

Summer Course "Small States and European Integration" in Iceland

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Every year the University of Iceland allows three MA EUS to participate on their course on small states and European integration. This year, Evgeniy (US/Russia), Arbenita (Macedonia), and I (the Netherlands) were lucky enough to travel up north.

At our arrival in Iceland we immediately encountered one of the peculiarities of Iceland: it was two in the morning, but hardly dark. After the shortest night I ever experienced, our summer course started with a lecture, where the main discussion points on small states studies were discussed. A first question that arose in this lecture was: what exactly are small states, and how – and especially why – should they be defined? A discussion lead by a panel of lecturers from the course taught us that there are many different views on in which way it is useful to focus on the size of a state in order to explain its political or economical manoeuvres in the international arena. A good preview of the many lectures that would follow.



Four of the lecturers of the course, f.l.t.r.: prof. Thorallsson (Iceland), Archer (Manchester), Wivel (Copenhagen), and Griffiths (Leiden).

However, first it was time to get to know our fellow students in a very relaxing way, namely in the Blue Lagoon! It was a truly original experience to bathe in a naturally warmed swimming pool in a moon-like landscape. Nonetheless, after this relaxing start our days were filled with many lectures, taught by professors from different universities in and outside of Europe. Although the emphasis on the course layed on Scandinavian countries, also small states elsewhere in the world were discussed. "Our" professor Richard Griffiths lectured on the economic importance of small states, and especially the Benelux, while others gave a more political science based view. Later dr. Tekwani lectured on the position of Sri Lanka, and its relation with the neighbour giant India. Perhaps the most positive lecture on small states was the statement of prof. Thorhaldsson from the University of Iceland: the amount of influence does not rely on how big you are, but about how big you *want to be*. Although arguable, this motto seems to be a popular throughout Iceland: Iceland is a candidate for the UN Security Council, and its companies are becoming more and

more influential. When realising that Iceland has a population of merely 300.000 this indeed seems quite astonishing.



The Blue Lagoon

Very special were the guest lectures and trips that were planned in the course. Former president of Iceland Vigdís Finnbogadóttir (and first female president in the world) gave us a stimulating speech on Icelandic politics, and women in politics in special. The low population of Iceland had a visible advantage for us, as contact lines are short, and hierarchies are smaller. Therefore we got invited to visit places that would have been unreachable in larger states: we were served an excellent meal at the ministry of foreign meals, where the secretary of state gave us a speech, and we were even welcomed by the current president, Ólafur Ragnar Grímsson, at his presidential residence!



The participants of the course with Vigdís Finnbogadóttir (5th from left in the middle).



In conversation with the President of Iceland, Ólafur Ragnar Grímsson (right).

Next to serious matters, there was enough time for tourism. Prof. Griffiths was so kind to take the three of us around the “Golden Circle”, a circle of highlights of Icelandic nature: an amazing waterfall, an unpredictably gushing geyser, and the natural border between the American and European continent, where the oldest parliament of Europe (as Icelandics claim) was seated. Immediately it becomes visible that Iceland resembles no other place in Europe: moonlike landscapes are varied by amazing mountain landscapes – all desolate in a beautiful way.



Arbenita, Evgeniy and I at Thingvellir, between the American and European continent.



Prof. Griffiths at the largest waterfall of Iceland.

In the weekend we discovered the south coast by ourselves. Again we see many impressive waterfalls, rock sculptures, and – last but not least – we encounter the experience of standing on a glacier! The lack of darkness proved to be ideal for tourism: even late at night we could still discover the country.

After two weeks of very diverse lectures and amazing tourist trips, the course ended with a final exam, where our knowledge on small states was tested. When finished, we all went home with a lot of new knowledge: both in theory and in practice. Because that was one of the nice experiences of the summer school: actually meeting people from other small (and sometimes less small) states, and discovering their views on both international and national politics - European integration in practice!