

ULLA-STINA HENTTONEN



My name is Ulla-Stina Henttonen and I was born in Espoo, Finland. I grew up in a family where international affairs and politics were strongly present, both on our travels around Europe, and at home. My family comes from Karelia, a region annexed by Russia in World War II, and I grew up hearing my grandparents talk about the war and the home they left behind.

Through my school years I was driven by endless curiosity that made me gravitate towards everything new. I competed in math, added a new language to my curriculum every two years, and spent my free time reading, writing, volunteering, and doing theater. At the age of 11, I was diagnosed with a chronic bone marrow condition (CRMO), and although it sets limitations to what I can do, it has never stopped me from diving head first into new challenges.

During high school I got the first taste of life abroad as I left for Italy for an exchange year. The transition from the safety of Finland to the poverty and crime in Naples was a shock, but it gave me perspective and further sparked my curiosity. By the time I graduated high school I knew I wanted to go into international relations, but decided first to realize my goal of further strengthening my language skills. Before my undergraduate studies I worked for TUI Travel PLC for three years in five countries, and in seven languages. Heading a multinational staff of seventeen, I gained professional experience and confidence in my abilities to work in an international setting and to adapt to new environments. In addition to my native Finnish, I now have an excellent command of English, an advanced working proficiency in Italian, Swedish, and French, and conversational Spanish.

When it came time to take my curiosity into an academic setting and head to college, I chose Malmö University in Sweden, because the curriculum offered a clear focus on international relations. In Malmö I soon realized that I enjoy immensely the intellectual challenge offered by international relations theory, and the company of likeminded people. During my first semester I became active in Malmö Association of Foreign Affairs, where I headed the online publication as Editor-in-Chief, and served in the board throughout my studies.

During the second year of my studies, I had the opportunity to study abroad in Melbourne University, Australia, where I gained hard skills focusing on political communications and professional writing. Returning to Scandinavia I managed to secure an internship at Worldwatch Institute Europe in Copenhagen, where I later on took over as Head of Communications gaining an insight to the ins and outs of the non-profit sector.

I graduated from Malmö University in June of 2015 and my bachelor thesis brought me back to where my interest in IR started in the first place. My dissertation discussed the fear of Russia in Finland historically, and in the light of the Ukraine crisis.

During my first year at SAIS Europe I have learned to pair my theoretical mindset with real-world policy issues. I started out my studies with an all-encompassing curiosity about global phenomena and the underlying structures, and while that deep-rooted curiosity still persists, I have learned to narrow down my questions and enjoy research. My research interests focus primarily around power politics and the role of communications, perceptions, and spin in international affairs. Coming from a background of public education, the opportunities offered at SAIS are beyond anything I could have ever imagined, and I am looking forwards to the academic and professional opportunities that Washington DC has to offer. After graduation, I hope to find employment in a think tank or a research institute, and potentially pursue post-graduate studies in the future.