

MY PORTFOLIO

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EUTOPIA

CERTIFICATE OF INTERNASIONALISATION

AUGUST 2025

After finishing high school in Poland, I made the life-changing decision to move abroad and begin a new chapter in Belgium. I enrolled in a joint bachelor's program in Social Sciences with a specialization in Political Science at the Vrije Universiteit Brussel and Ghent University. Leaving my home country was both exciting and challenging as it meant stepping into a completely different cultural and linguistic environment, where I had to adapt, grow, and find my own self. From the moment I arrived in Brussels, I knew I wanted to engage in activities and join organizations that resonated with my academic interests and personal values. I was looking for opportunities that would allow me to connect with other young people, exchange ideas, and gain a deeper understanding of Europe's cultural and political diversity. While searching for opportunities that would allow me to develop my skills and meet like-minded young people, I came across the European Youth Parliament. It felt like the perfect way to combine my interest in political debate with intercultural exchange.

When I first joined the European Youth Parliament in Antwerp in October 2024, I entered a completely new environment. The activity itself took around 40 hours during the 4 days period excluding self-preparation before the event. It was my very first session, and I remember feeling both curious and intimidated. I was surrounded by many people who seemed so confident in expressing their ideas, debating, team-building activities, and social interactions. Although I had prepared myself and was genuinely motivated to contribute, I found myself sometimes holding back during discussions. I worried about whether my opinions were strong enough. My shyness made me, during certain activities, more of an observer than an active

participant at first. I spent a lot of time listening to how different delegates framed their arguments, noticing the subtle differences in how people from different cultures approached discussions, and quietly reflecting on how I fit into this event.

That first session made me deeply aware of the power of language in shaping participation. English was the working language, which on the one hand created a level playing field, but on the other hand also revealed inequalities. Some delegates were so fluent that they could joke, debate, and persuade with ease, while others hesitated, worried about grammar or pronunciation. I realized that in an intercultural setting like this, language was not just a tool of communication but a symbol of confidence, identity, and even inclusion. A recent study by Kalra and Danis (2024)¹ suggests that language-based groups often form naturally in diverse environments, not as a way to exclude, but as a practical way for people to connect and share knowledge, something I could clearly recognize in what I saw and felt in Antwerp. When I heard delegates slipping into their native languages during informal breaks, I saw how differently they behaved compared to when they spoke only in English. This session also made me realize the limitation of English in expressing yourself freely if it's not your first language. Certain cultural aspects or phrases simply can't be translated into English, which can make it hard to fully express who you are. Seeing people group together based on their native language made me think that fully integrating into another country might be nearly impossible. I believe there will always be, even if only in a small way, a feeling of being an outsider.



Despite my initial shyness, Antwerp was an important learning experience. It made me reflect on my own cultural background and how it shaped my communication style. I come from Poland, a country where in formal settings people often value precision and careful wording, and that probably made me more cautious than I needed to be in such a dynamic environment. Still, by the end of the session, I felt that something had shifted. During the General Assembly, I managed to stand in front of more than a hundred delegates and chairpeople and deliver a speech representing my committee. I was extremely stressed, and I know I didn't look at the audience as much as I should have, but I still managed to say what I wanted to say. Just standing there, in front of everyone, was already a huge step for me. Even if I wasn't the most vocal delegate, I had taken my first real step into this intercultural space. I saw the value of diverse perspectives and realized that the only way to fully experience the European Youth Parliament was by pushing myself beyond my comfort zone.

This reflection became crucial when I later joined the Brussels session in April 2025. It was my second time at an EYP event, but it felt completely different from the very beginning. I already knew what to expect, the flow of the activities, the nature of committee work, the cultural diversity that would be present and most importantly, I knew that I didn't want to remain in the background like I had in Antwerp. I consciously decided to approach the session with more openness and confidence. This was a national session that took place over the span of 4 days and took around 40 hours, excluding the pre-event preparation itself.



In the committee work, I took on a much more active role. Over the past year, living on my own in Belgium had made me more confident and independent, and through my studies at university I had gained a much deeper understanding of politics. I also already knew how inclusive and welcoming the European Youth Parliament was, which made me feel more at ease. This time, I decided to really engage with my committee. I was actually the only one who had attended an EYP session before, so I knew the answers to many of the questions other participants had, and I was always ready to help them. It felt like I naturally became the “mother” of the group, and I was happy to take on this supportive role. I also noticed again how cultural differences shaped the way people communicated, some delegates

were very structured and direct, while others preferred more narrative and contextual approaches. In Antwerp, I had mostly observed these differences, but in Brussels, I actively tried to bridge them. When misunderstandings came up, I rephrased points in a way that resonated with everyone. It wasn't just about translating words but about translating cultural perspectives so that everyone felt included. I think our committee was very efficient, and I really enjoyed the small leadership role I had this time. It was rewarding to guide and support others while also making sure we worked well as a team. At the end, our chair (the person responsible for leading and supporting our committee) told me that next year I should consider applying to become a chair myself, as she believed I would fit perfectly into this role. Hearing that gave me a lot of confidence and made me realize how much I had grown since my first EYP session.



Looking back, the European Youth Parliament was much more than a simulation of parliamentary work. It was a personal journey of development. Antwerp taught me humility and reflection, while Brussels taught me confidence and leadership. Together, these experiences showed me that internationalization is not simply about traveling or meeting people from different countries but it is about truly

engaging with diversity, adapting your communication, and finding ways to connect beyond cultural and linguistic barriers.

POEM

By Jagoda Szejnfeld

There I am, moving, changing,
searching for the place I belong,
I've wondered where it's been all along.

I left my country, my home, my start,
carried my old self in my heart.
But piece by piece, she's slipped away,
making room for who I am today.

My new home, Brussels.
Maybe this is it.
At first in silence,
I would stay,
but then I found friends along the way.

People who understood me,
with whom I truly connected.
Through their eyes, I saw myself more clearly,
and for the first time in a long while, I felt at peace.

I found things I love,
things I want to keep just close.
It wasn't easy,
but it was worth it.

The people I met through EYP,
opened my mind, my heart, my eyes to see.
In Antwerp, quiet, I took it all in,
in Brussels, I led, I helped my team win.
We laughed, debated, bridged our speech,
shared our cultures, learned from each.

I learned, I grew,
and I'll carry it with me always,
this sense of belonging,
this bond we built together.

