



Tour to Brussels with the Hungarian Fulbright Association

Travel diary written by David Keringer

First and foremost, I would like to express my gratitude to the European Parliament, which sponsored our visit to Brussels, to the Hungarian Fulbright Association and its president, György Kovács for the planning and organization of the events, to the Hungarian Ambassador to Belgium, Tamás Iván Kovács, to Erika Antal, Branch Head of the Resource Management Branch at NATO Office of Resources, to Erica Lutes, Executive Director of the Fulbright Schuman Commission, her staff for their incredible work and to Antonio Amendola for the reception at the Sofitel Hotel.

During our stay we were invited to 7 institutions in Brussels and also had the opportunity to visit the sights of the city.

First day, June 15

Visit at the NATO Headquarters

Our first visit was to the NATO Headquarters where we were received by Zoltán Nagy, Ambassador and Permanent Representative of Hungary to the North Atlantic Council. He presented us a brief overview of the most important agenda items of the upcoming Madrid summit and substantial priorities in NATO's strategy. We discussed global security challenges as well as NATO's efforts to overcome these. We were excited to learn more about NATO's political agenda from Petr Lunak, Deputy Head of the Public Diplomacy Division and NATO's response to the Russian invasion of Ukraine by Vineta Kleine, the director of NIDC in Kyiv. We are grateful for Antónia Szilárd of NATO's Engagement Section for her hospitality and guidance throughout our visit.



Visit at the Fulbright Commission Brussels

After a hearty lunch at the *La Brace* Italian restaurant near the city center, we headed to the Fulbright Commission of Brussels on the 6th floor of the Royal Library of Belgium. Elisabeth Bloxam, Sonny Willems and Jasper Anthony introduced us to the exchange programs between the United States, Belgium and Luxembourg. We learned about the Fulbright Schuman Program, which offers scholarships focusing on EU and EU/US transatlantic affairs. We have seen several examples from the hugely diverse research topics of the previous years.

I went for a walk in the wonderful *Jardin du Mont des Arts*, visited the famous *Manneken Pis* statue, spent a couple of minutes in between the impressive buildings of the *Grand-Place* and I had my first ever portion of fries made in Belgium.

Reception at the Residency of the U.S. Embassy

We arrived to the Embassy of the United States of America later that day. We were invited by the Ambassador of the United States to Belgium, Mr. Michael M. Adler to an elegant event organized for recent Fulbrighters. We were greeted by Him, by the Prime Minister of Belgium - Fulbright Alum, Alexander De Croo and by Erica Lutes, the Executive Director of the Fulbright Commission Brussels.

Second day, June 16

Visit at the Hungarian Embassy of Belgium

The next day started with a visit to the Embassy of Hungary, located in a lovely suburban area of the Brussels-Capital Region. The Ambassador and Fulbright Alum, Tamás Iván Kovács, Imre Takács and Balázs Varsányi informed us about the work at the Hungarian Embassy, the Hungarian Diaspora Council and their several programs focusing on diplomacy and culture. They spent their time with us generously answering our questions. We had the possibility to hear interesting stories about the life of Hungarian expats and their local cultural institutions. The Hungarian Embassy to Belgium celebrated its 100th year anniversary and each one of us received a set of unique stamps issued for this occasion.

Visit at Permanent Representation of Hungary to the European Union

Hopping back into a train, heading to the city center we were able to have a look at the modern architecture of the European Union's building complexes. At the Permanent Representation of Hungary to the European Union, we met the Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary, Bálint Ódor and the Head of Cabinet, Zsuzsanna Beszteri. We had a long and pleasant conversation with them about the European Peace Facility, the aid for the Ukraine, the sanctions imposed to the Russian Federation and Hungary's participation in the European institutions.

After those visits I left the city center and travelled to the Mini-Europa Park in the northern part of Brussels. As I arrived shortly before closing time, I could enjoy a walk almost alone across the models of significant European buildings. I listened to the Hungarian anthem in front of a miniature version of the Széchenyi Thermal Bath and had a glance at the iconic Atomium throughout my stay.

Reception of the Transatlantic Alumni Network (TAN) at the Hotel Sofitel Louise

Antonio Amendola, the president of the TAN organized a rooftop dinner in a stylish venue of the Sofitel Louise Hotel for the members of the Hungarian Fulbright Association and the Transatlantic Alumni Network. We saw some familiar faces from the past few days and had a nice chat with each other.

Third day, June 17

Visit at the European Parliament

On our third day in Brussels we finally entered the grandiose glass building of the European Parliament, which already crossed our paths several times in the past few days. After the usual security check-in – with which we already had some experience – we were able to walk through the complex, where the members of the Parliament work. There was a thorough presentation about the operation of the institution. We discussed the history of the European Union, the purpose of the European Parliament, the European Commission and the European Council. With detailed illustrations we were able to get various important information about the competences of the EU, further interesting facts about the amount of seats each member country has, the distribution of the Political Groups, the Parliamentary Committees, the financial structure and their working calendar for 2022 as well.

After the presentation we had an extensive tour of the building. We visited the Chamber for the plenary sittings and the famous Mickey Mouse Bar, where according to the presentation, important conversations are taking place on a regular basis. We walked through an interesting exhibition of various artworks of the member countries in the foyer of the József Antall building.



Visit at the European External Action Service (EEAS)

The last stop of our diplomatic tour was in the European External Action Service. András Kós talked about the EU/NATO relationships with Ukraine and the security of the EU during the Russian-Ukrainian crisis.

