Message from the Director

In a few weeks’ time, citizens across the EU-28 will go to the polls to elect 751 members of the European Parliament. As program alums certainly remember, Community-wide turn out for EP elections has fallen in every successive EP election since 1979. Many pundits are suggesting that this depressing trend will continue in 2014. They are also predicting that far-right and nationalist parties will make sizeable gains. Within the EU, it seems, enthusiasm for the process of European integration is at a low ebb.

Indeed, over the last six months, the world’s most enthusiastic advocates of European integration have been in . . . Ukraine. The scenes that emerged on the streets of Kiev in November and December of 2013 were heartening for Europhiles. Young, enthusiastic citizens from various backgrounds and social classes flooded into Independence Square to wave European flags, to appeal for help from the West, to greet Lady Ashton, etc. The proximate cause of their protests was President Yanukovych’s eleventh-hour retreat from a Ukraine-EU association agreement that had been in the works for years.

Of course, the scenes from Kiev, Crimea, and eastern Ukraine that we have seen more recently have hit more at the stomach than at the heart. Russia has made a bald expansionist grab, and leaders in the EU and the US have struggled to respond. Headlines speak (sometimes with a question mark, other times without) of a “New Cold War.” Is this hyperbole? To what extent are we witnessing a new Cold War? And what do the developments in the east portend for the evolving relationship between the EU and the US?

One real hallmark of the Cold War was a strong political, military, and economic alliance between Europeans and Americans. “Containment” would have been impossible without this alliance, and the very process of European integration took place within the context of the alliance. Headscratching about the dawn of a “new Cold War” presents a great opportunity to think about the transatlantic relationship. Are the United States and the EU still each others’ most important partners? Trade statistics, investment statistics, and so many other indicators suggest that they are. Why, then, is common transatlantic action—not only to Russian aggression in Ukraine, but to other foreign policy crises, economic threats, and environmental challenges—so difficult? Yes, the EU and the US are negotiating the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP), but the going is slow, the entrenched interests are many, and the transatlantic trust (in this post-Snowden age) may have been shaken. Where is the transatlantic partnership headed?

All articles in this issue of the newsletter address this question from different angles. Current student Liz Hammer reports on a recent photo exhibit that focused on the American presence in Italy during WWII and on the experience of attending the exhibit with a group of Italian peers from the University of Florence. Liz also provides more information about the upcoming EP elections and the ways that election results might affect Europe’s (and particular member states’) approach to the US. Emily Slifer, who graduated from the program in 2013, shares her unique experiences having worked for the European Parliament in both Washington, DC and Brussels. Finally, Liz reports on a recent visit to Florence by Dan Caprio, a JMU alum who has been active for decades in the transatlantic relationship.

I hope that the pieces, when read together, provide a series of illuminating angles on the question of “where the transatlantic relationship stands today” and help to redouble readers’ (whether North American or European) commitment to a strong transatlantic partnership.
Oggi a Firenze

Museo Alinari, located near Chiesa Santa Maria Novella in Florence, hosted work from world famous photographer Robert Capa in January 2014. Mr. Capa is a photojournalist who has covered several wars, including World War II. His pictures focus on the human elements of war and usually depict soldiers on their down time eating and socializing, being helped by locals, and even interacting with soldiers from the opposing side in friendly ways.

A few EUPS students attended the event with our simulation counterparts from the University of Florence. This grouping perfectly complimented the exhibition, since the exhibit focused on American platoons stationed in Italy during WWII. It was very interesting to go through the exhibit as an American and then hear the perspectives of the Italian students. Each of us had different stories to contribute. Some of the American

We all came to a consensus about some of our favorite pictures in the show. One showed an elderly Italian gentleman acting as a guide and leading American soldiers through a town. Another showed an American soldier carrying a small Italian girl with no shoes and tattered clothes through the streets. Many pictures showed the destruction of Italian towns and the effect the destruction had of Italian citizens. These photos served as a reminder of the strong connection the US has to Italy and the rest of Europe. This exhibit, at least to us, underlined the importance of EU and US cooperation and for the existence of the EU in general to prevent destruction as shown in the pictures from occurring again.

By
Liz Hammer
The upcoming EU elections are a hot topic in European politics right now. The new process is a bit confusing, but can be described as follows: “European political parties are this year nominating candidates for the position of European Commission president in a bid to increase interest in the European Parliament elections. While it is the member state governments who appoint the Commission president, their choice must be confirmed by the European Parliament. Proponents of the new system say member states should appoint the candidate of whichever group receives the most votes in May’s election” (Keating, 2013).

The Party of European Socialists (PES) chose German MEP Martin Schulz as its nominee. This was determined a few months ago in a PES conference in Rome, that could be compared to a US party rally. The European Liberals (ALDE) nominated former Belgian MEP Guy Verhofstadt. Far-left Greek MP Alexis Tsipras has been chosen to represent the far-left GUE group. Mr. Tsipras has begun campaigning across Europe, and many European countries will feature a party list with national candidates, headed by Mr. Tsipras. In a historic primary, the first ever Europe-wide open online process to select leading candidates for the European elections, the Greens have chosen a team to lead them: José Bove from France and Ska Keller from Germany. Jean-Claude Junker, former PM of Luxemburg and influential Eurogroup president is the candidate of the currently largest party group, the EPP.

The most striking new feature of this campaign is that Europe-wide debates between the Commission candidates will be televised on several occasions for the first time in the history of European elections. This will give the candidates a chance to voice their opinions about why they should be elected and what they believe the future of the European Union should look like in terms of integration, economics and actions on the international stage. One of these debates coincides with the State of the Union conference taking place on May 9 in Palazzo Vecchio in Firenze. EUPS students will have the chance to attend the debate and ask questions to the candidates. Televising these debates brings these elections closer to the US model, as the candidates will attempt to appeal to a continental electorate and voting will be more personality-based. A major concern with these elections is the rising number of euroskeptic parties and supporters in EU countries. As much as 25% of the EU population could vote in favor of these anti-EU parties. The election of anti-integration, anti-EU candidates could have serious implications for the EU vision to become more active internationally and also on the transatlantic relationship. UK euroskeptics, for instance, favor UK-US ties over US-EU ties, which could possibly disrupt other member states’ relations with the US. The outcome of these elections will determine what kind of actor the EU will become and what the future of EU-US ties will be.
The James Madison EUPS program was privileged to welcome Mr. Dan Caprio, a James Madison University alumnus, into the Palazzo in mid-March. Mr. Caprio graduated from JMU with a political science degree and has experience in both the federal government and private firms. Mr. Caprio delivered a two part lecture series: the first was focused on resume building and job hunting, and the second was a very detailed lecture on the Safe Harbor negotiations and cybersecurity.

Some of the words of wisdom Mr. Caprio gave to us were to continually update our resumes, be ready to accept almost any job, even if it is not quite in our desired field, and to be assertive when it comes to networking and asking people for career advice and connections. More specifically, Mr. Caprio reminded us that it is important to maintain your network. His advice as to touch base with your connections at least in six-month increments, but even more frequently if possible. When it comes time to ask for advice or if they can provide a connection, Mr. Caprio emphasized the need to be specific. He told us to identify certain agencies, bureaus, or jobs that we are interested in to help the person help as best as they can. Finally, he reminded us that it is a tough market out there and that using our JMU alumni network and other connections from internships is the best way to navigate the challenge of finding a job.

Mr. Caprio’s lecture on Safe Harbor focused on the importance of data protection both in the US and the EU. The US and EU have very different approaches when it comes to data protection. The US uses what Caprio calls a sectoral approach, which focuses on medical records, financial information, and protection of children. On the other hand, the EU views data privacy and protection as a fundamental right afforded to all citizens. The EU has established overarching legislation to ensure protection of data, which makes the US’ system look severely inadequate. In order to fix these discrepancies, the EU and US established the Safe Harbor program which combines US FTC and EU enforcement activities. However, both the EU and US have found flaws with this program. The EU wants more transparency within the program while the US has issued complaints about how the program functions. These disagreements about cybersecurity within Safe Harbor mirror the disagreements the two actors are also having within the TTIP negotiations about data protection. It is unclear what the future or both Safe Harbor or TTIP will be. We thank Mr. Caprio for this lecture, as it was new information that helps further our understanding of the transatlantic relationship.
I am not the first EUPS alumni to intern in the European Parliament. Nor will I be the last (especially if Caterina has any say in it). But I have had the unique opportunity to work for the EP in both Washington, DC and in Brussels, Belgium. I have spent the last 6 months as an intern for the European Parliament Liaison Office with the US Congress (EPLO). EPLO is a small office of 11 individuals located in the heart of DC. EPLO’s purpose is to strengthen ties between EU and US legislators. I spent three months in DC attending hearings on the Hill, think tank events, and aiding in delegation visits. I was then sent on mission to work in Brussels on the foreign affairs committee (AFET) for Silvio Gonzato.

Interning for EPLO is very different than a typical DC internship. EPLO only takes US graduate students as interns. The reason for this is that they want US insight; people who know the US system and have an interest in European policy. The staff in the office were extremely knowledgeable, but, at the end of the day, they were not Americans. So they valued our opinions. I was often asked what I thought about things people said at hearings on the Hill and at think tank events. To me, this was a sign of how much the European Parliament valued its US relationship and wanted to understand the US perspective on various topics.

We had an MEP who came over on a delegation visit to look into the NSA scandal who particularly stuck with me because he directly asked me my opinion. I was escorting the MEP to an interview. In the cab, he looked directly at me and asked, “what do you think of what the NSA has done”? It took me a moment to respond because I was stunned that an MEP would care about the thoughts of an

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US. Once again, I was surprised at his genuine interest in what an American intern thought.

I realized through working at EPLO that Europeans are actually interested in US politics. The same cannot be said about most Americans when it comes to European politics. There are those who focus on specific policy issues, but there are not enough who look at EU politics as a whole and European public opinion. This is the alumni newsletter, so I know that I am preaching to the choir. It has been striking to me, though, that many in the US do not look at the EU as a valuable ally.

After working for the European Parliament for nearly six months, I finally came up with an answer to the commonly asked “Why are you interested in the EU?” It’s a question that has been asked since I graduated from the EUPS program, and it’s one that I’ve received countless times from people in the European Parliament. I value the EU-US relationship. In an increasingly globalized world, strengthening transatlantic relations is a key for US and EU growth. I believe that there are not enough Americans who value this relationship, and I want to work to not only strengthen this transatlantic relationship, but to shed light on its importance to US citizens. The EUPS program granted us a unique opportunity to learn and experience EU politics, and I hope to now use the knowledge and skills I’ve gained to continue to strengthen the ties between the US and EU.
Welcome...
...to the Spring 2014 issue of the JMU EUPS Newsletter

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