

**Centre for European Studies Travel Research Grant Report**  
**By Megan Ardagh Weekes (NPSIA)**

My Centre for European Studies (CES) travel research grant enabled me to travel to Brussels in order to conduct interviews with European Union (EU) policymakers regarding Turkey's application to the Union. The information I gathered will be used to enhance my major research paper on this topic, a final requirement for my MA in International Affairs at the Norman Paterson School.

Turkey's application to the EU is highly complex and a vast number of intimately connected issues underpin the question of whether it should gain EU membership. My research paper, however, specifically examines why Turkey remains perceived by some as "too different" in terms of its culture to join the Union. Because official EU documents rarely discuss questions of cultural exclusion, I looked forward to directly addressing this issue with policymakers, including Members of the European Parliament (MEP), officials from the DG Enlargement's Turkey Team, and members of Enlargement Commissioner Olli Rehn's personal cabinet.

I carefully chose the week of June 20-27 because it followed the European Council Brussels Summit, the most recent meeting of the EU-Turkey Joint Parliamentary Committee, and it corresponded with a European Parliament mini plenary session in Brussels (meaning that the MEPs would not be in Strasbourg). I never could have anticipated how perfect my timing would become. After the failed Brussels Summit, the issue of enlargement and, more specifically, Turkey's application to the EU became more controversial than ever. Consequently, not only did the issue become prominent in the press, but policymakers also proved keen to discuss this matter with me. Everyone I spoke with held a strong opinion on the issue, and it seemed that members of the European elite were more willing to discuss the uneasy and thorny question of Turkey's "cultural difference."

My time in Brussels proved extremely fruitful thanks to the kindness of so many MEPs and their staff, officials from the Commission, and diplomats from both the British and Turkish Permanent Missions to the EU. While there, I met with 18 different individuals. I am pleased with the diverse mix of individuals I managed to interview, including both conservative and socialist MEPs, the chair of the EU-Turkey Joint Parliamentary Committee, the Vice President of the European Parliament, experts from the Commission's DG Enlargement (including the author of the Commission's new Civil Society Dialogue specifically designed to help address fears over Turkey's application), the British diplomat charged with managing the Turkey file during the current Presidency, and the First Secretary from the Turkish Permanent Mission to the EU. I also attended a number of interesting events, such as European Policy Centre (EPC) briefing with Enlargement Commissioner Rehn entitled "Is the Future Enlargement of the EU in Peril?" and the EPC post-Summit briefing. I also managed to sneak into Commissioner Rehn's presentation to the European Parliament's Foreign Affairs Committee and to Tony Blair's speech to the European Parliament. In short, I rushed from one interview to the next and managed to gather a significant amount of information. The challenge has become determining how best to use this excellent material in my paper.

I would like to thank the Centre for European Policy Studies for funding this research trip. It not only markedly enhanced my research on Turkey's application to the EU, but it also strengthened my understanding of EU affairs in general. While I certainly benefited from meeting EU policymakers in person, the simple experience of walking from the European Parliament to the Commission's Charlemagne and Berlaymont buildings to the Permanent Missions also proved surprisingly insightful. Studying EU affairs from across the Atlantic can prove challenging at times and, thus, the opportunity to see and experience Brussels cannot be under-appreciated.