

Individual Report on the EU Top-up Summer Programme 2013

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Major in Translation

1.

I applied for this programme because of two reasons. First of all, I have never been to Belgium before thus I see the programme as a valuable opportunity to broaden my horizon. Secondly, the programme enables students from Hong Kong to learn more about the EU on the spot in Brussels, the capital of the EU through a wide variety of activities such as discussion with EU officials and dialogue session with a member of the European Parliament. It is very attractive to me as one does not often get a chance to talk to the EU officials or even to exchange views and opinions in different policy areas, not to mention students from Hong Kong like me.

Before the programme, what I knew about the EU were only bits and pieces such as EU is the largest donor of development aid in the world and it is an economic and political union of 28 member states in Europe. However, I knew nothing about its operation mechanism and I only deemed it as a supranational institution that mainly concerns economic and trading affairs. Therefore, I expected to gain a deeper understanding of the EU during the five days in Brussels through different activities such as participating in conferences and listening to the debates of the Parliament members. Unfortunately, visitors are not allowed to participate in the conferences but I still believe listening to the debates of the Parliament members, even if it is just a mock one, is very beneficial to the participating students.

2.

It is certain that I have gained more knowledge on the EU and I found the dialogue session with Mr. Bill Newton Dunn was especially unforgettable. He shared his ideas on “Organized crime, Corruption and Money Laundering” with us and I found one of them very impressive which is to establish a law enforcement entity in Europe that officers from different countries share information of the criminals, just like the Federal Bureau of Investigation in the United States. It is really an ambitious yet feasible idea and if it is really going to happen, it will be extremely important in combating the international criminal organizations.

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Timothy Yim

Chinese University of Hong Kong

Major in Law

In summer 2013, I participated in the EU Top-up Summer Programme to visit various European Union institutions and attend lectures as held by the officials from different EU departments in Brussels in Belgium for 5 days. The reason that I have chosen this programme is, first, I would like to visit the EU institutions as it is an opportunity that cannot be missed. Second, I would like to know how the union works and how different member states co-operate with other member states and different states have different values and sometimes they can be very contradictory. Last but not least, as a law student who has previously studied international law which concerns a lot of treaties, I would like to gain more knowledge on how and where these treaties were formed, which is beneficial to my further studies and helps building up my foundation on EU Law, which I am planning to study in the future. Before the programme, I have also participated in Model European Union which has given me an in-depth knowledge about EU and how the EU parliament operates. Nevertheless, it is important to understand the system through direct and first-person experience and it is unbearable to miss this programme.

Apart from the knowledge such as human rights and green technologies which EU has put great emphasis on, the biggest achievement that I have gained from the programme is to learn how important negotiation is. The virtue to form such a union is for member states to reach mutual agreements and create solutions to tackle various issues and problems internally and externally, as different speakers have stated the importance of negotiations. Unlike other unions, such as United Nations, where different countries have contradictory and opposite stands with other countries and it may be difficult for countries to create a perfect outcome, EU member states really would “open their ears” to accept opinions and views from other member states and they are eager to solve problems, rather than to create further problems. The MP who represents United Kingdom states that the ultimate goal is to transform EU from a union to a federal state, such as USA and Australia, which EU would have bigger power to enforce its laws and policies which encourages its member states to unite

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and work together as one to increase its economic and political influence in the world. On the other hand, we had the opportunity to visit the HKETO, College of Europe, and Brugge. These activities have given me an insight of the role of the government of HKSAR has internationally and introduced me to the elite institution where a lot of famous and influential diplomats graduated. The visit to the city of Brugge shows the history of Belgium and I have learnt that it used to be an important port of Belgium as there are a lot of canals and is referred to as "The Venice of the North".

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Alejandra Rodriguez

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Major in European Studies and History

As a European Studies student in the University of Hong Kong, I was required to take a summer course -in Europe- on European issues. During the briefing sessions for this summer course, which took place in Holland, my professors at Hong Kong University introduced me to this new top- up summer program with the EU. This course really caught up my attention since it was related to the summer course on European Politics I was to take in July. Furthermore, the description of the course resulted very attractive to me. Among the many things that attracted me, there was the visit to the key institutions of the European Union, the opportunity to travel in Brussels and the possibility of meeting very important people in the European Union scene.

Beforehand, as I am doing a major on European studies, I already had knowledge on the European Union; however, I didn't quite understand the differences between the organization and division inside the EU; or the application of laws and the nature of Supra-nationalism of the EU. In fact, the idea was rather vague and unclear.

Since I didn't fully understand how the EU worked, my image of the Union was also unclear. I was not sure if the Union was positive or negative; if it would fail or recover and grow successful; if people liked it or not, etc. My opinion was based on the different opinions I heard from people and the general information acquired from the books, which although useful, didn't fully help me to understand and build a personal position regarding the EU.

When entering this program, my expectations were focused primarily on the opportunity to visit the EU institutions and the potential to meet important characters in the European Parliament, Commission and even Council of Ministers, since the description of the course made it viable to think we were to meet highly important people. Furthermore, I was very happy to be part of the first group of student in Hong Kong to join the program and why not an academic excuse to visit Europe by myself, getting to know new people and experience in first persons what Europe is.

I am glad to have joined this EU summer program since it served me to finally understand different aspects of the EU. Furthermore, I got to experience Europe; I had the opportunity to meet people working for the European Union and I got the opportunity to experience life in Belgium which also opened the opportunity to travel to other places inside Belgium and neighbor countries.

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I highly appreciate the opportunity of getting more in touch with students from Hong Kong since I got to meet great people during the trip.

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Elaine Sum Hoi Ling

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1. Expectation of the whole programme

I am a student who is studying business administration program in the Chinese University of Hong Kong, I have zero chance to learn something about European Union as well as study some courses related to European studies in the university, therefore, knowledge about Europe and European Union are very new for me. This is my first time to visit and join a summer program in Europe, so I have high expectation towards this course.

Before I joined the program, I expected that I could learn more about the operation of European Union, for example, its structure and daily works of different departments. I chose this programme about EU as I obtained the information about this summer program through my university after I successfully registered the summer exchange program in the Stockholm University School of Business in Sweden, and I believed that this would be a wonderful study trip.

I only knew few things about EU in the past, and most of them were related to financial aspect only, for example, the advantages of using Euro, the ways that European Union helps its members in economic aspects. The image of European Union for me was really high, as I believed that it has strong power to assist and help different European countries to cooperate with each other very well.

2. Knowledge from the programme

I really learnt a lot during the programme, I think the programme was great because I could acquire knowledge about European Union in different aspects, for example, issues related to human rights, social media, drugs, green energy, as well as the relationships between Hong Kong and European Union. All of them were really new for me so it was a good chance for me to widen my horizons. I liked the visits to different buildings of European Union, such as the info point, European Parliament, European Commission, I think it was an unique chance for me to visit these places, if I did not join the program, I would never have chance to visit.

I think the pre-trip briefing sections were useful as I could get some basic information

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about European Union when I listened to others presentation. And when I searched information on the Internet for preparing my presentation, I also had chance to read reports and some journals about European Union deeply, it was a good way for me to raise my interest towards European Union.

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Joscelin Yeung
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I have expected that EU Top-up summer programme would allow me to have in-depth interaction with high-level diplomats as well as officials from the EU. Also, I expected that I would be able to gain more knowledge about the EU which I did not know before I go to the trip. I expected that there would be some visits to the European commission or parliament which would allow me to understand the functioning of the EU better and to have a chance to take a look at the working place of the officials.

Before the trip, I think that the EU is body which comprises of many European countries and try to figure out solutions to world problems through peaceful negotiations and conferences. EU had a positive image in my mind since it had received the Nobel Peace Prize. I think that EU is a very successful union as it is able to unite so many different countries, including countries such as United Kingdom and Germany which have conflicts with each other back in history.

Overall, I gained a better and deeper understanding about EU through actually stepping on the land of EU and also listening to the officials. One of the highlights of the programme is the face to face interaction with the MEP, which is something that we normally cannot do in usual academic trips. The interaction with the MEP, who was the oldest MEP in the Parliament allowed me to know more about how the MEPs think of the world nowadays. Although the meeting was very short, I was awed by the depth of the answer by the MEP and it was indeed a very enriching experience.

One topic that I found quite interesting is the point on ETS, which I did not really quite understand before the trip. The official was from South Korea and he had a very comprehensive explanation of what Emission Trading system was by using formulas and all that, which gave me a clear idea on what ETS was. I discussed with him about the global energy situation face to face after the session and it was rewarding since he expressed many inspiring ideas on the topic of energy which I believe was worth investigating, such as the

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use of shale gas in the world which might actually affect the whole global supply of energy. The fact that he was from South Korea was also something which was quite surprising for me since I knew that usually its only EU citizens who can work in the EU. The chance to speak to such an acclaimed official from another government during his mission to EU is really a rare and precious chance.

It was my first time to travel to Europe and I travelled with two friends from the programme. It was a pleasure to know so many good friends from different disciplines through this academic programme and by chatting and touring around Brussels with them; it added colours to my trip. Without them I think the whole trip would be less interesting and I would get lost in town if I were alone. The idea of touring around with a large group of peers is really a fascinating idea as we could exchange ideas along the way.