

## Evert in Moscow

### Evert Faber van der Meulen

Read Evert's account of his student research visit under the exchange agreement, April 2007:

"Having a thesis topic as controversial as gas relations between the EU and Russia I could only hope for an opportunity to visit Russia and get the other side of story. To my amazement however a trip to Russia could easily be arranged via the exchange program the MA European Union Studies has with MGIMO in Moscow. After a short visa hassle I could finally get the plane from Amsterdam to Moscow on April 4. On arrival in Moscow I was welcomed by prof. Kuzmin, my guide into the wonderful world of Russia. He took me to my land lady and we met up again the next day for a conference on Russian external relations. During the weekend I celebrated Russian orthodox Easter with prof. Kuzmin and his family, with an evening visit to the church and a traditional Russian Easter lunch/dinner.

After leisure it was however time to begin working on what I really came here for. Thanks to an extensive network of contacts I soon had interviews set up with various academic experts, people from government and gazprom, and various independent gas producers. Intensive 3 hour talks followed - occasionally with a translator - , that gave me an insight in Russian thoughts on energy in general and specifically gas (with luckily often a free lunch included). In my free time I also met up for various drinks with Victoria. She studied the same MA last year and is now working in Moscow. During my second my thesis supervisor prof. Sergeyev arrived back in Moscow and I was warmly invited by the family to celebrate Mrs. Sergeyev's birthday.

Two weeks of research, sightseeing and socialising in Moscow having passed quickly I also took the opportunity to visit St. Petersburg. I left Moscow by train on the 20th of April and arrived the next morning to meet up with my fellow student in the Netherlands Maria Grammakova. Being from St Petersburg she, of course, was the ideal person to show me around town. Unfortunately after just three days in St. Petersburg (of which I spent most days in the Hermitage and the nights drinking a small beer) I had to take a plane back to Holland.



In the process of writing my thesis afterwards I discovered the immense added value this visit has given me. A better understanding of the Russian position has resulted in my opinion in a more balanced thesis. Secondly with the array of contacts I made in Russia I have very direct links if I want to go back to Russia, either as an academic or in a professional sphere."