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Narrative Report

Center for European Studies Graduate Travel Research Grant, Fall 2008
by Anne Vavrik

First and foremost, I would like to thank the Centre for European Studies for providing me with the opportunity to conduct field research for my MA dissertation. For my research essay I am analysing discourses within major German political parties on the subject of naturalisation. I used the funding to travel to Berlin and Munich. I visited Germany between October 9th and October 23rd in order to visit local archives and attend parliamentary sessions. I was able to attend the Berlin and Bavaria state level parliaments once each, as well as the federal parliament. I also visited state political archives and libraries.

I found this research trip beneficial in numerous ways. The first is the access it gave me to archival material which is not available by loan. The time I spent in the Auswärtiges Amt (federal political archives) was invaluable in the primary and secondary sources I was able to find, including legal documents and scholarly commentary. Materials from this site are not available by loan, and may only be viewed in house. Copies also may not be made, so it was imperative that I visit the site myself. At this archive was the first once I visited in Berlin I was able to find the locations of other useful materials, such as the Ministry of Internal Affairs, where I was able to obtain copies of legal policy, such as the national integration plan and demographic statistics. I also registered for a membership at the Berlin Staatsbibliothek (state library) which is only possible in person. I now have access to the library's online database of legal sources and electronic resources. In both Berlin and Bavaria I obtained literature published by major political parties outlining their platforms, which I will be able to analyse and contrast. This has especially been useful with state-level legislation, because very little is available online or in Canada.

My visits to parliamentary sessions produced mixed results. Due to the recent international financial crisis, a great deal of scheduled debate was postponed in order to discuss plans for banking and security. This poor timing was not predictable and could not be avoided. Nevertheless, I was still able to conduct useful research on political discourses. I was able to observe the differences in the ways in which members of different parties discuss the same topics, as well as differences between discussion in either state and at the national level. I chose the states of Bavaria and Berlin as case studies specifically in order to examine two polarized examples of German political discourse. Having the opportunity to visit the three parliaments also allowed me to witness first-hand the passing of legislation. For example, discourses on federal intervention greatly varied in the two states and at the national level. For example, as a city state, the Berlin government also addresses municipal concerns while the Bavarian system has the state divided into smaller administrative units. Being able to visit the sites allowed me to obtain unedited primary sources which would not be available in Canada and to gather information without relying on what is available within scholarly publication.

I would like to take the opportunity to once again thank the Centre for European Studies for awarding me this grant. It has been an invaluable resource for my studies and allowed me to gain insight on political discourse and conduct research for my MA work which would not have otherwise been possible.