MSC EPP STUDY TRIP TO BRUSSELS

Anna Whicher and Libby Vannet, MSc European Public Policy students write:

Having studied the EU institutions and politics in great depth throughout the year, there was an air of sleepy excitement as everybody arrived at St Pancras station early on the morning of Wednesday 10 June 2009. The results of the European elections were the hot topic of discussion aboard the Eurostar on our way to Brussels and our first glimpse into the practical workings of the EU.

In the morning, Dr Christine Reh had organised for the environmental NGO E3G to host a series of speakers, including Dr Sandra Bartelt from the European Commission’s DG Development, Anja Fiedler, Press Officer for the External Relations Commissioner and Jesse Scott from E3G.

Sandra Bartelt spoke about the legal bases on which EU development policy operates and explained how the EU contributes to global development policy and aid. Anja Fielder described her daily routine as Press Officer for Commissioner Ferrero-Waldner. We also discussed how the Lisbon Treaty would affect EU external relations. Jesse Scott explained how E3G operates in Brussels and the impact that NGOs can have on the EU policy-making process. She gave us a particular insight into how lobbying groups work on the ground. The talks were particularly interesting as we could apply our course knowledge to a practical context.

Over lunch, we had the opportunity to ask questions, before we headed to the European Parliament. Gergely Polner, a Hungarian lawyer who worked at the Parliament, spoke about how the Parliament worked and a lively discussion took place on the recent European election. We had the chance to have a brief look at the Parliament Chamber where we observed the Economic and Social Committee in session. Tim Beyer Helm, who works for the European People’s Party, spoke about David Cameron’s decision to leave the European People’s Party which was fascinating. As a pro-European British Tory and Policy Advisor to the EPP, Mr Beyer Helm was well placed to explain the nuances of party influence at the European level.

After a day of captivating and thought-provoking talks we went to a bar on Place Luxembourg to meet a few of last year’s students and share experiences. This was a great opportunity to discover the wide range of career options and hear about day to day life in Brussels. Later, those who were only staying for the day left for the Eurostar back to London, while the rest, who had decided to stay the night in order to make the most of our Euro-experience, went in search of fondue and chocolate!

The trip was a great success in its combination of intellectually-stimulating talks with informal chats about daily life in the EU. A huge thanks to Christine for arranging such an interesting and fun study trip!