

The 2025 EU Study Tour was an informative interdisciplinary experience for me as a master's student at NPSIA. I received my Bachelor of Arts degree in International Relations (European Regional Concentration and a Thematic Concentration in Institutions and Governance) with a Minor in Geography in June 2022, after which I moved to Yellowknife, Northwest Territories, to work for the Department of Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs Canada. As an undergraduate student, I had plenty of opportunities to engage with various topics in European studies. As a result, I took several courses that touched on the EU and NATO as intergovernmental organisations and the justifications behind their existence based on key theories in international relations. Some of my other courses covered European colonisation and imperialism, the foundation of International Relations as a field of study originating from the European nation-state and Westphalian systems, and the totalitarian regimes of Fascist Italy, Nazi Germany, and the USSR under Joseph Stalin. My undergraduate degree also included a language requirement, which I met through completing four German courses. In addition to learning the German language, the courses included material on the cultures and histories of Germany, Switzerland, Austria, and Liechtenstein, as well as discussions on Germany as a key EU member state. In addition to the pre-departure classes with Dr. Crina Viju-Miljusevi, I felt well prepared to participate in the tour and expand on my knowledge of international affairs in the context of European integration and security.

Our group consisted of 24 students from across Canada studying various fields such as biology, political science, history, and economics, which enhanced my learning experience. With such a diverse cohort, I learned a lot about my fellow Study Tour members by conversing with them as individuals and listening to the sorts of questions

they asked during institutional visits and panel discussions. I especially enjoyed observing how different students' academic and personal backgrounds influenced the questions they posed to presenters. My example of this is from our visit to the Belgian Royal Institute for International Relations, where Wannes Verstraete (a PhD Candidate) gave us a presentation on his research surrounding nuclear deterrence. While discussing the history of nuclear proliferation and South Africa's total disarmament in the early 1990s, I asked Mr. Verstraete about whether he came across racially-charged narratives used to justify South Africa's nuclear disarmament, given the looming end of white-minority rule and fears of reprisal by the new government; as a black South African, I felt that the question was worth asking based on my personal relationship with the topic, for which I received positive feedback from our instructor and fellow my fellow students.

Of all the presentations we received during the 19-day-long tour, I found that by Faruk Kaymakci (Türkiye's Permanent Delegate to the EU) to be the most informative and enlightening. His presentation was on Turkish accession to the EU, where he discussed the ongoing stall in negotiations while highlighting the benefits that Turkish accession could bring to the EU. However, what appealed to me most was his refreshingly candid approach when discussing Türkiye's turbulent relations with Cyprus and Greece and their effects on Türkiye's accession process, which inspired me to cover that topic in my post-Tour paper. The Ambassador's frankness was a marked departure from the more diplomatic and "sanitary" presentations we received during our other visits and is undoubtedly a highlight of my Study Tour experience.

Perhaps my key takeaway from the Study Tour involves 1) the role of morality in international relations and 2) intergovernmental organisations' ability to act independently of their constituent members. During the Study Tour, many of my fellow

“classmates” admittedly grew frustrated with the lack of meaningful responses to their questions and criticisms of EU and NATO inaction and perceived apathy in the face of serious geopolitical issues such as the War in Gaza and the rise of neo-imperialism. I empathised with their dissatisfaction as I once shared many of the same sentiments in the early years of my undergrad, but eventually grew to understand and – begrudgingly – accept that treaty-based intergovernmental organisations are ultimately instruments of their constituent members, operating based on well-established and legally binding procedures and provisions written in a specific historical context and in such a way that either explicitly advances the creators’ interests and/or prevents members from being geopolitically disadvantaged in future due to their membership in that organisation. An excellent example is Chapter V of the United Nations Charter, which codifies permanent membership and veto power to the five major powers that emerged after the Second World War. In the context of the EU and NATO, consensus-based decision-making on key matters, while presenting an undeniable hindrance to their ability to act in times of specific global crises, is a strategic mechanism that affords states the ability to defend their own interests, often with no regard for morality. I must admit that my four years as an undergraduate student converted me from being more ideologically aligned with the liberal theory of international relations to being a disillusioned neoclassical realist. The visits and presentations we received during the Study Tour did not reveal anything new to me; instead, they reaffirmed my outlook on international relations.