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Just imagine not washing dishes for a month! Well, since you people in the West use automatic washers, maybe it is not the best analogy, but when a 30-year old from Eastern Europe, who is not expecting any big changes in life is given a quick barrage of attention, guidance, style and city lights, that really IS something.

This is a story about 12 people who were given an opportunity by Thomson Reuters Foundation and Robert Bosch Stiftung to have lectures and writing exercises on economics, and to speak with business and political leaders in London, Brussels, Berlin and Frankfurt and did really enjoyed it. This is not letter of praise, as I always refused to write PR stuff, but this is, dear reader, a story as it actually happened...

Slowly but surely next generations of journalists, those who were not, as Keith Stafford, the course instructor, says (more on Keith later) "all been for some time war correspondents ", are taking over top jobs in our countries, which are broadly described as South Eastern Europe.

This is a tremendous change, since we had matured in postconflict and postcommunist societies and have much more in common with coming 21st century generations, than with just a little older colleagues, who worked to bridge two epochs. We see need to change and catch the pace more clearly than others, even than our readers, but must work on intuition since there is nobody to pass the knowledge how to work by western standards.

Being so, media we came from are complicated bunch of companies, programs and releases who all still search for place in the emerging scene and are experimenting a lot. Almost half of us came from well established and prestigious weekly economical magazines, hungry for new ideas and approaches to keep positions won by some farseeing founder 10 years ago. Other came from companies concerned about general news, where knowledge offered is equally significant because of lack of understanding 'complicated' market news.

People profile of those selected to attend the course, five men and seven women, all between 24 and 34, fits this ever changing environment really well. In our countries, many young people work just any job they find, don't work at all, or work jobs they think will bring them great prosperity on the long run. People actually working with vigor the same job they trained for and having big ambitions without much of it being financial, are very rare. But they could be found among journalists. We tend to think we fight our fights alone, and one of biggest commendations I have for the organizers is they showed us it isn't like that.

Some of us had not traveled much before, some had a bit. But when we first came to London, the awe was great, and not because of Big Ben but because

we were taken to financial heart of the city, Canary Wharf, and lived and worked for 10 days along tens of thousands of young people like us, who occupy skyscrapers with letters on top, projecting power of institutions like Barclays or HSBC from those towers. And what we found inside was equally staggering, We found an old (sorry Keith) English gentleman, and young but very experienced journalist Melanie as his assistant there, ready to show us, for our own good, how much we don't know.

And that is also one of the biggest things about the seminar: we entered pretty much clueless about workings of international economy and left with knowledge on par or better than some of the people who actually work in finances in our countries.

In spirit of great fun and friendliness we went through the ABC of economics, did more writing in a day than in three days on a job back home, and how the biggest financial news agency in the world, Thomson Reuters, operates. And when the bell rings, the city of London is ours for the taking. I remember spending 6 hours in The British Museum, my legs begging me to sit, but eyes taking me further every moment. I would like to say I remember as well all the time we spent in pubs, but there seem to be some blank spaces. And oh, all the important places where we have been. We spoke to a true Lord in Westminster, and he spoke to us with such dignity it was a glimpse to times past. We found ourselves sitting with the director of EBRD, who asked us if we thought all those billions they invested in our countries were well spent. It was the first time anybody asked me to give my opinion on any billions, even billions of dinars. It makes you feel that, just maybe, being a journalist isn't a waste of time, that it really matters.

One day we jumped on a train and escaped for a weekend to Brussels. No news writing for three days, just a tour of EU institutions, businesses and think tanks. On the UK/Belgian border (my geography teacher from the 80s would be outraged) my friend from Romania just showed a personal ID and I had to have a valid and thoroughly checked visa; it is a good thing to be a member of European club and we were going to its heart. It stunned me how EC buildings are tranquil places though buzzing with work, much more at peace with themselves than dark corridors of power of national governments, simply a thing of the future. The look in the eyes of a Commissioner for Economy was almost motherly and people are coming to work on bicycles. All prejudices about stiff EU bureaucrats fell like dominoes.

Another special thing concerning the seminar was it was actually done in two parts. You get two weeks in London and Brussels, you go home, get a summer holiday and when summer ends you all come back together for Part Two. And like a good sequel to a good movie it was great again, and it felt like it was certainly not six months in between. But now we were not caught unprepared. Knowledge was still there, and seriously expanded in the meantime, mostly because of the financial crisis that made us really dig in to economy. If anyone thought there is no much need for us in the East to be so well informed about



technicalities of the credit crunch, as it was called in early stages, they were proved wrong. What we learned in London we really used back home, people wondering how we all of a sudden know all that. And so we came to Frankfurt, the centre of Europe's finances alongside London, with much improved skill and thousand questions to ask. Thanks to Bosch and Reuters people were there, more than willing to answer all of them. Again, a marching column of bankers and other experts passed in front of us, and again an opportunity to ask somebody questions our local experts would only be capable to give broad answers to.

— Keith was there also and we went further to practice our news writing style. In the end, papers coming out after his editing were almost without mistakes, and we actually rose to a level it was expected from us by the end of the course. Reuters standards, the toughest kind.

— And again, not all the time was spent in Frankfurt. Four days were reserved for Berlin, a final and richest part of the seminar cake. What more is there to say than in four days we visited three concerts and numerous historical and fun places, and seen all, from empty building in East Berlin now used as artist quarters and night club, to inside of the Foreign Affairs Ministry with its pre WWI elevators and bullet holes in the front. Bosch and the Germans really are good organizers. Again, more leaders for us to question and some fantastic venues to have dinner with them. And all the wine...

Back to reality, I now see it was worth a struggle, if their goal was to get us informed, interested and encouraged, because that is what they did. Good luck everybody, hope this crisis doesn't bury us all. If it does, well - it was a historic chance to see Canary Wharf, and central Frankfurt before all the banks left them deserted.