

## School of the E.U. Elite Adapts to a Changing Climate

# College of Europe Aims to Produce Well-Rounded Civil Servants

By KRISTIANO ANG     AUG. 3, 2014

BRUGES, Belgium — Early this summer, after the students who normally populate the College of Europe’s campus here had gone home, over two dozen Chinese officials came to this scenic, if sleepy, northern Belgian city. Their purpose: to learn about [European Union](#) competition policy.

The Chinese bureaucrats were probably not the students that the college’s founders, who included Winston Churchill and the former Belgian prime minister Paul-Henri Spaak, had envisioned when the school opened its doors in 1949. Its purpose then, as it is now, was to help postgraduate students who hope for a career in Europe “acquire the necessary understanding of the challenges of cooperation and integration in Europe,” said Jörg Monar, the college’s rector.

The College of Europe still aims to do this by offering five yearlong master’s degree programs in fields like law, economics and international relations and diplomacy. During the summer, it also hosts shorter courses on various topics, such as the intricacies of European Union legislation, like a seminar attended by the Chinese officials.

Long known as a training ground for future members of the European Union bureaucracy, the college is facing challenges today in its bid to groom the next generation of European civil servants. Much of its budget comes directly from the European Union or from member states, some of which are currently implementing austerity policies.

Euro-skeptic parties on both sides of the political aisle are training their fire on an allegedly complacent, continentally oriented political elite, part of which was trained in Bruges. (Two alumni of the college currently in high office, Helle Thorning-Schmidt, the Danish prime minister, and Nick Clegg, the British deputy prime minister, saw their parties finish behind euro-skeptic rivals in recent European parliamentary elections, though another former student, the new Finnish prime minister, Alexander Stubb, did significantly better.)

Then there are the problems facing a small institution — its most recent graduating class had 446 students — competing to attract quality students who have the option of attending better-funded schools, especially in Britain and the United States. This challenge is exacerbated by the college’s policy of requiring almost all students to be capable of taking classes conducted in English and French from their first day, a legacy of the college’s postwar origins.

In many ways, however, the school has become significantly more global. While citizens of France, Spain and Italy still make up the largest contingents of students, the college's most recent pool of graduates comprised 51 nationalities and included nationals of Australia and China.

"They may want to join the Foreign Office or a big company with links to Europe," said Dr. Monar of these "third country" students. "That's why they want to understand European decision-making procedures."

The college is expecting to announce new collaboration agreements with governments and universities outside the European Union soon. Its academic council recently gave Dr. Monar permission to work on a dual degree arrangement with a university in the United States, which he hopes will pave the way for more American students to attend.

The school also hopes to unveil in September an agreement with the Chinese government to finance a scholarship. About 70 percent of the college's students attend with at least a partial scholarship, which Dr. Monar said had often been crucial for less wealthy applicants, given the relatively high academic and lodging fees of 23,000 euros, or nearly \$31,000, a year.

The shift away from Western Europe has also been prompted by the admission of new member states into the European Union in 2004 and 2007, which has encouraged young Eastern Europeans to attend.

One of these students, Andrei B. Murarasu, a 26-year-old Romanian who recently graduated from the Bruges campus with a master's degree in law, said Romania's admission into the bloc was a bit complicated "and I wanted to get more knowledge about how Europe works and help the transition process," he said.

While Dr. Monar said that his students were not necessarily "federalists," the college tended to shape, or at least attract, students with pro-European sympathies.

Marco Rimanelli, who taught courses in the last academic year on relations between the European Union and the United States and NATO, said, "We had Russian and Ukrainian students who were completely taken aback by what was happening in Russia."

"Students are in a multinational structure and are not only European, but European-oriented. It's a great, great building of bridges," Dr. Rimanelli said.

Despite its pedigree, the institution's characteristics also grant it a certain flexibility. Most faculty members are "visiting professors," who teach on yearlong, renewable contracts, though there are directors of study with administrative responsibilities who serve for at least three years. Dr. Monar said that this enabled the college to ensure that courses deal with contemporary issues, either by changing professors or encouraging them to adapt their material.

Recently introduced courses include those on European Union-China relations and European energy security. In 2010, the college's Warsaw campus established a chair in European

civilization, whose holder researches what historical experiences in different parts of Europe mean for European integration.

Michele Chang, who co-teaches a course on European economic and monetary policy, said that she had increased the focus on European Union financial regulations in her class after the eurozone crisis. “In the past, a lot of people viewed it as more technocratic,” Dr. Chang said. She added that interest in her course had more than doubled in recent years.

To ensure that students do not get stuck in an academic silo, they are also required to spend about 20 percent of their time on a “general studies” curriculum that covers issues such as integration and migration.

“This is to make sure you do not risk producing only technocrats who only look at the technical questions,” Dr. Monar said. “We try to be upfront and critical in our analysis of the challenges, to enable our students, if they come to responsible positions later, to deal with them.”

The location of the Bruges campus, just off a picturesque canal about an hour from Brussels, also allows it to easily attract top government officials for guest lectures.

Speakers this year included the Scottish first minister, Alex Salmond, who made the case for an independent Scotland engaged within the European Union, and President Xi Jinping of China, who called his hosts an “important think tank” for the European Union, according to a Chinese government transcript.

The college is also getting closer to the private sector, both in terms of placing its students into jobs and in soliciting donations.

The foundation of the aluminum producer Alcoa funds the college’s energy chair, while Microsoft recently endowed six partial scholarships. And while Dr. Monar said he did not have the exact figures, he said a growing number of graduates were working in the private sector, especially in jobs like consulting.

Mr. Murarasu, the Romanian graduate, who recently took a job in the legal department of Airbus, said that he believed a majority of his classmates had found positions in the private sector. “A lot of people want to be civil servants, including myself. But these days it’s not that easy to get,” he said. “It’s a fair representation, with some adjustments, of what Europe looks like.”

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