

2018's Alumni Seminar of the European Autumn Academy

The Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung brings together the Maghreb countries in Tunis. A glimmer of hope for a cooperation of future generations?

The students and civil society activists who participated in previous European Autumn Academies in Otzenhausen in the years 2015, 2016 and 2017 had the opportunity to meet this year in 2018 for a three days seminar of alumni in Tunis. The aim of the seminar was to understand the functioning of the European Union and its institutions through simulations organized by **Mr. Florian Aue** and **Ms. Martina Eichlinger** from the CIVIC-Institute for International Education.

The **Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung** and the **European Academy Otzenhausen** brought together young leaders from the three Maghreb countries, Morocco, Tunisia and Algeria to participate in a simulation divided into five groups: Representatives of countries and political parties in the European Parliament, Ministers of Foreign Affairs in the Council of the European Union, Commissioners at the European Commission, Representatives of Eastern European countries concerned by the Neighborhood Policy and finally journalists representing Russian and European media.

The young guests virtually turned the hotel in Tunis into the seat of the European institutions in Brussels within the framework of a simulation named "*Shaping the Neighborhood*" -- a scenario based on the European Neighborhood Policy (ENP) program that the EU has developed to establish sustainable and solid cooperation (Southern and Eastern) with its neighboring countries. Thus, the main debate was not only the integration of certain Eastern European countries such as Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine but also the development of potential partnership contracts, the EU peace cooperation process with the contribution of neighboring countries, the stabilization of EU's borders and the values of the European Union that the participants have highlighted along these three days.

The alumni seminar started with an introduction to simulation games and participants were assigned their roles and mission for the three days. As part of the role plays, an inauguration of the event took place as well as an opening speech by the appointed President of the European Commission followed by a first press conference. The participants then began the debates in their respective institutions (European Commission, Council of the EU and European Parliament) with the presence and continuous contribution of the media. These debates were followed by fruitful negotiations and presentations by the countries concerned by the neighborhood policy. The European Commission then presented its proposals for the countries concerned which were afterwards subject to votes by the other institutions.

Finally, these three days were completed by a press conference and a talk show hosted by the Russian and European media who also continuously published on their respective blogs "The Voice of Russia" and "EU Today" with up-to-date information and articles.

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Along the simulation, participants were confronted with several challenges and conflicts of interest specific to their countries and respective political affiliation. Candidates had to face these constraints by managing to fully embody the role they were assigned with despite their personal opinions. The interests of several protagonists had to be taken into consideration and the European Commission was responsible for presenting a potential agreement while keeping good relations with the countries concerned by its neighborhood policy. Thus, after negotiations with the European Neighborhood Policy (ENP) countries, the Parliament and the Council of the European Union had to vote on the proposed agreements according to the voting rules of each institution.

Additionally, Russia's role and exclusion from the ENP program was part of the debate. A possibility of dialogue with the former has also been proposed since Russia is an actor in many of the conflicts that still prevail in Eastern Europe and is therefore necessarily part of the solution. Nevertheless, the complexity of EU-Russia relations could not be fully discussed in a single conference especially as Russia did not take part in the round table discussions. However, the country was present through its media: The Voice of Russia.

Through this seminar, the candidates had the opportunity to experience and understand the complexity of decision-making in the EU as well as the divergence of some opinions on certain issues (e.g. BREXIT), the consequences of each decision taken and the importance of media.

To conclude, this simulation was not only instructive from an academic perspective but also from a social one in the sense that participants had to surpass their differences and personal beliefs to defend the interests of the country, political party or institution they represented. Thus, it certainly allowed them to have a glimmer of hope for a potential Maghreb union for future generations highlighting the interests and future of this region rich in natural and intellectual resources while benefiting from its special relationship with the European Union.

For this reason, on behalf of the three generations of the European Autumn Academy, we would like to thank the **Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung**, the **European Academy Otzenhausen** and the trainers of the **CIVIC- Institute for International Education** for these series of training and this follow-up which can only foster a fruitful Mediterranean dialogue and be a glimmer of hope for the Maghreb.

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Ryam Toumi: Ryam is 24 years old and graduated in Algebra and Cryptography from Houari Boumediene University of Science and Technology in Algiers. Ryam is currently a production project manager in the communication agency *MAD diffusion*. She is volunteering and active member in several Algerian organizations such as the women's sports association *Oued Semar*.