Ulrich Hunn, consul general of Switzerland, tells a joke Thursday afternoon in the Associates Room of Oklahoma Memorial Union.

**Meredith Simons**
*Daily Staff Writer*

Students had the opportunity Thursday to question diplomats from all over Europe in an event professor Mitchell Smith described as “kind of a miracle.”

Consuls and consuls general from Austria, Germany, Spain, Switzerland, the Netherlands, France and the United Kingdom participated in a panel discussion with faculty and students in the Oklahoma Memorial Union.

“It’s very rare to have that many consuls in the same room,” said Keith Brecheen, political science and history junior. “This was very well put together.”

The event, moderated by Smith, political science and international and area studies professor, was designed to give students an opportunity to interact with experts in European affairs and discuss the relationships among Western nations.

Munzel said the EU is becoming increasingly more involved in the world’s economies and development projects, but emphasized that this expansion should be viewed as complementing the United States’ efforts abroad, not competing with them.

“My conviction is that the European Union and America are natural partners,” he said. “There is no alternative to cooperation between us.”

Paul Lynch, the consul general of the United Kingdom, agreed that the European Union is expanding in global influence, but cautioned that it still doesn’t have the same role as the U.S. does.

He pointed to the European Union’s recent negotiations with Iran as an example of the EU’s increasing importance in international diplomatic circles.

“That was an example of how the EU can help in situations where the U.S. might not be able to sit down and talk,” he said.

He added, however, that the EU’s abilities in some areas are still limited. North Korea, for example, has been reluctant to talk with the European Union, preferring to deal directly with the U.S. or no one at all.

“Many countries still see the U.S. as the global power,” he said. “So even with a willingness on the side of Europe to become more engaged, there’s not always a willingness on the other side.”

Lynch said this perception of the U.S. as the world’s ultimate power makes it crucial that America continues to engage the world diplomatically.

“I think it would be a great shame if we saw the U.S. drawing back from its global responsibilities,” he said.

Geert Visser, Consul of the Netherlands, agreed.

“The U.S. is still the leader of the free world,” Visser said. “But the EU is getting stronger and stronger.”

**Responsibilities in the States**

In addition to discussing their views of the work that needs to be done in international circles, the diplomats described their duties at European consulates in the U.S.

Consulates provide services to their foreign nationals living in the U.S. and Americans who want to do business with the consulate’s home country.

“Most of the work we do is in trade,” Lynch said. “Helping British companies set up here and encouraging investment in Great Britain. We also help British nationals in distress.”

Part of encouraging investment abroad is handling visa requests from Americans who want to live, work or study in Europe. This brings the consulates’ staff in frequent contact with students, including many from Oklahoma.

“Every day, we have a few students, especially from Oklahoma, who have to travel to Houston to apply for a visa,” said Matthieu Clouvel, deputy consul of France.

Clouvel is from Clermont-Ferrand, one of Norman’s three sister cities and an OU-exchange city.
European consuls visit OU

By Julianna Parker
Transcript Staff Writer

Consuls from eight Western European nations discussed the changes the European Union brought in a panel discussion at the University of Oklahoma Thursday afternoon.

“Taxes are vanishing from the European Union now and the European Union is a natural partner,” said German Consul General Konrad Muznell. About 60 students and faculty observed the “Europe in the Mirror 2007,” a program sponsored by the Center for Studies in Democracy and Culture, the International Programs Center and the School of International and Area Studies.

The consuls are the heads of the embassies for their respective countries — Austria, Germany, Spain, Switzerland, United Kingdom, the Netherlands and France. Consulars are often located regionally and help consuls in another country, supply visas for those visiting their countries and promote their country.

Most of the consuls visiting Norman Thursday were from their Houston offices.

“The consulate covers regions much bigger than the European country. For example, Swiss Consul General Ulrich Hunz said his Atlanta office’s staff of nine serves 11 states, or about 50 times the size of the entire country of Switzerland,” Hunz said.

At the panel discussion Thursday, students asked the consul questions. Several standardized questions regarding the changes that have come since the countries joined the European Union.

“We identify as a group, we act as a group,” Muznell said about his duties within the EU.

The countries work together to solve problems and prepare for emergencies, but the consuls still act as national representatives, the German consul said.

One change brought by the EU that affects consuls is different requirements for transportation within the EU. Schengen countries have the EU eliminate internal border checks and visas between themselves.

“Once you step into the Schengen area, you’re in,” Austrian Consul General Gerhard Wiedner, French Deputy Consul Matthieu Gloire and German Consul General Konrad Muznell and Dutch Consul Geert Visser.

“The more countries surrounding Austria become Schengen members, the fewer monitoring expenses will be drastically reduced,” he said.

French Deputy Consul Matthieu Gloire and because of this, soon all borders in Europe will be dissolved.

This was the first visit to OU for Gloire, but the trip seemed too short.

He went to university in Clermont-Ferrand, France, which has an exchange program with OU. He said he applied 15 years ago to study abroad here, but wasn’t accepted. Instead, he went to London with his girlfriend (now wife), so it worked out. He said he was glad to finally get here, though.

Yarik Cohen, an OU student from Israel, asked Gloire about the EU’s stand on the Arab-Israeli conflict.

This controversial issue is a good example of the benefits of the EU. Instead of each European country bringing their own historical alliances and prejudices, the EU benefits from everyone’s experiences.

“Sowe each of us, we can moderate each other, we can bring something,” he said.

Moderator Mitchell Smith, associate professor of political science and international and area studies, asked the consuls whether the decline of the American dollar meant Europe’s role was growing.

“Think it’s already happening?” Muznell said. “Europeans are playing a very big role in developing aid to Africa, for example.”

Muznell didn’t deny the increased role, though.

“We are not really very happy the decline of the American dollar, because we want you to buy our stuff,” he said.

The Swiss consul had a different opinion about the dollar’s decline.

“It’s very good for the Swiss banks,” he said.

The dollar hasn’t changed enough to let Europe surpass the role of the United States, British Consul General Paul Lynch said. Many countries think of the U.S. as the global policy, and won’t discuss or negotiate with other Western countries, he said.

“There’s still a great need for the U.S. to be globally engaged,” Lynch said.

Dr. Roger Randel helped bring the dignitaries to OU. Randel is a member of the Governor’s International Team, which organized the consuls trip to Oklahoma. As an OU-Tulsa human relations professor, his goal was to bring them to OU.