

Although I was only a child, the images of the crumbling of the Berlin Wall marked a turning point in my life. The throngs of celebrating crowds, the warm embraces between individuals divided by artificial, political boundaries, and the climactic end of the Cold War, inspired my passion for international politics. After the fall of the wall and the final closure of the iron curtain, the sociopolitical *winds of change* that swept throughout the former Soviet Union were felt by me and my family, thousands of miles away from Moscow, East Berlin, and the traditional centers of the Communist Bloc. The world around me was rapidly changing, and during the course of my intellectual and personal development, set goals that would launch me toward a career in international affairs and economics. The School of International & Public Affairs at Columbia University (SIPA) provides the ideal opportunity to engage my intellectual interests, and develop a strong practical expertise in International Finance & Economic Policy as related to the former Soviet Union, and the world at large.

I became more politicized as I transitioned into high school and university, and actively participated in organizations that were driven by a spirit of public service and political leadership. I joined *Cross-Cultural Solutions (CCS)*, an American nonprofit organization committed to teaching English to indigent Russian orphans. This experience, which bridged political involvement with humanitarianism, revealed that politics could be wielded into a philanthropic tool, which was deeply empowering. In addition, taking on a leadership role in educating children from my native country was especially moving, principally because of our shared culture and common origins. My involvement with CCS also exposed me to a range of cultures, and facilitated my collaboration with a range of passionate leaders whom engaged their regional expertise to develop and democratize the region. Furthermore, I also observed how economic conditions and policies in former Soviet republics impacted the citizenries' life on the ground, and resolved progressive economic reform is the optimal mechanism for improving the overall quality of life. I debated this matter in the classroom and at home, where I would have fruitful exchanges with my mother, a Professor of Russian History, and closely assessed the economic dimension of international affairs.

In line with this realization, I undertook a rigorous curriculum in Economics as an undergraduate. In addition to examining domestic economic systems, I critically examined global economics and the intersection of economics and international politics. I observed how nation-states often formulated political decision based on rational economic interests, which navigates their foreign affairs strategies. The role of transnational actors, such as the United Nations (UN) or the World Trade Organization (WTO), is also guided by economic considerations, resolving that economics was an inextricable component of international affairs and politics. Therefore, I majored in Operations Research for Economics as an undergraduate, and later attained a Master's Degree in "Macroeconomic Modeling and Forecasting," which provides me with the academic preparation to transition into SIPA's International Finance & Economic Policy concentration.

In order to supplement my academic and extracurricular activities with meaningful international experience, I decided to work abroad and immerse myself in Swedish, Bulgarian and Russian culture. I took on a position with the international furniture giant IKEA, and held several positions that developed my professional acumen in these three nations. My capacity at IKEA allowed me to work and meet with CEO's, CFO's, Logistics Directors, and prominent indigenous professionals who were committed to the economic development of their respective countries. While abroad, I reflected upon my mosaic of academic, extracurricular and life experiences, and resolved that a career in International Trade Operations was the most appropriate platform to nurture my talents, and cultivate my passion for international political and economic affairs. Therefore, my short-term goal is to engage my skills, and graduate education from SIPA, to enhance the capabilities of my current company or an analogous international manufacturing or trading corporation. After solidifying my practical experience, my ultimate aspiration is to transition into a domestic or transnational organization committed to the economic development and democratization of the former Soviet republics, particularly the most underdeveloped states.

The opportunity to study under world-class policy scholars, and interact with a dynamic and diverse student body, will naturally enhance my graduate education. For instance, learning from academics including Stephen Sestanovich, a distinguished scholar of Russian and the former Soviet republics, will maximize my understanding of my regional focus. SIPA's Harriman Institute is indeed the most prominent interdisciplinary center committed to the study and analysis of the former Soviet states, which brings together dynamic researchers and fellows, respected academics, and students who share an interest in the region. Extending my examination of the region by participating in the Harriman's Institute's range of activities and opportunities will enrich my education by furnishing me with the forum to network with such a dynamic collective. In addition to learning from leading academic and experts, SIPA's rich curriculum will help me crystallize my professional aspirations, and position me squarely within New York City, which is home to the United Nations and other salient international actors. I look forward to the prospect of joining SIPA's incoming Class of 2009, and taking the first step toward shaping myself into an international policy leader who may, one day, partake in the type of progressive reform that mobilized my commitment to the field. Nearly two decades after the fall of the Soviet Union, the region is in need of renewed wind to erode the vestiges of injustice, and carry in a *new breeze* of economic prosperity and international cooperation.