The activity overview

The travel scholarship that I was awarded has enabled me to participate in the International Summer School Seggau 2009, organised by Karl-Franzens University of Graz at Seggau Castle, Austria from June 27th to July the 11th 2009. The theme of the summer school was ‘State-Society-Religion: The European Model’, which had six parallel seminar module as following: Law & Politics, Economy & Innovation, Society & Culture, History & Power, Ethics & Religion, Media & Communication. Besides the in depth knowledge that I acquired in the first module Law & Politics, I had the opportunity to attend two introductory lectures on the European Identity and general lectures held by each of the professors present at the summer school.

The academic experience

Along with my application being accepted for the summer school, I was granted access to my first choice of specific seminar module, which was Law & Politics. I was attracted to this module because it offered a broader understanding of the concept of the European Union and European Integration because it was not examined just under the political aspect, but through the international law lenses as well. The academic programme was divided in two different segments with each week having a separate lecturer conducting the morning sessions.

The first week my group discussed ‘The European Neighbourhood Policy: Sharing Values or Priorizing Interests?’ taught by Maria del Mar Campins Eritja, Professor of European Law at the University of Barcelona. This was a very interesting and challenging experience for me as I had no particular previous interest in the subject of the European Neighbourhood Policy, this week proved to be an eye-opening time. The subject was broad, as we discussed the policy itself and how it shaped the foreign relations of the European Union with Eastern European countries, South Caucasus countries as well as the Mediterranean and the Middle East countries. I am extremely grateful that had the opportunity to engage and learn from the discussions about the conflicting concepts of identity that the countries have, the different approaches that the European Union has towards them and the implementation of the policy. We also had the opportunity to analyze the actual individual agreements between the European Union and some countries. This was particularly interesting as we were divided in groups that had students from different countries, some from old members of the EU, some from the new, and some from the countries that we were discussing.

Foreign policy was always a strong interest, however this was enriched by the experience of being taught from a interdisciplinary perspective -legal and political- and by discussing with students from countries in completely different situations.
The second week my seminar group discussed the topic ‘The South East European Enlargement of the EU-Chances and Pitfalls’ under the supervision of Dr. Henrietter Rigler from the Austrian Institute of International Affairs. This is a subject I am particularly interested in and I was extremely grateful to increase my knowledge and share opinions regarding sub-themes such as: comparing the East European enlargement with the Western Balkan one, the role of the European Union in the Yugoslav wars and the future of enlargement. The fact that students from the region were present had a great influence on the discussion and one could understand much better what were the effects of the Dayton Agreement on Bosnia, or of the enlargement policy on Macedonia. It was intellectual stimulating and I am very grateful to have been a part of it.

Besides the module that I was a part of, all the students were required to attend evening lectures given by lecturers from all the modules. This enabled me to understand the application of a European model from themes like Economics, going though History, all the way to Religion and give me a deep appreciation of interdisciplinary teachings.

The personal experience

The other great experience that I was privileged to have was the opportunity of spending time and making friends with a very international group of people. Although I have been studying in London for the last year, which is a truly cosmopolitan city, the atmosphere struck me as very international in the summer school. Many of the students present were from East European countries or former Soviet nations and along with some students from West European countries and from Canada provided a very interesting environment. I was happy to make friends with people from as far as Kazakhstan and learn about a country on a first hand basis. It made me realise that young people today are not very different as we seem to have been exposed to very similar things. Moreover, I am happy that I managed to become a part of a network of like-minded young students and maintain friendship based relations.

Conclusion

The scholarship that the university awarded me, along with other financial aid given to me by the Austrian university and a Romanian foundation has enable me to grow, intellectually and personally in so many ways that I find it difficult to express my gratitude. The summer school has opened my eyes to subjects that I didn’t consider before and help me broaden knowledge on subjects that I was already familiar with. Even more, the personal ties that were created between me and fellow students from other countries are an important asset in my view.