

EXPERIENCE REPORT VSB FONDS

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On 7 May 2014, I received the fantastic news that I had been selected as a VSB fellow for the year 2014-2015. The VSB Fund supports active and socially involved students who want to continue their studies abroad.

After completing my bachelor in Public Administration in Tilburg in August 2014, partly thanks to this scholarship I was able to leave for the Moscow State University for International Relations for the master's in Governance & Global Affairs, a mix of International Relations, Economics and language from a Russian perspective.

Behind the scenes

The university is well-known in Russia for educating the Russian diplomatic elite and therefore offers a wonderful peek behind the scenes of Russian international diplomacy.

Russia is newsworthy, the situation in Ukraine and the recent assassination of opposition leader Boris Nemtsov is a recurring concern. Since my arrival here I have often received questions from a Dutch perspective concerning the current situation with Russia. For example, the questions range from "Do you notice any of the current tensions?" or "How do people perceive you as a foreigner?"

My answer is usually short and resolute: I personally do not notice any difference in the period from when I arrived in Russia until now (apart from the prices in the supermarket). It appears that "the ordinary Russian" sees politics as politics and daily life continues to exist. In Russia I am mainly concerned with improving my Russian in order to make it easier to talk about the aforementioned tensions, but also about how everyday life was in the Soviet era or how the generation of my age thinks about the future of Russia.

This last question in particular leads to varying answers, given that on the one hand the vast majority of students agree with Putin's politics, but there is also vocal criticism.

However, the main question that remains is: what am I going to do with all these new impressions of this very special period? The options vary widely. In my Master's thesis I emphasized the Energy relationship between the European Union and Russia. The choice for this subject was made after following some courses in the field of Russian economy. Those who want to understand the Russian economy and politics must understand the impact of the energy sector in this country.

Energy is not only important for Russia, but also for the relationship between Europe and Russia.

Currently, the dialogue between Russia and the "West" is practically silent, but that does not mean that the energy issue has become any less important. Global warming and the scarcity of raw materials, as well as the enormous bilateral dependence on Russia and Europe in this area offers many interesting perspectives. Thanks in part to the acquisition of this information, as well as correctly speaking Russian and all the other aspects that I learnt, I hope to broaden my options for the future. Where this future will lie, time will tell, but many possibilities have been created thanks to the support of the VSB Funds, that is beyond question.