“The Brussels Democracy: Citizen Participation and Multi-Level Governance in Europe”

As a researcher working in the field of European governance I could not miss the chance to participate in a seminar with the promising title “The Brussels Democracy: Citizen Participation and Multi-Level Governance in Europe”. The five day event was held in Brussels between 13 and 18 February 2009 and organized by the International Network for European Studies, short INES.

INES is a network of students and researchers of all disciplines interested in European issues, based in Bremen/Germany. INES aims at contributing to European integration and its underlying goals, the promotion and sustainability of peace, progress and cultural diversity, and a chance to achieve social inclusion in Europe. Accordingly, INES has been able to establish a community of members from all over Europe and beyond. By organizing regular meetings and seminars INES has successfully built a forum for a continuous exchange between young academics in Europe.

The Brussels Democracy seminar was a great chance for young people to meet in the heart of Europe and explore questions such as “Who is able to decide what in the European decision-making process?” and “How can citizens participate within the policy-making process to defend their own interests and express their opinion?”. The seminar comprised a simulation of the co-decision procedure, visits to the European Commission, the European Parliament and its Members Rebecca Harms (Group of the Greens/European Free Alliance) and Erika Mann (Socialist Group), the Permanent Representation of Germany to the EU, the Representation of the State Niedersachsen, the Volkswagen Liaison Office and the NGO European Youth Forum. The participants thus had the chance to address their questions to different stakeholders involved in the European policy and decision-making process. Discussions continued during and after dinners, a fact that contributed to the great atmosphere in the group. Of course, all participants were eager to learn more about my chosen home region Åland and my efforts in exploring the implications of multi-level governance for Åland.

The course was a great opportunity to gain a firsthand insight into the functioning of the European Union and to discuss the concerns of young Europeans among a group of like-minded from different corners of Europe. I can only encourage young Ålanders to experience Europe themselves and participate in events like this.

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