

Report Form Exchange Period Abroad 2014-2015

To which foreign university did you go: Katholieke Universiteit Leuven
Country: Belgium

- study period in 1st semester:
- start date study abroad: 22.09.2014
- period of classes: from 22.09.2014 until 19.12.2014
- examination period: from 09.01.2015 until 1.02.2014
- did you follow a language course: no.

Courses completed at the host university:

1. **International and European Human Rights Law**
2. **European Insurance Law**
3. **European Family Law**
4. **International Business Law**
5. **The Law of the World Trade Organization**
6. **Discrimination Law**

Report – Exchange Period Abroad

A. Study Programme

I have followed courses considered part of the LLM Programme of International and European law at KU Leuven. As several courses had already been taught or will be taught during my Bachelor at RuG (Legal History, Law of International Organisations, etc.¹), my choice was somewhat limited. The university allowed us to choose 2 non-law courses (from criminology), however, due to the schedule, I was not able to maintain the criminology course. The courses I followed were :

1. **International and European Human Rights Law (Basic, 6 ECTS)**

The course presented, in an introduction, the concept of human rights, including the generations of human rights, followed by general aspects of human rights. For illustration of these aspects, the Council of Europe, The United Nations and the Organisation of Security and Cooperation in Europe and European Union. The course ended with the study of specific fundamental rights, such as right to life, right to fair trial, freedom of expression, right to privacy and family life.

The examination was a written exam, consisting of two essay questions, one case and a theoretical one, for which one page was required. We were allowed to bring into the exam the legislation reader. The lecturers were Koen Lemmens and Paul Lemmens, who is a judge at the ECHR.

The course is a basic one, if one wants to acquire a general knowledge of international and European human rights as the course offers a wide overview.

2. **European Insurance Law (Basic, 4 ECTS)**

The reading materials for this course were case law and complementary literature. The focus was on EU insurance law, but certain international aspects were also dealt with (motor vehicle liability). The

¹ Available courses for exchange students at KU Leuven can be found here :
<https://www.law.kuleuven.be/education/exchange/courses>

most recent developments in EU law with impact on insurance were studied: internal market, establishment and free provision of services, harmonisation, private international law, institutions. There was a guest lecture as well, given by one of the contributors of the project PEICL. The course ended with an overview of current regulations of insurance.

The exam was written, with open questions, in which we had to define a concept, make an essay on a specific subject, and an essay which had to combine specific aspects of the course. It was closed book, but certain given legislation was allowed.

There were no Powerpoint presentations, however, the course was very well structured, and we did not feel the need for such presentations. I would strongly recommend this course, due to the teaching method, as well as the relatively peculiar topic.

3. European Family Law (Advanced, 4 ECTS)

The course was divided in two parts: matrimonial property law and maintenance principles. The adopted method was comparative typology of legal regimes. Landmark cases, imperative matrimonial property law (Dutch example), optional property regimes and matrimonial contracts were discussed. The second part, the maintenance obligations in the EU arising from family, parentage, marriage or affinity. Each student had to prepare a group presentation regarding maintenance in their country.

The examination was a written exam consisting of open questions. It had two parts, which were separately evaluated and contributed equally to the final grade. The exam was closed book, no materials were allowed in the exam, other than legislation.

If one has enjoyed the lecture on matrimonial property during the course Private Law, this course elaborates further on the same topic. Therefore, I would recommend this course to anyone interested in cross-border family situations.

4. International Business Law (Advanced, 6 ECTS)

The course was focused on lectures and discussions on specific topics. A general framework was presented in : international law, international private law, world trade organisations. Subsequently, the topics approached were : international sales, general contract law, distributorship, intellectual property and transfer of technology, protection of investment, international financing and credit security, aspects of property law and proprietary security, international payments and litigation – which dealt with international procedure and insolvency as well as commercial arbitration. Slides were made available after each lecture.

The information was somewhat overwhelming due to the different topics approached, however, an overview of all aspects of international business law was provided. There was a legislation reader, allowed to bring to the exam.

The exam had 3-4 open open questions, requiring between 1-2 pages. The reader was truly helpful in answering the questions. Moreover, the exam reflected the content of the course. If one considers taking up this course, one should take into account the fact that there are 19 lectures, there is quite a lot of information, different topics, and there is not much interaction during the lectures (however, lecturer willing to answer questions).

5. The Law of the World Trade Organization (Advanced, 4 ECTS)

The lectures were held by two lecturers (Geert van Calster and Jan Wouters), as well as guest lectures on specific topics. Especially the following issues were dealt with during classes: international trade theory and policy, institutional framework of WTO, main principles of WTO law, most favored nation, non-discrimination, market access, WTO dispute settlement mechanism, tariff customs classifications, non-tariff barriers, balance between trade and health protection (SPS Agreement – guest lecture James Flett, who represents the EU in WTO dispute settlement), anti-dumping, subsidies, countervailing duties, other trade defence instruments. The GATS was also presented, and the course ended with the four pillars of international trade.

The course material consisted of a reader with literature, one with legislation, one with cases, and a text book. The exam was completely open-book, consisted of open questions. However, the exam had many questions, so little time was left to the students to search answers in the materials. I would recommend this course to anyone interested in WTO.

6. Discrimination Law (Basic, 6 ECTS)

The course focused on study of equality and non-discrimination in the EU and Council of Europe. It started with different theories of equality, there was an overview of basic concepts and problems of discrimination law, including : direct/indirect discrimination, grounds, methods of proactive discrimination law, rules regarding proof and enforcement of discrimination law. Other fields were also discussed where discrimination met other values: hate speech, lookism – viewed in a comparative perspective.

The course included a moot court, based on a real case to which preliminary ruling is currently pending. The moot court was quite challenging, however, it was not graded. The exam consisted of 2 questions, a case and a theoretical one; however, it was open book, a documentation map and the class notes/slides being allowed.

I would recommend this course to anyone interested in current issues related to non-discrimination.

B. Language, language preparation

The university provides a free introductory Dutch course for all ERASMUS students, from 0-A2. The language of the courses was English, therefore, I encountered no problems.

C. Finances and general matters

Being an EU citizen, I did not need a residence permit – only registration to the city hall was needed, however, this was dealt with very efficiently. The costs per month are similar to the Netherlands, as regards housing. I lived with the other RuG exchange law student. We rented an apartment in the centre, which we shared with another Belgian student. The inclusive rent was 425 eur/month. KU Leuven provides for cultural cards for 20 eur (discounts at museums in Leuven) as well as bus passes. The student card was issued on spot, free of costs.

D. Preparation and contact with the faculty abroad

KU Leuven organized an introductory week with various cultural and fun activities, during which main tourists attractions were presented. Events in pubs were organized, as well as rector lectures on university life. There was also a fair in which information on topics like work, insurance, transport, other similar subjects were dealt with. Registration for this week was announced by the university.

At the beginning of the academic year, there was a starting meeting with the head of the exchange office and the academic coordinator of ERASMUS programme.

E. Housing

If they wish, the students can rent a room whose landlord has a contract with KU Leuven, however, they need to apply in time, as there are limited places. It is almost impossible to rent from an agency, as the required minimum period is one year. The rent is the same as in the Netherlands. I would recommend students to join Facebook groups, as there are plenty of people subletting their places while going abroad, or looking for someone to take over their one-year contract.

F. Guidance / reception at host university

Introduction programme at beginning of semester, where the study programme was given by the exchange was given by the exchange coordinator, who was available to contact. Other help was provided by the university, such as finding a job, rent-related issues.

G. Other

When choosing this university to spend the exchange, one has to consider the fact that the courses are at Master level, and are therefore quite comprehensive, as there are many issues to be prepared after classes. Moreover, all courses are given at once. For instance, the course on WTO law is considered a 4 ECTS course, however, it requires the actual study of a 6 ECTS course. Furthermore, in some courses there are no slides, therefore, being present during class and taking notes is essential. The time spent at the university is considerably lengthier than in RuG, as for 6 ECTS courses, every two weeks there is an additional lecture of 2 hours.

There were some organizational issues, as literature for some courses were only provided at the end of October.

My personal opinion regarding the exchange is probably a different one than other Erasmus students. I chose KU Leuven as a top university, and was quite disappointed when in one course the information provided by the lecturer was inaccurate. Moreover, in some courses, the lecturers seemed that they did not care about teaching us relevant facts.

The housing experience was not a very fortunate one, either. The apartment we sublet (the contract was governed by the university service) was shared with a Belgian student, who (we found out later) was the president of a "club" (which, in his own words, uses the funding to organize parties and then make profit from cheap drinks). Therefore, my colleague Irina and I did not manage to have a good night sleep or a quiet day without him playing music or inviting friends over to drink without announcing us. After notifying the landlord, everything was a bit better, but it did not last long.

However, I made some good friends there and the fact that I was not alone in everything made it much better. I managed to have some time to visit tourist attractions and take some photography classes as well. Perhaps my experience was shadowed by the stressing housing situation, but I would not conclude that I loved Leuven, or that I would like to go back there.