

Doctoral School Research Award 2022/23 Report

Lucia Frigo

The Doctoral School's 2022-23 Research Award has been a pivotal resource in my PhD experience, as it allowed me to conduct several elite interviews in Paris (France) and Brussels (Belgium) and to collect invaluable data for my doctoral thesis.

My research project aims to understand the impact of Brexit on the Euro-British relationship in the field of intelligence and national security. As an interdisciplinary study at the crossroads of law and international relations, it relies heavily on elite interviews with former and current security professionals, diplomats, and experts from civil society.

Due to the sensitive nature of the conversations, many professionals do not agree to online conversations: the Research Award allowed me to organise and carry out two field trips in which I was able to meet these professionals in their institutions. This was an incredible experience, as I was able to witness first hand these key figures' experiences and relationships, at times even with each other, in a way that profoundly informed and enriched my research project. This experience has granted me a deep understanding of the interinstitutional, interorganisational and interpersonal relations that constitute the European intelligence network. I gained access to a British Embassy, to the European External Action Service, to the French Military School and to other institutions that I am sure will feature as useful *vignettes* in my thesis. (see pictures below)



Some of the locations I visited between Paris and Brussels (above); below: being an accredited visitor at the heart of the European Union's diplomatic service.



The research trips took care respectively in late April and late May of 2023. In the eight days in total that I spent in the European capitals, not only I was able to interview 10 professionals and diplomats; I also established important connections that allowed me to reach new interviewees and organise future trips to collect more data.

This “snowballing” of opportunities is a crucial aspect in a research field so characterised by secrecy and gatekeeping; I strongly believe that these new opportunities would not have arisen had I not met these individuals in person and spent time both listening to their insights and proving my credentials as a competent and prepared researcher. I look forward to the new interviews that I will be able to carry out in the future, both returning to Brussels and travelling to other European capitals.

In the meantime, I am extremely grateful for the Doctoral School’s Research Award. The financial support I received in the academic year 2022/2023 has given extraordinary impetus to my research and allowed me to gather a rich pool of innovative data, that will undoubtedly form the basis for my thesis’ findings.



very inspiring views between interview appointments in Brussels (above) and Paris (below)

