Campus Mundi and Erasmus+ Internship Report

Permanent Representation of Bulgaria to the European Union

Dear colleagues,

I am Neli Kirilova, PhD Student in International Relations and Security Studies at the Corvinus University of Budapest (CUB), Hungary. My current internship is at the Permanent Representation of Bulgaria to the European Union in Brussels, Belgium. This Diplomatic Mission of Bulgaria interacts with the Diplomatic Missions of the other EU Member States within thematic working groups of the Council of the EU, dealing with internal and external EU policies. It works in close cooperation with the European External Action Service (EEAS), the EU Delegations, and the Commission Services. This experience perfectly complements my studies in International Relations and Security with practical skills. The highlight for me is double - the EU external policy focus and the 2018 Bulgarian Presidency of the Council.

Professional practice:

Firstly, supervised by career diplomats, I am supporting the Bulgarian Delegation at several working groups at the Council, shaping the EU external policy towards specific geographic regions of my long-term interest. In particular, I regularly attend the working groups dealing with Eastern Europe, Russia, Central Asia, Latin America, and occasionally the Western Balkans. In support of the Mission, I also attend other thematic and geographic working groups. I experience the process of EU creating its external policy, learning how the different Member States negotiate in protection of their specific national priorities, and how the consultation between the European Commission, the European Parliament, the European Council and the European External Action Service leads to a coordinated choice of strategy and action.

Secondly, the duration of my practice is before, during and after the Bulgarian Presidency of the Council of the European Union, which is a unique opportunity once in 14 years. Each Member State has the Presidency for six months, plus preparatory and follow-up periods. Due to it, I have the chance to contribute to the ongoing activities of the Permanent Representation, including a wide range of public diplomacy and cultural diplomacy events, negotiations, conferences and seminars.
Consequently, I am acquiring diplomatic skills, advancing my professional development and sound academic judgement. Through this excellent opportunity I combine my thematic research with practical know-how of shaping the EU foreign policy towards the region I explore. As a result, I am highly motivated to continue working for the international multilateral cooperation, guaranteeing regional peace, stability and security.

**Life in Brussels:**

Belgium, as a host country, is friendly for young professionals, provided that their basic costs are covered. The provided E+ grant could be sufficient for accommodation only. Any other costs should be additionally calculated - approximately double grant is needed to guarantee an acceptable life standard. However, E+ and Campus Mundi provide an opportunity for professional practice at the right destination, which is wonderful. The public transport in Brussels is well organised, different parts of the city are easily accessible. The weather is widely known as rainy and windy, which is actually good precondition for working and research. The winter is gray, with short days, while the summer daylight lasts about 16 hours. Whenever it is sunny, the parks offer a good opportunity for after-work walks. The cultural life is quite diverse – one can easily find whatever they like. For example, I like traditional dance, and I participate in a Bulgarian folk dance group in Brussels.

**Career opportunities:**

The social environment in Brussels is quite enriching. The city is full of international professionals, interested in EU policy making. Different activities, conferences and presentations are organised by the EU institutions, NGOs and think-tanks. For this reason, one can easily find international political and economic events, and to invest their time in exchanging knowledge with peers, searching for solutions to existing world challenges. For example, I was selected as the EU Representative to the “Youth, Peace and Security” EU Conference, organised by the European External Action Service (EEAS) and the National Representative at the European Consultation on the progress study for “Youth inclusion in conflict prevention and sustaining peace” for the implementation of the UNSCR 2250. In addition, I participated in 1) The “Climate, Peace and Security” Conference, organised by the EEAS; 2) several thematic research conferences, organised by the Centre for European Policy Studies (CEPS); 3) Summer Seminar for Young Public Policy Professionals from South-Eastern Europe and the Black Sea region, organised by the Economic Policy Institute; 4) GEM-STONES PhD Summer School in Institutional Proliferation and EU External Action, organised by the...
University of Geneva. These activities were possible due to the well-matching mixture of knowledge and skills, acquired during my training. It greatly contributed to enriching my understanding of how the EU external action influences the stability and security of the Black Sea region, which I explore academically.

In a nutshell, I am absolutely content with my training. I have the chance to be part of the Bulgarian Diplomatic Service during the Presidency of the Council of the EU, and I participate in working groups shaping the EU foreign policy towards the regions I am continuously exploring – the Black Sea region, Central Asia, Latin America and the Western Balkans. For me, this is an excellent combination of academia and diplomacy, leading to sound professional development in my chosen career path. As a result, I am confident to continue working for the EU diplomatic cooperation, aiming stability and prosperity in the Russian speaking, Spanish speaking and Balkan countries.

I am grateful for the provided training to my host organisation, the Permanent Representation of Bulgaria to the EU, a diplomatic mission of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, of my sending organisation, the Corvinus University of Budapest, and of the European Commission and the Tempus Public Foundation for the provided Erasmus+ and Campus Mundi funding. For the listed reasons, I would encourage every student to clearly define their own professional interests. Then, to search for the ways to best develop the specific skills they would need through the suitable for them training.

If one knows where they would like to go, every road will bring them there.

Your Sincerely,

Neli Kirilova