

EU Travel-Research Grant Report

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Thanks to the financial support of the Jean Monnet Centre of Excellence in the EU field and the Center for European Studies at Carleton University, I was able to conduct primary qualitative research in Bulgaria during the spring of 2017.

My master research project focuses on political challenges to the integration of Bulgaria in the EU, particularly the politics of lustration and shadows of the communist past as these issues continue to circulate as hot topics in the Bulgarian mass media at present times.

Having obtained ethics clearance from the Carleton University Ethics Board in March, I flew from Ottawa to Sofia, Bulgaria in early April and then I drove to the small town of Dimitrovgrad where I conducted five semi-structured interviews with some opinion makers of the Bulgarian society including history school teachers and journalists. Then I traveled to the small provincial town of Veliko Tarnovo in the north part of the country where I conducted two more interviews. The actual interviews took place in the second week of April. The interviewees shared with me their perceptions on the politics of lustration and the present disillusion of some Bulgarians with the EU.

I chose Dimitrovgrad to conduct interviews because as a small provincial town and an old bastion of communism, this town is a unique place where one can still notice the shadows of communism almost everywhere. Nearly three decades after the fall of communism in the country, nostalgia to the “old” order is still stronger in Dimitrovgrad than other Bulgarian towns. Furthermore, different transitional justice mechanisms such as renaming of the town, its streets, or lustration processes never took place there and most residents of Dimitrovgrad were strongly against it unlike other Bulgarian towns.

By interviewing Bulgarian citizens, I was able to find out whether there was a significant divergence between public narratives, mass media interpretations and existing secondary sources discourse on the above issue. I also explored to what extent, the media influences the discursive frames of the respondents of my study.

In conclusion, I would like to state that the interviews I conducted in Bulgaria were an important step for my master research project as they helped me gain invaluable insights that I would not have been able to attain only from secondary sources. Therefore, I would like to express my sincere gratitude to the Centre for European Studies for assisting me in the funding of my travel, which would not have been possible otherwise.