

Institutional Insights - the EU Parliament and Forced Migration

Last summer, I was fortunate enough to participate in an impactful research project documenting the lived experiences of forced migrants in the EU in a strong collaboration between students from Williams College, Central European University and the American University of Afghanistan. During the interview-based film ethnography, our interview partners shared many of their personal experiences coming to Europe and allowed me and my team to understand some of the ways in which migration and border policy can have violent effects on people's lives. This experience immensely impacted my studies in Sociology, where I am specifically interested in how EU policy affects forced migrants in their lived experiences trying to settle within the European Union. In the context of my thesis research, it is therefore extremely important to understand the processes, ideologies and institutional mechanisms of making supranational asylum and migration policy that will impact the lives of millions of people in the EU.

Thanks to the generous support through the Marguerite W. Friedberg Memorial Travel Fellowship and the Williams College French department, I was able to conduct a research trip to France including a week-long Study Visit to the EU Parliament during the July parliamentary session in Strasbourg, as well as to visit Paris to see highly relevant exhibitions and archival material around forced migration, exile and continued global colonial legacies. The goal of this visit was to gain insight into the institutional and politico-ideological sphere of the European Union to understand high-level, political decision/law-making processes that will ultimately translate into shaping people's lives.

After a suite of changes in location and timing of the original plan due to the EU Parliaments structure and summer work models, I shifted from working with the Directorate

General for External Policy to conducting a personal Study Visit with the office of Malte Gallée, youngest Member of the European Parliament (MEP) and part of the delegation of the Green Group from Germany. During the week-long parliamentary session in Strasbourg, I was granted the opportunity to delve into the work of the European Parliament with them by listening to important parliamentary debates, accompanying the team on strategy meetings of the larger political group, and conducting interviews with the office's policy consultants as well as colleagues of the team of migration expert and MEP Erik Marquart.

During parliamentary sessions that take place for a week almost every month, the 705 elected members of the EU Parliament, delegated from the 27 member states in the EU come together in Strasbourg to negotiate collective agreements, make policy resolutions, to vote and to propose laws. In interviews with parliamentary assistants and law experts I learned about the stagnant trajectory of a new asylum and migration pact to be developed to replace the current legal framework as well as policy making strategies among the political groups (equivalent of parties in the EU Parliament) especially in the sensitive and, on national levels, often controversial topic of migration.

I was especially struck by the parliamentary debate on sea rescues in the Mediterranean held in the context of the 2023 Messenia migrant boat disaster. The debate, planned to express stances taken by the political groups on a resolution from the Parliament concerning the EU's responsibility and lack of commitment to saving lives, evolved into a clash of national interests and party-specific narratives. Where right-wing ideologies turning the EU's obligation to humanitarian aid into a need for further border control and violence collide with left-wing and social policy goals on a European opening for migration, it becomes difficult to find productive, joint policy results that take individual lives and experiences into consideration. Rather than

finding agreements for people in need, shifting responsibilities from one country to another within currently highly imbalanced migration regulations and effects for member states seemed to rule the agenda. Speaking to migration activists and representatives of different foundations such as Heinrich Böll Stiftung present for ethnographic exhibitions as well as policy talks, I got to catch a glimpse into the importance of activist and lobby work behind the final parliamentary debates as well.

While gathering useful data for my thesis research, it was extremely interesting to follow other policy processes within the supranational, multilingual institution of the Parliament as well. While I was there, for example, I also got to participate in a demonstration for the nature restoration law in the EU together with Greta Thunberg within a very international group of activists, and spoke to one of the many translators making sure any EU Parliament sessions can be followed simultaneously and live in the 24 official languages of the EU.

With the EU Parliament, as well as other important institutions for human rights in Europe like the European Court of Human Rights and the Council of Europe being based in Strasbourg, France, and France being one of the most influential members of the EU and historically deeply entrenched in colonial global power structures, I also was interested in the country's own national position on asylum and migration today. Since the Study Visit with a Member of the Parliament comprised only one week, I took advantage of the allocated project time frame to delve deeper into the French national narrative around forced migration in Paris. Once in the capital, I got to visit the *Musée de l'histoire de l'immigration*, the national museum for immigration history in France as well as the *Institut du Monde Arabe (IMA)*, hosting important library archives as well as the collection of the "Future National Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art of Palestine". With the Immigration museum's home being the *Palais*

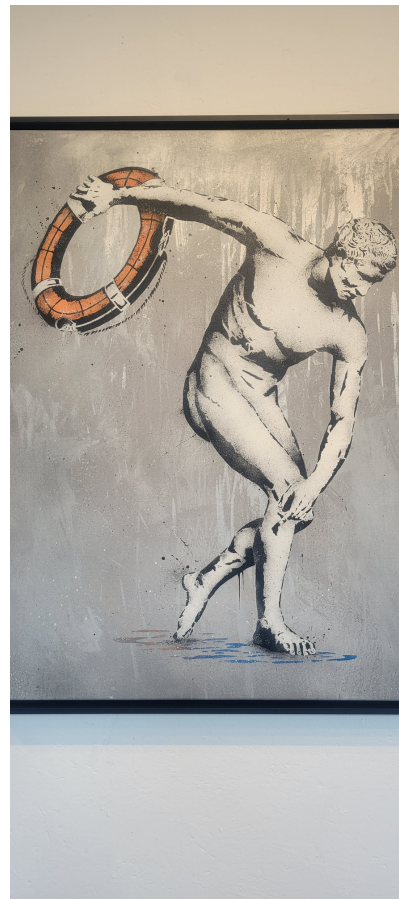
Dorée, former site for the country's Colonial International Exhibitions on its colonized territories seemingly intending to acquit the building and France from its somber past, while the activist spirit of the *IMA* houses art of a nation that has no state, I got to dip into some of the tensions held within a politically highly polarized EU member state trying to reposition itself on its colonial past in the midst of an international and European migration crisis.

STUDY VISIT EU



EU PLENARY WEEK IN STRASBOURG

- 1) in front of the EU Parliament Building
- 2) Plenary debate on Migration policy in the EU with focus on recent rescue disaster
- 3) Activist artwork in exhibition



"THE ASSEASTANT" BY FALCO (1998)



IN PARIS

Upper left: Visit of the Future National Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art of Palestine at the Institut du Monde Arabe in Paris

Lower half:

Visit of the national Musée de l'histoire de l'immigration with parts of the exhibition pointing to the EU's recent refugee crisis including a conflicting self-representation of France's national stance on migration policy

Words like “humanitarian”, “reception/welcome”, “border”, “papers”, “family” and “circulations” make up a tense mix in the face of France’s rather conservative immigration politics.



MUSÉE DE L'HISTOIRE DE L'IMMIGRATION



"ROADS TO EXILE" BY BARTHÉLÉMY TOGUO (2008)