

## **Travel Research Grant Report**

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In June 2017, I had the pleasure of carrying out field research in Belgium and France for my Masters Research Project (MRP), tentatively entitled: “The Influence of Subnational Authorities on the Ratification of European Union Free Trade Agreements.” This trip was made possible largely because of the EU Travel-Research Grant as awarded by Carleton’s Centre for European Studies (CES). The trip took place from May 29 to June 24, and because of it I was able to make substantial progress on my MRP.

To be brief, my interest in the process of free trade agreement (FTA) ratification was due to the ongoing negotiations the Comprehensive and Economic Trade Agreement between Canada and the EU and opposition to it from the Belgian region of Wallonia. Under the Belgian federal system, which gives equal credence to regions as to its central government in Brussels, if the Wallonian authority chose *not* to ratify CETA, that could mean that the entire agreement itself would be terminated. I thought this was very interesting and decided to explore not only Belgium’s political system, but also that of France, which is by contrast a unitary state. This means that there is only one central government in Paris to which all the country’s regions must answer. Furthermore, ratification in France is only necessary at the national level.

Throughout my time in Europe, I remained based in Brussels but travelled to different areas of Belgium and France in order to provide a more complete picture of each country’s political frameworks. To do so, I interviewed academics who specialized in such matters and who were very keenly aware of the CETA negotiations. I also interviewed a representative from the EU’s Committee of the Regions, which as its name implies represents EU member states’ regions at the European level. Furthermore, I interviewed the permanent representatives from each of the Belgian regions (Brussels, Flanders, and Wallonia) to the EU, which was a fascinating experience. Finally, I interviewed a journalist from *POLITICO Europe*, which provided me with a sense of civil society’s perspective on CETA. Often the interview subjects, especially the academics, would either pass on another name of someone to meet that I had not previously considered or would give me substantial literature related to my thesis.

Each of these interviews was performed in person, though I was not able to interview every person that I initially wished to meet. For instance, I sought the Minister-President of Wallonia, but due to time constraints could not meet with his staff. Additionally, there were a number of journalists that I would like to have met but unfortunately they were unavailable for interviews. Nevertheless this was a very fruitful trip that provided me with a great deal of insights into my MRP. Without this trip and without the Centre for European Studies Jean Monnet Centre Travel-Research Grant, I do not think that my project would be as comprehensive and in-depth. I look forward to completing my project and presenting my findings in the final version of the essay.