European Union Centers of Excellence
Trip to Brussels, Belgium, June 2013

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In June of 2013, I had the incredible opportunity to travel to Brussels to learn about the European Union and EU-US relations. As a French teacher, this was not only a chance for me to learn a great deal about the EU, but also an opportunity to bring stories of these experiences back to my classroom to show students the importance of language learning, global citizenship and understanding international relationships. I was in for an adventure!

Our first day began with a visit to the European Commission Headquarters. The Commission is an executive branch that proposes legislation, policies and budget and is considered the ‘watchdog’ of the EU. We learned how decisions are made within the EU as well as which decisions are left to the individual Member States. Experts discussed with us the process of enlargement, economic stability, balance of power and European solidarity to foster peaceful relations. The European Parliament (which exists in Strasbourg, France in addition to Brussels) was our next stop. The Parliament supervises the Commission, approves finances and passes laws. It is also the center that promotes European values and provides support for energy and transport policies within the EU. Members of the Parliament are elected; while we were in Brussels, there were 754 members. We also attended a meeting of the Foreign Affairs Committee of the European Parliament on developments in Georgia and the EU-Malaysia partnership, which was exciting to witness!

Day two we visited the European Network Against Racism (ENAR). Here, we learned of another part of international relations and difficulties that Europe has with racial inequities. Europa was a great source of information; we made a quick stop there to grab some realia for our classes back home. Next, at the European External Action Service (EEAS), we were informed about general EU-US relations, trade agreements such as TTIP, and global environmental and energy issues.

Day three of our journey took us to the US Mission to the EU, where we were briefed on the role of the US Mission in regards to EU-US relations. We learned of developments in the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP). In the afternoon, we met with the Secretary General of Bruegel, a think tank on European politics and economics. As the Euro crisis is still an economic reality, we learned more on the crisis from a European standpoint.
Day four was highlighted by a visit to the **Council of the European Union** where laws are adopted, economic and foreign security policies are coordinated, and budgets are approved. The afternoon took us to a tour of the **NATO Headquarters** (OTAN in French), a political and military power. We heard briefings on current NATO political issues, the US Mission to NATO and on NATO-EU relations.

There was so much excitement every day of our trip to Belgium. This was an amazing learning experience for me with great memories. Not only did I meet wonderful people, but my French classroom has been transformed because I now have first-hand knowledge of the European Union. I am better able to assist my French students in making cultural connections from a European perspective. With these added viewpoints, I encourage students to consider historical and current-day realities as we discuss France and other francophone countries around the world.

I send my most sincere thanks to the European Union Centers of Excellence for allowing me to have this incredible opportunity.

Very Best Regards,

SuAnn Schroeder