



David Francis

Freelance Journalist

Home Media: Freelancer, Washington, DC
Guest Media: Financial Times Deutschland, Berlin

David Francis is an award-winning journalist based in Washington, D.C. He has written for a number of publications including the *Christian Science Monitor*, *Foreign Policy magazine*, the *San Francisco Chronicle*, the *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, the *Washington Monthly*, *SportsIllustrated.com*, and *Chicago magazine*. David has reported from around the world and the United States. He has been awarded journalism fellowships from the American Council on Germany (of which he is a member), the International Center for Journalists and Arizona State University, and he is a two-time winner of the Lilly Scholarship for Journalists.

Francis has written on topics ranging from energy security to U.S.-Russia relations to Con-

gress to high school football. He has conducted several in-depth investigations, including a six-month inquiry into the suspicious suicide of a Washington, D.C. man chased by federal agents and another into mismanagement of the Washington-area transit union's pension fund. He has given talks at Georgetown University's School of Foreign Service, Johns Hopkins University School of Advanced International Studies and the World Affairs Council of Pittsburgh.

Francis went to the University of Chicago as an undergraduate and Georgetown University as a graduate student. He was born and raised in Pittsburgh, PA.

Report by David Francis

I spent the first two weeks in Berlin in intensive, one-on-one German language training classes at Goethe Institute. I had stayed in Berlin for a short fellowship in 2008, and was comfortable living in the city without any real knowledge of the German language. However, I was not confident that I could participate in a German workplace, and with a little less than two weeks of classes before beginning my work at *Financial Times Deutschland* -- this lack of confidence was unsettling.

I was surprised how much one can learn in two weeks of intensive language classes. My teacher developed a curriculum around my circumstances, and within days I felt I had made some nominal progress in understanding German. I also knew that as quickly as I learned some German basics, I would be equally quick to forget them without continuing classes. So for once a week until late into my trip, I met with my teacher to continue our work. I will admit that speaking is still extremely difficult beyond basic conversation. But I am surprised with how much my reading and listening comprehension have improved in three months, so much so that I can generally follow conversation and read German newspapers.

Fortunately, everyone at *FTD* knew upon my arrival that my German skills were lacking, so they all happily communicated with me in English. While the language barrier did prevent me from participating in many aspects of the newsroom culture, it did not prevent me from contributing to the paper, being part of the *FTD* politics team and forming bonds with my colleagues.

On my first day, I realized that I could occupy a niche writing about U.S. politics. *FTD* has a very skilled Washington correspondent in former Burns fellow Sabine Muscat. Sabine, however, was often preoccupied with the breaking news of the day and the general work of being a foreign correspondent. This provided me with the opportunity to write more analytical pieces about U.S. news, as well as commentaries and features about the psyche of American politics.

For instance, in my first week I wrote about the American populism fuelling the so-called “town hall” health care protests that took place in August. I also wrote about the political dynamics of the Clinton family, the ballooning U.S. budget deficit, and Democratic disappointment in some of President Barack Obama’s policies. In short, whenever something significant or interesting happened in the United States, I had a

story to write (I wrote in English, which was translated to German for publication). And I enjoyed writing about politics from outside of the Washington bubble, so much so that I'm dreading going back to the insularity of the Beltway crowd. I also enjoyed coordinating with Sabine, especially for her stories on the G-20 which took place in my hometown of Pittsburgh.

I was surprised about differences between U.S. and German newsroom atmospheres and culture. Reporters at *FTD* tend to be older with advanced degrees, as opposed to the States where a reporter with a master's degree is rare. The newsroom was a bit quieter than ones I have worked in, although in moments where news was breaking there is a familiar, unmistakable and highly addictive energy among reporters and editors. The open, traditional newsroom space we all share allows everyone to get their fix.

News placement at first was also a bit puzzling to me. In the United States, newspapers tend to put exclusive content and analysis on the front page. *FTD* tended to stick with the news of the day for front page material and put more exclusive, in depth reporting inside the paper. A German reporter recently explained to me that this is a bit of a tradition here, but it seems to be a misguided one.

I also had some misconceptions about *FTD*. I thought its staff would be bigger, despite being a satellite office to the main newsroom in Hamburg. Yet I continue to be amazed at how much work is done by *FTD*'s seven-person politics team. Work hours are long – from 9:30 a.m. to around 8 p.m., and typically one day on the weekend – and the pace is hectic. But the team persists and does an amazing job of covering the world from Berlin and from locations around the world. I admire and respect my colleagues for their hard work very much.

While at *FTD*, I tried to dedicate at least a few hours of every day to work for publications in the United States. I mainly worked for the *Christian Science Monitor*, which made me a correspondent after filing a few stories for them early in August. I wrote about a host of issues, including: the Opel-GM deal, the G-20 conference the German elections, climate change, European sports, European culture, EU politics and German involvement in Afghanistan. Between this and my work from *FTD*, I remained busy throughout the fellowship.

So busy, in fact, that I decided to stay until mid-November to continue my work for U.S. publications. What I did not plan on, however, was continuing to work at *FTD*.

On my last day, my editor asked me if I would consider helping out during Sabine's vacation in October. I readily accepted, and for a number of weeks, served as the paper's Washington correspondent in Berlin. The fact that I'm writing this report while sitting in the newsroom on a Sunday evening is testament enough to how much I have enjoyed my extra time here.

One of the speakers at our orientation back in July mentioned that she was a bit disillusioned with journalism before she took the fellowship. I admit feeling the same before this trip, and know that many of the other fellows in Berlin shared similar sentiments. But I will return to Washington with a renewed sense of journalistic purpose. With my return date slowly approaching, I am uplifted that I was able to find this purpose in a foreign newsroom 4,000 miles from home. I am also sad that I am returning to a city where that purpose was initially lost.