

Dual Degree Programme Sciences Po - MIA: experience political transitions and developments first hand

By Anne Rehbein and Nicola Wullschleger



Last September we started the first master year of this programme at Sciences Po Paris. “We” that means a group of 19 students, 5 international students and 14 students from France, who came to Sciences Po to study in a big variety of programmes: Finance and Strategy, International Affairs, European Affairs or Public Policy. No

matter in which master’s programme we are enrolled, in September we will together start the Master in International Affairs and Governance (MIA) at the University of St.Gallen.

We, Anne Rehbein and Nicola Wullschleger, already know the University and the city of St.Gallen, as we studied in St.Gallen for our Bachelor in International Affairs. However, both of us decided to apply for this programme to put a focus on an additional field of study. For Anne this focus is International Business as she is studying Finance and Strategy at the School of Management and Innovation, whereas Nicola is studying Public Policy at the School of Public Affairs with a focus on Digitalization, New Technologies and Public Policy. Besides these curricular reasons, the decision to study for one year abroad definitely has many advantages more. In our case, these are for instance the ability to improve our French skills and to gain some personal experiences in the world city of Paris.

Living and studying in Paris has and is giving us the opportunity to experience political transitions and developments first hand. The movement of the *gilets jaunes* that started last semester is only one example. Sciences Po being the most important political University in France, it was thrilling to follow and to be part of discussions and exchanges with students and professors about the future of the country and possible political transitions. Another highlight is the possibility to attend political events, such as the podium discussion with

France's former president Francois Hollande. Nevertheless, not only Sciences Po offers plenty of enriching events. We also had the chance to visit external political or economic summits, for example the *Paris Peace Forum*, the *GovTech Summit* or an *OECD conference*. Not to mention the vast cultural offer of museums, galleries, theatres and concerts from which we can benefit living in the centre of Paris.

As multifaceted as the city itself are the living arrangements that can be found as a student. For instance, Anne is living in a small flat in the 18th arrondissement, which is one of the *quartier populaire* in Northern Paris just next to Montmartre. In contrast, Nicola found a room in the *Cité internationale universitaire de Paris*, a relatively green campus in the 14th arrondissement, that was built for students and researchers from all universities of Paris.

While there is an undeniable difference of living in a city like Paris compared to St.Gallen the academic culture at Sciences Po is also quite divergent. Indeed, the number of students per class is often much smaller and the workload over the semester significantly higher. This transition was a bit difficult in the beginning since we were used to the "freedom" given to us in St.Gallen whereas Sciences Po is more scholar in its teaching style. Given those differences, it was certainly helpful that we have had the opportunity to meet our 17 fellow students during a seminar in January.

Conducted by Tina Freyburg the seminar had several purposes. First of all, we got to know not only the other students but also the responsible persons for the dual degree programme at Sciences Po, Frank Stadelmaier, and at the HSG, Tina Freyburg and Daniela Engelmann. Hence, remaining administrative questions were answered and we received precise information about the transition from one university to the other.



Secondly, we had the opportunity to refresh our academic writing skills through a review paper that we prepared in groups over the Christmas break and presented during the seminar. This crash course was especially useful for those students who are not from the HSG and thus might be less used to the written requirements and the standards that are expected, for example for the master thesis. Overall, the seminar was full of intensive learning, critical thinking, teambuilding and enriching conversations that allowed us to develop a nice group spirit.

We are definitely looking forward to showing our fellow students the beautiful city and University of St.Gallen, but for now, we appreciate the opportunity to stay for a second semester in Paris. With our return after the first semester, we are realizing the valuable difference between an exchange semester and one year abroad: As the university, the city and the people are already well known, we are well prepared and can directly jump into the second semester full of valuable experiences.