



Kelvin Strausman (2010 British German Forum participant)

Testimonial

Wilton Park offered me and my co-participants - mostly people at the same career level - mid career-, the opportunity within a very short time - in a space of less than a week to intensively and intently exchange ideas on how we see the world. Although we were all Europeans, we live and work in different countries - Germany and the United Kingdom. The diverse backgrounds and accomplishment of the participants ensured that there were different points of views on issues, which made the discussions both informative and provocative.

We learned a lot about Britain and about how the institutions in Britain are structured and work. We got great insights not only from the lectures that were given by excellent and accomplished lectures, but from our fellow British participants who were very knowledgeable about the problems of Britain and its institutions. I am sure that they in turn learned a lot about Germany and its institutions as well. One of the most fascinating things that came out of the conference was the fact, that although we seem to know very little about the internal institutions in each other's countries, we face the same problems. We in Germany as well as in Great Britain face the problems of access to institutions by the citizens, we face the problems of how to make sure that stake holders are responsible and responsive to constituents, we also face problems of limited resources and how to distribute these resources equitably. What the experience at Wilton Park showed, was that as Europeans, the more we communicate with one another across all levels of society, the easier it is to work towards more European integration, because we have common problems and can only benefit from exchanging views on them and learning from each about what works and what does not.

Another aspect of Wilton Park that stands out for me is Wilton Park itself. I attend many international conferences as part of my job and I have never been to a conference like Wilton Park. It was like a retreat without being elitist. The organizers and staff created such an inclusive, democratic, open and relaxed environment that one felt as if one was with family. As a result you felt very free to express yourself and felt inspired to express your opinions without any constraints. I think that is the most important thing that Wilton Park offers.

The setting of Wilton Park - In rural south England, meant that the participants were not distracted and could concentrate on not only getting to know one another, but could continue discussions and debates well after the official end of the sessions. The staff of Wilton Park were very accommodating and provided us with everything we needed. The atmosphere, both during the discussions and break out sessions were very collegial but still very intellectual.