is at the center of a network, that is very important ... we have alumni in high places," Demaret, a Belgian-born lawyer, told GlobalPost.

When a British government department announced earlier this year that it was planning to slash funding for scholarships to the college, the Foreign Office forced a U-turn, fearing the cuts would weaken British influence within the EU machinery.

Nick Clegg the Liberal Democrat party leader who became Britain's deputy prime minister after the elections in May, is himself a former student and went on to work as an EU trade official and was later elected into the European Parliament. Clegg met his wife, Spanish lawyer Miriam Gonzalez Durantez, during their time at the college. International love matches are not uncommon in Bruges where there's emphasis on cross-cultural socializing.

"Students are not only here to study but also to have a European experience at a human level," Demaret said. "That is as important as the academic program."

Former student Constant Brand recalls that national groups are tasked to organize elaborate parties for their fellow students. Stand outs include Austro-Hungarian balls, Italian gastronomic extravaganzas, Balkan banquets or a NAFTA party organized by North American students that involved line dancing and a Mariachi band supplied by the Mexican embassy.

"You are thrown into a group of very different nationalities and backgrounds, none of the students will ever experience that again to that intensity," said Brand, a Dutch-Canadian journalist. "Being 24/7 with so many people of other cultures and nationalities, that is the big plus of the college."

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**Source: [globalpost.com](http://globalpost.com)**

***By Paul Ames- Special to Globalpost, September 28, 2010***