

Opening Power to Diversity



Larysa Karankovich was placed with Tony McLoughlin TD from February to July 2014

Biography

Now an Irish citizen Larysa has been living in Ireland for over 10 years after she left her home country of Belarus. In Belarus Larysa worked as an English teacher to both primary and secondary school students. Larysa has extensive administrative experience in Ireland. She has worked as a part-time Office Administrator for 'AFRI-Action from Ireland' since 2010. Larysa has a BA in Modern and Foreign Languages from the University of Minsk along with a Certificate in Business Studies from the National College of Ireland. Larysa is a fluent English, Russian and Belarusian speaker and has been working as a freelance interpreter and translator in Ireland since 2008. While in university in Belarus Larysa was involved in the promotion of free speech in the former Soviet state.

Diary

I joined the Open Power to Diversity programme because I wanted to have a first hand experience in Irish politics but I did not expect it to be such a constructive learning curve. Before starting the

programme I assumed that politics in general are detached from the day-to-day issues that concern most people and was pleasantly surprised to find out that it is not the case in the Irish Parliament.

I started my placement with Tony McLoughlin TD for Sligo-North Leitrim Constituency at the beginning of February and straight away got acquainted with the deputy's parliamentary assistant Enda and the other party staff members who showed me around the buildings and immediately included me in their tasks. I was already aware that Tony is a very experienced politician with a life long career in local and national politics, who also served as Mayor of Sligo on four occasions. I was pleased to find out that he is also a very approachable and down to earth person with a good sense of humor, a good listener with a natural disposition to help others and resolve issues. He also has a great interest in sports and the Irish Language.

I had the opportunity to assist in the daily running of the office and the rest of the team treated me as their colleague. As Tony is an active member of the Environment, Culture and the Gaeltacht Committee, I also got involved in cooperating with the Press Office and researched on issues that the Committee was handling. I understand now that the Irish Laws are the result of a lengthy process of interaction with all members of the public and representative organizations that are influenced. I realized that Tony's political life is equally split between Dublin and Sligo. I was in contact with his Constituency Office in Sligo at a daily basis which made it possible for me to comprehend the extent of the issues that the rest of Ireland is facing. I am finding it very easy to get along with everybody, and I hope that the rest of the internship is going to be as exciting as these first few weeks.

Needless to say I settled in the environment of my TD's office mainly due to the great help I received from the party staff, all of whom were very helpful at all times. **I met other TDs that welcomed me in the Dáil and showed great interest in the OPD programme and my home country of Belarus.** I was surprised to find out that they were well informed of the socio-political conditions in my country.

On one of the days I was part of the team that gave a tour of Leinster House to secondary school students invited to visit by my TD. I felt positively engaged bearing in mind that only a few months back when I started the programme I was given the same tour. I came to realise how little time has passed since then and how much I have learnt in the past two months. The students were just as enthusiastic as I was when I started the programme and showed a great interest in the proceedings of the Dáil; with some of them getting excited when they recognised representatives from their own area, or well established public figures like David Norris and Fearghal Quinn.

I also attended the European Peoples Party Conference in Dublin and got a first hand experience of European Politics. It was a two day event and it put Dublin in the spotlight of publicity worldwide with so many prominent political figures in attendance.

As part of Tony McLaughlin's team I extended my knowledge of the legislative work of the Dáil by conducting research on the Health Identifiers Bill, which will have a major impact on the health services in the near future. I also performed research on the Companies Bill 2012 and the Restorative Justice (Reparation of Victims) Bill 2013, where the team provided me with an insight in an area very little known to me. I realised that political life can be challenging but all citizens have the obligation to participate as it influences profoundly every aspect of their life.

After the Easter break both Houses of the Parliament were as busy as ever with a lot on the agenda both in the Dáil and the Seanad. As I realised that my internship was coming to an end I tried to grasp every opportunity and learn as much as possible in the last few months. **My work was exciting and varied every single day.** Apart from observing Dáil sessions on a regular basis I also took a great interest in the work of the Seanad. One of the most interesting and engaging sessions was when Mrs. Justice Catherine McGuinness was invited to address the Upper House on the topic of Children's Rights in Ireland. The session was both informative and captivating with Mrs McGuinness answering an avalanche of questions from the Senators.

Aside from doing research on different bills going through both Houses of the Parliament, dealing with queries from constituents and general public, arranging tours for the guests, I also got a chance to attend plenty of different committee meetings. I followed with great interest as the Employment Permit (Amendment) Bill 2014 passed through both Houses of the Oireachtas. This legislation was of a particular significance to me as I worked under the work permit scheme for a number of years and could never imagine that at some point in my life I would have an opportunity to watch the policy making process and see the changes being made to the bill that will have an impact on the lives of people like me.

I also got an opportunity to observe a number of Foreign Affairs Committees and meet some of the TDs who expressed a lot of interest in me and my countries of origin. I was eager to find out what they thought of Belarus and what the diplomatic relationship between the two countries was like. It was fascinating to observe the engagement process with foreign countries through their representatives when the Ambassador of Iran to Ireland was invited to discuss the current situation in the Middle East region.

Reflecting back on my 6 months internship with Deputy Tony McLoughlin I can definitely say that it was one of the most significant and worthy experience professionally and personally. It strengthened my belief that making decisions that affect thousands of people on a daily basis along with exhausting working hours and the need to be informed about the relevant issues at all times is not an easy task. But, without doubt, it is a very rewarding career. I would like to encourage everybody, not only people of immigrant background but also Irish people, to get involved in political process, take part in voting and make their voices heard. As those who choose not to vote still influence the outcome of the elections by letting other people make the decision for them.



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