

## **RBS MBA Study Tour: Rotterdam-Brussels- Rotterdam**

### **Theme**

The theme for the Study Tour is “Ethical Business in 2020”. The Study Tour addresses ethical aspects of managing organizations in the public and private sector in Europe. It aims to provide students with a theoretical foundation of business ethics, discuss the implementation and impact of European laws and regulations, and share best practice within Multinational Organizations, Small Medium Enterprises and Non-Governmental Organizations.

### **Lectures**

Two lectures were given prior to the visit to Brussels.

**Prof. Whiteman**, outlined the need for businesses to embrace sustainability as the world has already passed several key critical milestones on the way to destroying the planet and set out how the World Business Council for Sustainable Development was meeting the challenge ([www.wbcsd.org](http://www.wbcsd.org)).

The Executive Director at Circle Economy ([www.circle-economy.com](http://www.circle-economy.com)) outlined the need for companies to consider how to implement circular economy – and the challenges that companies face trying to implement alone.

In Brussels the group attended a series of lectures over two packed days.

A partner at FIPRA outlined how companies address issues in Brussels and set out a framework for “responsible lobbying”.

In a visit to the European Commission three eminent speakers described the functioning of the European Union; the role that Trade can play in sustainable development; and a lecture on how the EC is attempting to reduce bureaucracy and become more efficient through the REFIT programme (soon to be the responsibility of Mr. Frans Timmermans).

The team ended the day at Syngenta. The Head of Government and Public Affairs, Benelux outlined the difficulties that his company faces: adopting and embedding the goal of building a sustainable business – but aware that some of their current activities might not sustainable even if in the short term these might be necessary to achieve the growth in food production that the world’s population needs.

On the second day we were challenged by a Senior Advisor on External Relations, CSR Europe – who, in an energetic and passionate presentation, outlined what CSR Europe was trying to achieve through its network.

This was followed by an alternative view of the European Union. The Head of Open Europe, a think-tank, pointed out some of the inefficiencies and waste of the EU and set out an alternative agenda. Finally, the team learned how the

European Investment Bank goes about selecting projects and investing in sustainable development.

### **Student Thoughts**

Some comments from a few of the students highlight how much was enjoyed and learned in a short space of time.

#### **#1. What I learned?**

- Insights in how the EC operates and how legislations are developed
- Insight in the stakeholder field how developments on EU level are influenced by organizations like CSR Europe, Open Europe, and the EIB
- The complexity and challenges Europe is facing when creating stability and integration
- Better insight about the meaning of CSR on EU level.

#### **#2. Regarding some new insights I have gained during the Study Tour**

- the EU organizations (Council, Commission, Parliament) work pretty straightforward and are still involved in their core business: integration. It has engaged people working for them. They are very aware of their surroundings and are a future oriented body. Something I like to see as a taxpayer, but as well as a business student/business professional.
- All the think tanks, lobbyists and other parties make Brussels a very energetic city. I could feel the buzz! You must be able to think outside boxes, break through walls and genuinely be engaged with what you think or do. Advice for students, also the one engaged in business studies, consider a career over there. But be aware: this is not for p####s.
- Last but not least, I would emphasize to the readers (esp. students): the EU and its organizations are quite accessible. Through the EU visitor centre one is able to get valuable insights from people that actually work there. And meet up with other parties as well, just as we did. It has practical value (knowledge), and personal value because it persuades you to think about the EU, and the subjects it is concerned with (what is my opinion?)

#### **#3. My thoughts**

- I experienced it as very useful and interesting, even as person who considered himself to be up-to-date about the EU I learned a lot about the institutes and dynamics/different interests involved.
- The CSR-part was covered well, especially in the energetic presentation by Jan (CSR Europe), but also from a different angle by FIPRA.

- Other speakers such as from the EU and the think-tank has a lesser link with CSR, but still interesting.
- Also arranging Syngenta to talk about their new policies was useful

#### #4. It was really nice experience.

Personal reflections:

- Professional presentations and communication skills of speakers;
- Perfect opportunity to communicate to peer students and to see at a glance own strength and weaknesses;
- Subjects of interest: Lobbying, European Commission, its structure, role and function, way of decision making;
- A critical view of EU through perspective of Open Europe Org. CSR as a workshop and with motivational feedback;
- European Investment Bank and its functions really interesting .

#### #5. The whole study tour was an eye-opener for me and I found it very interesting.

The lessons I learned.

- As I used to work for xxx, I knew about the embedded CSR strategy within xxxx, but I did not realize the EU has such an impact/influence on xxx with regards to CSR (or xxx has such an influence on the EU?). It opened my eyes how much lobbying is done in order to realize goals.
- The study tour gave me insights about how the European Commission works and how CSR can be of positive influence on the growth of companies.

#### **After Hours**

Of course, not all the time in Brussels was spent listening and studying – there was some after-hours activity – two lovely dinners followed by some “consumer research” as students investigated the after-hours market in downtown Brussels, as one student put it – tasting some lovely Belgian beers.

Participants will now be completing specific assignments where they will use what they learned to draw up recommendations and present these at a Study Tour Epilogue on October 2<sup>nd</sup>.

Report compiled by Ron Ainsbury

Study Tour brilliantly organised by Roos de Wit-Goedhart, CEO Study Tours  
[www.studytours.nl](http://www.studytours.nl)

Picture: Yes – we are in the centre of the EC!



Picture: Listening to Syngenta



Picture: Who says learning can't be fun?



Picture: Is he saying what happens to our taxes?

