

Living a ‘European Dream’ in the ‘Bruges Bubble’

I had a ‘European dream’, and the dream came true in Bruges.

When I first heard about the College of Europe while doing my PhD of European Studies at HKU, I never imagined that I would spend one year doing a Master of EU International Relations and Diplomacy there in a medieval town called Bruges.

For tourists, Bruges means a fairy-tale, with bell towers, Gothic churches, cobbled stones, horse and carts, canals, boats, windmills, chocolates and beers...all the romantic elements you can imagine. For some students of the College of Europe, Bruges means a bubble, simply because it is too beautiful to be true. For me, Bruges means more – it means also a European dream.

And I will tell you what the European dream means.

As a student of European Studies, I could not think of a better place to study Europe than the College of Europe in Bruges, which – as indicated in its name – might qualify as the most ‘European’ college in the world. It was in this place that I came to realise what Europe really means. It means diversity, with 300 students from more than 50 countries bringing to the College a rich diversity of languages, cultures and personal experiences. It means unity, as the diversified student body all share the ‘*esprit de Bruges*’, representing a sincere solidarity that is crucial to a Europe entangled by all sorts of crises. There the motto ‘unity in diversity’ does not rest only on paper, but becomes a way of life. Following an intensive programme in such an environment thus allowed me not only to learn Europe, but also to “live” Europe.

I was lucky to be part of this diversity. Being one of the two Chinese students in the College, I also saw it as a mission to contribute to this diversity by bringing China closer to the College, which led me to initiate and create with my fellow students the first ‘China Group’ in the College. Within the framework of the group, we organised debates, presentations, a movie screening, a Chinese dinner, a study visit to the Chinese Mission and HK Trade Office in Brussels, and so on. My efforts were not limited to within the College, and the sense of mission motivated me to represent China at the 4th Europe-China Forum in Brussels and the 1st EURO-BRICS Young Leaders Summit in Helsinki.

The year in Bruges has also been a great stepping stone for my research at HKU. For a mainland Chinese student studying Europe in Hong Kong, nothing else could replace the experience of studying and living with the College’s highly-qualified students and renowned professors. The ‘play hard, work harder’ tradition in the College also paid off for me. I was the first Chinese student in College history to win the Inbev-Baillet-Latour Award for the Best Thesis on EU-China relations. This was accompanied by some 8 publications in journals, magazines or newspapers such as *E-International Relations*, *Eurasia Review*, *The Diplomat*, *the EU-China Observer*, and *the South China Morning Post*. Most importantly, I was accepted for a one-month study visit to the European Parliament DG External Policies, which has been invaluable for the current research project in HKU.

There is so much more to share about the College that I do not know where to end: a study visit to Geneva, simulation games, a NATO visit, paper deadlines, national weeks, parties, bar nights, hangovers, beers after exams, drinks with the Mayor, breakfasts, canteen foods, coffee machines, making Christmas trees, a boat race...



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Vive ‘*l’esprit de Bruges*’!

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