

Eric Pietrasik  
M.A. Candidate, Institute of European, Russian and Eurasian Studies  
Carleton University  
EU Study Tour 2024 Report

The European Union (EU) Study Tour offers a unique opportunity to engage directly with a diverse array of European institutions across Brussels, Luxembourg, and Frankfurt. Our cohort had the privilege of exploring the inner workings of key bodies, including the European Council, the Council of the European Union, the European Parliament, the European Commission and its various Directorates-General, the European Central Bank, and the Court of Justice of the European Union. Through these experiences, we gained a deeper understanding of each institution's roles and responsibilities while simultaneously examining the critical challenges currently facing the EU and its member states. Among the most pressing issues discussed were divergent policy responses to Russia's invasion of Ukraine and its implications for NATO, the green transition amid Europe's ongoing energy crisis, migration pressures and their impact on the Schengen area, and concerns about democratic backsliding, to name a few. Beyond intra-EU decision-making, the tour provided valuable insights into the EU's role as both a regional and global actor. This was complemented by visits to NATO and consulates (and missions) from Canada and Turkey, offering a broader perspective on the EU's interactions with key international partners and its position within the global geopolitical landscape.

The EU Study Tour had a profound impact on my research, providing invaluable insights and perspectives that enrich my analysis of media narratives surrounding the War in Ukraine. This experience was particularly relevant as I examine these narratives within three distinct geopolitical contexts: Poland, the UK, and the US. For example, our visits to the European External Action Service (EEAS) and the European Council shed light on the complexities of EU member state cooperation and contention over sanctions against Russia, NATO's role in the conflict, and approaches to managing external actors like NATO allies in dealings with Moscow. Additionally, these discussions highlighted the war's broader implications for the EU's institutional framework, including challenges related to the rule of law, democratic principles, and intra-EU decision-making processes. Ultimately, gaining insight into the EU's approaches toward Russia and the dynamics of the Transatlantic relationship in addressing the spillover effects of the war has greatly enriched my understanding of the conflict's influence on public opinion and policymaking. This experience highlighted how specific information and narratives related to the war shape both public perceptions and the development of strategic responses by Brussels.

In addition to the academic and policy insights gained from the EU Study Tour, participating in an internship program with a European institution was an invaluable opportunity and a pivotal step toward understanding EU policymaking. Following the tour, I interned at the European Commission's Directorate-General for Taxation and Customs Union (DG-TAXUD). This enriching experience provided a firsthand perspective on European policymaking processes, as I conducted economic and policy analyses to support legislative initiatives in the areas of competition and taxation. My responsibilities included evaluating impact assessments for upcoming EU legislative proposals, developing repositories for European Commission impact assessments, performing ex-post evaluations of existing legislation ("Have Your Say" initiatives), drafting the Terms of Reference for external studies, and submitting consultation reports, which offered a comprehensive understanding of segments of the EU's Annual Report on Taxation (ART24). The study tour and internship were invaluable experiences that provided students with a deep understanding of the EU and a practical,

hands-on perspective on how policies are developed within its institutions – all while being an engaging and rewarding journey with unmatched networking opportunities.