

Internship at the European Parliament, Strasbourg

by *Dominic Meyenburg*, University of Freiburg

I. Departure

I first got the idea of „European Parliament – Live“ when I was a student at the university of Constance. My interest in European, international policy and other countries, especially their language and culture intensified with my proceeding law school studies. Motivated by visiting the European Parliament I decided to apply for a yearlong internship with the office of Mechtild Rothe (Member of the European Parliament) in Strasbourg.

Due to the fact that a session in Strasbourg only takes place once a month (the rest of the time the deputies work in Brussels or in their constituency), there was enough time left to continue my studies at the “Université Robert Schuman” in the course of an Erasmus-year... .

After having a personal interview in her constituency in “Ostwestfalen”, Mrs. Rothe gave me the opportunity to work as an intern in her office in Strasbourg from the 1 of September 2004 to the 31 of July 2005.

II. In the Parliament

In June 2004 I experienced “my” first session in Parliament, during which I was introduced to the office-work by my antecessor (law student).

Thereby, the most important thing was to get familiar with the organisational structure (file- and folder-system) and to obtain a first orientation in the building.

Thus, I got to know the most important administrative offices (where I could get the draft laws, reports and the agenda) and the route I would have to go in order to guide visitor-groups.

The building itself impresses by the multifaceted symbolism. As an example, inside of the building the coalescence of Europe is allegorised by bridges above an imaginary river.

The glass facade embodies the transparency by which European politics should be conducted. The architectural art is particularly interesting as well. It combines the rather practical designed workplaces of the deputies with the representative parts of the building. Last-mentioned are especially designed for the European citizen. All visitor groups are brought there on the official tour.

I was also surprised by the open, friendly behaviour of the deputies and the employees. In all the turbulences and hectic rush that the every-day life in Parliament brings along, the lion's share of the "Parliamentarian Society" was always friendly, helpful and enjoyable.

To associate with people who you only know from the media becomes a part of your everyday life. Still, it is always exciting when shortly before the election of the President of the Commission is "rubber-stamped" by the Parliament, you are standing in front of the elevator with him or when Cem Özdemir (politician of the Green Party in Germany) asks you for advice in the hallway or when the "parliamentary leader" of the PSE-Group Martin Schulz is suddenly sitting next to you in the office of your deputy.

To all students who are planning to do a similar internship, I suggest to be persistent and not to give up because of some difficulties at the beginning. It's not that easy starting out. At the first day of my internship I had some real problems with the accreditation, because my badge (that you need to

enter the building) had not been made yet, and only after a long time and long-lasting discussions with security I could finally enter my new working place. According to the security rules you need to have a special badge to access the parts of the building in which the deputies are doing their job.

Having overcome the first obstacles, it was time to get to know my new day to day work life. While the assistant of Mechtild Rothe was staying in Brussels, I myself had to take over responsibility for the office in Strasbourg.

As a result I always had to stay up to date on the operating process in Parliament, especially on the committee work of Mrs. Rothe. That was the only way to live up to the expectations of my job, which consisted mainly of the coordination of the agenda, organisational work and the management of visitor groups.

Most interesting was to take part in many different committee meetings, sessions of the Socialist Group in the European Parliament (PSE) and the group of the Social Democratic Party of Germany (SPD-Group). This helped me not only to understand the working procedure in parliament, but also to follow the current development in Europe.

I always particularly enjoyed the cooperation with Mrs. Rothe (Member of the European Parliament). Although she was – due to her overfilled agenda – stressed out, we developed a trustful relationship in a comfortable working atmosphere.

Because of her work in the committee I got confronted with different topics, for example the industry-, research-, energy- and foreign policy which not only provided me with an insight of these topics but also enhanced my interest in them.

III. Straßburg: Europastadt, Studium, Freizeit...

During the year spent in Strasbourg I had the opportunity to learn about many aspects of European Law. at the „Universität Robert Schuman“. For my efforts I was rewarded with the certificate „Notions Fondamentales de Droit International, Européen et Comparé“ stating that I have basic knowledge in international, European and Comparative law. The internship provided an ideal supplementation to my studies.

Of course, I did not only work during my stay in France. The friendships and acquaintances I made, contributed to the fact that this year in Strasbourg is unforgettable to me.

The city is defined by the business activity of the European Parliament, the Council of Europe and the European Court of Justice for Human Right giving the cityscape its own European Flair. This explains the miscellaneous cultural offers and the many sports events as well as the vast bar and pub scenery. In the summer the city park, directly next to the European building, and the pond with the typical French name “Baggersee” provide a very worthwhile place for recreation.

IV. Conclusion

All things considered, for me personally the year spent abroad was highly profitable in a lot of ways. The combination of my studies with the internship and the many contacts I made to people from all over the world, caused my positive approach on the coalescence of Europe and international understanding in general to be deepened and strengthened.

My advice for everybody who is interested in such an internship or a year abroad is to actually realize this project. The only downer is, that this internship is not accepted by Baden-Württemberg as a compulsory internship in regard to the regulation on the Examination of Law Student (JaPrO). They only accept internships when they are done from one

month up without interruption. By nature an internship with the European Parliament can only be done for one week per month. Nevertheless this should not stop you from applying.

Certainly it is not easy to receive an internship. Chances are higher, though, if you apply directly at the deputy's office rather than at the central application office.

I wish everybody who decides to take part in such an internship as good a time as I had with many positive experiences.