

Travel Report

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Thanks to the generous travel grant provided by the Centre for European Studies, I was able to carry out my research connected to my PhD dissertation on fringe parties and party formation in six Western and Eastern European states. Given the increasing proliferation of - and support for - radical far-right but occasionally also radical libertarian and leftist parties in Europe during the last decade, my research investigates the underlying causes behind the recent formation as well as the electoral success of these parties.

In essence, my project attempts to situate itself in the literature on party formation as well as the wider literature on party-systems. The aim is not just to provide structural-based explanations but rather to consider the role that agency itself plays in the process of party creation as well as the subsequent electoral success. In addition, the phenomenon is relatively new with many of these parties being only a few years old. Substantial academic material and quantitative studies/analyses are therefore inexistent and, as a result, the research could not have relied solely on secondary sources or statistical data.

Consequently, due to the party-centric approach of the research as well as the absence of considerable statistical data pertinent to the formation process of these new political actors, traveling to those states and conducting interviews with party leaders/elites as well as with academic experts on the subject was the only possible way to attain a broader and in-depth grasp of the phenomenon. The experts interviewed have given me direction and have further crystallized my findings. Similarly, interviews with party elites proved very useful not just in answering my questions but in directing me towards other potential interviewees, thus allowing me to network with additional valuable contacts. A total of twenty one-hour sit-down interviews were conducted as a result of this grant. This included four academic experts, three party leaders, seven prominent party members/members of national parliaments or party strategists and ideologues, one former party elite member and five members of the European Parliament. The latter interviews conducted in Brussels have been especially crucial in understanding the role that EP elections play in the formation and entry strategies and of new parties.

Ultimately, the CES grant has been central in making my research trip possible and in helping me carry out my work. The interviews have been unquestionably vital towards my study of the most recent wave of fringe and niche parties in Europe. I would therefore like to take this opportunity to express my gratitude for the help and support of the Centre for European Studies at Carleton and especially the people that made this possible, Professor Joan DeBardeleben, Director of CES and Natalia Joukovskaia, CES Project Manager.