

Jean Monnet EU-Canada Network Internship

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The internship began by meeting prof. Tatjana Muravska, Denize Ponomarjova and Romans Putans. (I met Zane Zeibote much later, and at the Canada Day reception). I was introduced to four projects available and where my involvement was needed. Two of the projects were publishing projects; one celebrating CETS, and the other organizing academic articles for The Baltic Journal of EU Studies. The third project was about organizing an EU business tour scheduled for later in the year in November. The fourth project was with Prof. Toms Rostoks organizing a conference on security, but unfortunately, I did not get to work on this. Regular meetings were scheduled with Miss Ponomarjova, and due to the time of the academic year, meetings with my other university contacts moved to skype, phone and email communication. I regularly received the updates and requests to participate to other university tasks like contributing to several additional smaller editing projects related to regional cooperation, conducted surveys on engaging older work force, as well as cooperation on rehabilitation with water treatment. In addition, I decided to start taking an intensive Russian language course. It just happened so that one of the best Russian language schools in Riga was located in the building where I rented the apartment.

My Master's Research Proposal (MRP) topic is nation-state building in Balkans; specifically, exploring the language, ethnicity and religion components in the nation building. The major part of any nation-state building enterprise is based on the presentation of national history and memory politics. The similarities between two specific regions are significant, historically the Polish/Russian/Prussian and Austro-Hungarian/Ottoman empires, with recent independence, a Soviet/socialist history and influence, some EU and NATO experience, the historical language and religious issues and a recent past of historical events not quite acknowledged, i.e., WWII, 20th century experience of socialism, 1918 nation awakening in post WWI. These similarities are evident in museum exhibitions, day-to-day communication and the choice of language (Latvian or Russian), street names, choice of Statutory holidays and how they are celebrated, national food, and religious institutions. Russian presence through the Russian Orthodox Church is evident in almost all Orthodox Churches active and restored in Riga; where historical presence of Russian people in the Baltics is used today as political statement of the foreign, yet neighboring country. On another hand, Latvian state attempts to equalized both Nazi and Communist experiences. In either case, Latvian people are presented as victims (which is typical for nation (re)building projects). Victimization ultimately leads to noncritical review of nation's history which is the topic that overwhelms the historians of the Balkans too. One of the best exploratory articles I have read on the topic of dealing with recent history is written by Ljiljana Radonić (2017) "Post-communist invocation of Europe: memorial museums' narratives and the Europeanization of memory", *National Identities*, 19:2, 269-288, DOI: 10.1080/14608944.2016.1264377. I visited almost all museums mentioned in the article and saw for myself the history making in action. I visited even more museums from Tallinn to Vilnius: pre and post WWII memorials, pre and post WWI memorials and landmarks, privately owned occupation museums, national and city history museums, listened to the states' approved guide tours, and official narratives, talked to people on the markets, shops and churches.

Busy with daily Russian language classes, my University of Latvia tasks, and side trips on the weekends, I completed my MRP work by reading primary sources relevant to how the state informs the population of their belonging and nationhood through history textbooks. The benefit of my internship in Latvia unpacked another important question which adds a valuable dimension to my MRP research: Is it possible to live and prosper with contested history and what are the implications of a non-reconciled past? I will certainly try to answer these questions in my MRP, drawing not only from what I learnt about nation-(re)building in Balkans through history textbooks, but also what I learnt about the Baltics witnessing the nation-(re)building through monuments, museums, national holidays and stories of people I've met.

Some advice for the internship:

After learning that I was accepted for an internship, my first step was to pull from my mental database the names of people traveling or living in Riga; the goal was to learn about people and customs, but also to learn about Riga. I got in touch with friends and acquaintances from both the embassy of Latvia in Ottawa and the embassy of Canada in Riga. Latvians were described as very kind people yet reserved. And this proved to be true in my experience as well.

Given that I had to incorporate my EU Summer Tour into the Atlantic crossing, I decided to start my internship on June 16. If you are a music lover, this may be late for regular concerts in the city (the musical scene is very active and quite affordable), as this is the end of the regular music scene and artists move to many summer festivals. Latvia and the Baltics are famous for their summer music festivals, however it may be difficult to reach those places without a car, especially for the evening performances.

Renting a car in Riga is simple, but if you are planning to drive to other Baltic states, the rental companies are charging extra for "crossing the border". So, for my side trips to the rest of the Baltics I took the weekend bus tours.

With a Canadian passport you can visit all EU countries, Belarus (by plane up to 5 days w/o visa), and Ukraine. For Russia you will need to obtain the visa in advance, and I recommend doing all paperwork while still in Ottawa, because it's simpler.

Airbnb was my first point to find accommodation. I found a reasonably priced accommodation just on the canal on Raiņa bulvāris (street named after the famous Latvian poet) between the old town and the University of Latvia (Kalpaka bulvāris 4). I selected a few properties and contacted the owners and negotiated a significant discount, given that this was not a simple visit of several days, but a two-month stay. Looking back, I realize that I could have found probably cheaper rent. It is a good piece of information that the average monthly salary in Riga is 770 euros.

For buying health insurance I had a few options, but decided for RBC Visa top up, since I was already covered with them for the first 30 days outside Canada. Visa has a good program for any ticket purchases, hotel reservations, health insurance, as I was fully covered for any cancellations, loss of luggage, accidents. For the airfare ticket I recommend buying directly through the carrier, because of the recent introduction of "light economy" that does not include your standard 23 kg. Intermediaries like Flighthub or Skyscanner, etc., will not let you know whether you have luggage included until a few days before the flight. And that costs extra \$60 per direction. I highly recommend shopping for affordable rent, air ticket, and insurance as early as possible. As the date of departure approached, all becomes more expensive. Uber is available both in Estonia and Lithuania, but not in Latvia. However, BOLT is a regional provider and largely available throughout the Baltics. The Bolt drive from the airport to downtown is anywhere between 5-10 euros. There is a bus service that can take you to downtown for 2 euros per ride.

Creating the support network was very important for me. I did what I could to meet and hang out with Latvians, but that proved insufficient despite my extroverted nature. I regularly checked in with my family in Ottawa, but a 7-hour difference was a challenge. I had friends and family in Europe (in the same time zone) that I stayed in touch with during my whole stay in the Baltics. I had a cohort friend with an internship in Brussels that visited me. And I stayed in touch with my cohort, especially those already outside of Canada. I reconnected with friends that I met in Canada and visited them in Vilnius, Tallinn, and Kyiv. I set up this whole network while still being in Canada, and just followed up from Riga.

As instructed by my landlord I took the Bolt from the airport. Even though Riga is only a population of 600,000, like in any city, taxi drivers may drive you in circles. The Bolt application gave me a peace of mind, and I could follow my ride on the map. My landlord was waiting for me with the key and basic introductions upon arrival on Sunday. While still at the airport I purchased the local sim card too. My selection was ZZ provider.

Once in the apartment, I sent out three messages: to Carleton's internship coordinator, and my family to tell them that I arrived and I am safe, and to my university supervisor, Prof. Muravska, to inquire about a convenient time to meet. I

then walked to Stockman (a little bit on high-end supermarket) and bought the basics. Tap water is safe to drink in Latvia, so my first purchase of gallon of water was unnecessary. The opening hours of shops in Riga are similar to Canada, almost always open. It's always a good thing to know oneself, but this could be priceless skill when faced with traveling alone. It was helpful to create some routines. Of course, I had some of the routine fill up with my daily class attendance, but I introduced some extra too: instead of buying food like in Canada (once per week), I was shopping daily. The fresh food market was a great way to buy and eat healthy but also opportunity to speak Russian. I discovered that bookstores and antique shop sellers were not that busy, so I would go daily to different stores, and talk to the staff about everything and anything I was able to say in Russian.