

UACES Scholarship 2010

Eleanor BINDMAN, *University of Glasgow*

Outline of project

My research aims to examine the role played by the Council of Europe and the European Union in promoting human rights in Russia and the way in which both institutions interact with Russian human rights NGOs. The focus of the project is the attempt by both organisations to transmit 'European' values to Russia and the way in which these attempts are interpreted and responded to by Russian NGOs and the Russian political elite. The objectives of my trip, which involved spending 3 months undertaking an unpaid traineeship in the office of the Commissioner for Human Rights at the Council of Europe, were to learn more about the inner workings of the Council of Europe and its policies on human rights promotion in Russia. I also hoped to conduct a small number of interviews with Council of Europe officials and MEPs at the European Parliament (also based in Strasbourg) prior to my main period of PhD fieldwork which will take place in 2011.

Academic achievements during my time abroad

During my time at the Council of Europe I conducted research on behalf of my colleagues on human rights issues in both Russia and Ukraine and contributed to reports on these countries. I also conducted a number of interviews with MEPs and was able to attend numerous sessions of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe and related side events which concerned human rights issues in Russia.

The experience of conducting one-to-one interviews was of invaluable benefit to my PhD research as I had had virtually no previous experience of conducting qualitative interviews and the data gathered was both interesting and highly relevant to my work. It has allowed me to reflect more on my fieldwork aims for next year and given me greater confidence in arranging and conducting this type of interview.

Use made of resources, facilities abroad

The traineeship allowed me full access to the Council of Europe and European Parliament and, as a result, I was able to attend meetings and events which would not otherwise have been accessible.

Positive and negative aspects

The positive aspects of the time I spent in Strasbourg included the opportunity to conduct interviews, to contribute to the work of the Commissioner for Human Rights, and to identify various Council of Europe and EU officials whom I hope to interview at a later date. I am enormously grateful to UACES and the European Commission for providing the funds for this trip, which has contributed greatly to my PhD research, my research skills in general, and my professional experience.

The only negative aspect of the trip was that, due to the size and structure of the organisation, it was often difficult to identify the officials at the Council of Europe with whom I needed to speak. As a result, it proved far easier arranging interviews with MEPs at the European Parliament than with Council officials.