

EU Travel-Research Grant Trip Report
Saturday November 8th to Saturday November 15th, 2008

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As a result of receiving the Centre for European Studies' 2008 EU Travel-Research grant, I had the privilege to visit Brussels to conduct interviews for my MA research on the EU-Canada and EU-US trade negotiating relationships. This trip provided an exceptional opportunity to discuss my research with and gain important policy-related insights from trade experts within EU institutions, Member States' permanent delegations, the Canadian and American Missions to the EU, and Brussels-based academic think tanks. As I move forward with completing my research and preparing my written work, the information and insights I collected in Brussels have had significant value to the process of deepening and expanding my analysis in four specific ways.

A major component of my research focuses on how intra-EU institutional dynamics (between the Member States and the Commission) influence the EU's behaviour in trade negotiations with Canada and the United States. Given this focus and the closed and sometimes informal nature of intra-EU processes, published sources provide only a partial account of how the EU develops trade negotiating mandates and strategies. Thus, the opportunity to speak with officials who are involved in these processes with regards to Canada and the United States was critical to gaining insight as to how EU negotiating mandates are developed and executed.

A second contribution of this trip to my overall research was the acquisition of contemporary insights especially in the realm of the Canada-EU trade negotiating relationship. Only several weeks prior to my visit, the 2008 Canada-EU Summit placed a significant emphasis on the potential for Canada and the European Union to negotiate a comprehensive economic partnership in the near future. As a result, several of the individuals I interviewed were involved in the scoping exercise for the proposed negotiations and provided extremely timely insights concerning the past and future challenges that characterize Canada-EU trade negotiations. These discussions not only highlighted the temporal relevance of my research but also stressed the need to address the ongoing evolution of Canada-EU trade negotiations in my analysis.

In looking at bilateral trade relationships, the accuracy and complexity of my analysis will depend on incorporating various perspectives concerning the behaviour of the European Union as a trade negotiator. For example, part of my research examines the extent to which Member States as a principal use informal control mechanisms to limit the autonomy of the European Commission as a negotiating agent. In an attempt to explore this issue, my research trip allowed me to gauge and compare the perspectives of EU actors such as the Commission, Council, and Member States as well as the EU's negotiating partners. In drawing on these various perspectives, it will be possible to make nuanced distinctions when discussing the objective realities and subjective insights which characterize EU trade negotiating behaviour.

Prior to my trip to Brussels, my research was primarily focused on intra-EU institutional dynamics and did not examine the principal-actor issues which exist within the EU's trade negotiating partners. However, in discussions with EU trade officials as well as Canadian and American officials dealing with the EU, I was given insights concerning, for example, how federal-provincial dynamics may impact Canadian trade negotiating behaviour with the EU. From these discussions, I hope to enrich my final analysis by providing a comparative perspective to my research which examines how institutional structures at the EU level as well as those of its negotiation partners affect the EU's trade negotiation behaviour. Based on these important contributions, the EU travel-research grant proved immensely valuable to my MA research as it provided a unique opportunity to gain valuable, first hand insight concerning the European Union's trade negotiation behaviour vis a vis Canada and the United States.