



My internship experience in Brussels

Opinion

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From home to Brussels

Last September, I traded the beautiful city of Groningen for the heart of the European Union: Brussels. Fortunately, I quickly found a cozy room just a five-minute walk from the European Parliament. The day after my move, I began my internship at the Royal Association of Dutch Shipowners (KVNR). Here, I work alongside a team of experts, each with different specializations, united by a common goal: to effectively represent the interests of the Dutch shipping industry.

During my studies, I had the opportunity to work for a Dutch shipowner, which marked my first introduction to the shipping industry. This time, however, I am focusing on a broader range of issues and working at the policy level for the industry. The KVNR's work in Brussels centers around critical topics such as transition financing for ships, alternative fuels, emissions regulations, the strategic importance of the shipping industry to the EU, competitiveness, and other pressing matters. The impact of EU legislation on the Dutch shipping industry is significant, and given the central role of shipping in the European economy, nearly every economic change in Europe directly affects our sector.

I was particularly drawn to the internship at the KVNR because of the international nature of the shipping industry and how closely related the issues are to my studies in International Security. The shipping industry is not only vital to the global economy but also plays a crucial role in international security matters, particularly in the protection of global trade routes.

In my role, I have the opportunity to actively contribute to the KVNR's objectives by analyzing new EU legislation, preparing discussions with stakeholders, and attending and organizing events.

From theory to practice

During my studies, I gained insights into how the EU operates, including the legislative process, the roles of the Council, Commission, and Parliament, and how EU legislation can sometimes lead to increased regulation. My focus was often on the formal aspects of politics. However, in the past few weeks, I've gained a new perspective. EU legislation in Brussels can sometimes originate in informal settings—such as cafés, restaurants, over a beer, or even, as I learned from a colleague, at the gym. Daily, countless conversations occur between interest groups, MEPs, their assistants, and officials from the Commission and other EU institutions. These informal interactions are crucial to the policy-making process.

Although the KVNR is relatively new in Brussels, it has quickly established itself and is working to expand and strengthen its network step by step. Effective advocacy in Brussels involves building relationships, recognizing the right moments to exert influence, and often requiring patience and persistence to make those small but significant advances. My experience in Brussels has transformed and deepened my understanding of how the EU operates, and I'm continually reminded of the importance for our sector to be actively and proactively involved in policy-making.

In the coming period, I will focus on several key topics for the shipping industry, including sustainable ship financing, promoting alternative fuels, and monitoring the plans of the new European Commission. Additionally, I will continue to work on expanding our network in Brussels, engaging in ongoing dialogue with various stakeholders both within and outside the EU. This dynamic and challenging internship provides me with the opportunity to deepen my knowledge of international security while nurturing my interest in EU policy.

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