

Travel Research Grant Report

Patrick Mayangi

M.A. Candidate, Institute of European, Russian, and Eurasian Studies (EURUS)

Carleton University, Ottawa

On April 26th, I had the wonderful opportunity to travel to Brussels, Belgium. With the generous funding of a research travel grant administered by Carleton's Centre for European Studies, I conducted research mostly in Brussels and two other European cities. The travel grant supported my ongoing research for my Master's Research Paper, tentatively titled: "The European Citizens' Initiative (ECI): Fostering More Transnational Communication?"

The European Citizens' Initiative (ECI) is an innovative tool, introduced by European Union (EU) to foster deliberation and to strengthen participation of the EU citizens in European affairs. One of the benefits in introducing the ECI is that the ECI tries to address the democratic-deficit of the EU by generating proposals that adhere to citizens' interest in EU policies. My research seeks to explore the impact of the ECI on transnational communication and the creation of an European public sphere. Transnational communication or transnational public sphere is the ability for Europeans to communicate across borders. I believe that a transnational European public sphere emerges through the citizens particular engagement with the ECI. I intent to test my hypothesis which aims at outlining the broader participation aspect of the ECI through my research on transnational communication and by focusing on two initiatives, *Right2Water* and *One of Us*. I conducted interviews with members of European Commission and union organizers in Brussels.

On April 27th in Brussels, I met with two policy officers in charge of the ECI, through the European Commission. Where I discussed the historical background of the ECI and its innovative potential to foster a more European space. On May 4th -8th I travelled to Madrid, Spain to speak with the national coordinator of the *One of Us* campaign initiative. I was able to present my research, ask vital questions, and receive an insider perspective. I was able to additionally go to Berlin, Germany (May 12-May 15th) where I had the chance to share my research with regular individuals and discuss the ECI in a more unconventional setting. In all, I remained in Europe from April 26th -May 31st. I also conducted 5 interviews most of them were held in Brussels. The information gained from those interviews has proved to be of great value for my ongoing research. The opportunity to interview ECI campaigners and unions was highly fruitful and stimulating. The information gained has contributed to drawing a much fuller and more precise outlook into my research thesis.

As I begin work on my MRP, I anticipate these interviews, and my experience in Brussels will provide a priceless contribution, the result of which I believe will be a research paper of much greater intellectual value. The trip would not have been possible without the generous funding awarded by Carleton University's Centre for European Studies, and I extend a sincere thank you.