



University of Geneva Jessup Team 2016 – Washington, DC International Rounds – From left to right: David Trajilovic, Jonathan Kirschke-Biller, Violetta Sefkow-Werner, Jana Schulz-Kuhnt, Vincent Lawson-Body, Vincent Kirschner*

This past April, we, four law students from the University of Geneva, represented Switzerland at the 57th Philip C. Jessup International Law Moot Court Competition in Washington, DC. The Jessup, as it is called by its aficionados, is an international advocacy competition where students act as lawyers in a simulated dispute before the International Court of Justice, the judicial organ of the UN. It is the oldest moot court in international law, and the largest one in the world.

More than 500 universities from all around the globe participate each year, but until now, there was one notable absentee: Geneva, despite the prominent place the city and its university have in international law, is not a regular participant in the Jessup.

Since the Jessup Moot Court is not incorporated into the University of Geneva's curriculum (yet), our participation this year was based on a student initiative. Violetta Sefkow-Werner, a 4th year exchange student who had participated in the Jessup at her home university last year, established the team and coached and administered the Jessup with the support of another former participant, Vincent Kirschner.

As in actual court proceedings, the Jessup begins with a written phase. Each team composes two Memorials presenting the arguments for both parties to the dispute. The starting point of all that is the so-called *Compromis*, a written agreement between the disputing (fictional) states which contains the facts of the case and the claims brought forward by the parties.



None of us had much experience with international law, so when first faced with the 30 page *Compromis*



dealing with topics such as mass surveillance, eco-terrorism, leaked documents, and cyber attacks, we were admittedly quite lost. With time, however, and under the gentle guidance of our coaches, we managed to identify the important legal questions at hand, and from there on, it was extremely rewarding to really delve deep into each issue and develop deliberate arguments based on that research. After some last finishing touches over the Christmas break, we proudly handed in our memorials in

January.

Motivated by a certain sense of accomplishment, we started to practice for the oral pleadings, the second phase of the Jessup. Violetta had promised that this would be the fun part, and although the first few sessions were a bit bumpy, with time we came to see what she meant. With each day that we spent presenting our arguments under the watchful eye of our coaches (who acted as judges) we got better, and eventually we really enjoyed each chance we got to eloquently rebut the arguments of the other side or to engage in inquisitive back and forth with the judges. After two months, during which we participated in Vienna in a very useful three days full-scale simulation, bringing together representatives teams of a dozen States from Europe, the Jessup European Friendly, we were ready for Washington.

While we were in the comfortable situation of being the only Swiss team, thus automatically qualifying for the international rounds, our trip to Washington was jeopardized by some administrative obstacles. Obtaining fundraising and support proved to be harder than we had anticipated. With the generous support of *ELSA Genève* and the *UNIGE Commission de Gestion des Taxes Fixes* as well as two external organisations, the *Genf-Gesellschaft e.V.* and the *Geneva Bar Association*, however, we managed to find enough funds to cover all our costs and were finally ready to set out for Washington.

We arrived there on Easter Sunday, as one of 131 teams competing in the finals representing their country. After carrying the Swiss flag at the opening ceremony, we received the written submissions of the four opponents we had to face during the preliminary rounds: Russia (*National Research University Higher School of Economics*), Puerto Rico (*Universidad de Puerto Rico, Rio Piedras*), Guatemala (*Universidad Francisco Marroquin*) and Chinese Taipei (*Soochow University*). The next few days were rather busy, but still, we all agree that this was the best part of the experience. The nights we spent preparing for new arguments brought us even closer together as a team, and each pleading against another team was an exciting new challenge. In the end, we unfortunately didn't quite make it to the round of the best 32 teams. Still, we had a great time in Washington, and a great Jessup experience overall.



Not only did we learn a lot about international advocacy, but we also met brilliant people with a passion for international law and gained friendships as well as memories that will be cherished for a longtime. In this regard, the Jessup's value goes far beyond the individual benefits of each participant. By truly bringing together law students from all around the world, it helps to form closer bonds within the international community, both professionally and personally. One might smile at former participants talking about their "Jessup family", but having experienced just what that actually means, we are truly thankful to everyone who made this possible for us, above all to our sponsors and to our coaches. We sincerely hope that in the future, other students from Geneva will decide to become a part of the Jessup as well, and that they will get to benefit from the same opportunity we had.



From left to right: Jonathan Kirschke-Biller, Jana Schulz-Kuhnt, Violetta Sefkow-Werner, David Trajilovic, Vincent Lawson-Body