INTERNATIONAL SECURITY MASTER
PLACEMENT REPORT
CENTRE FOR EUROPEAN SECURITY STUDIES (CESS)

JUNE 25, 2018

RICCARDO PANELLA S3401812
PLACEMENT COORDINATOR: MERIJN HARTOG
PLACEMENT SUPERVISOR: BASTIAAN AARDEMA
INTERNSHIP PERIOD: 01/02/2018 – 30/06/2018
Contents

INTRODUCTION

Why a placement? p.2
Before the placement p.2
Expectations p.5
CESS p.5

DURING THE PLACEMENT p.6

The activities carried out for CESS p.6
The activities carried out for the EUCAM programme p.9
Miscellaneous activities p.12

CONCLUSION p.12

Personal reflections and prospects p.12
INTRODUCTION

Why a placement?

Arriving to Groningen was a completely new experience for me in many ways. Even though I had previously lived abroad and experienced the pros and cons, the benefits but also the struggles of living away from my native country, I had never tested living far away from home as a student dependent on myself for a whole year.

The master in International Security was the precise programme I was looking for after I finished my bachelor studies at the University of Florence. The variety of research seminars you could pick from, together with the ample space given to students in class to debate, discuss and confront each other on different matters have enriched my study experience enormously.

During my bachelor, I never really thought about the serious importance of doing an internship as a significant step towards my future. I was probably more concerned with gaining enough credits to graduate in time without taking into account the benefits that it could have given me. For this reason, together with a general dissatisfaction towards my previous placement experience and the chance to replace the internship with another research seminar, I did not take into consideration at first the possibility of searching for a placement. Attending in October a job fair at the University though, helped me change my mind. Some Dutch and international alumni from the Faculty of Arts intervened in the conference and explained how important it was for them to embark on an internship for their present job. Thanks to their experiences I started to be more motivated and finally looked at the internship as something more than a filler for my CV but rather as an opportunity to link the gap between the theory studied during my bachelor and master and practice. Furthermore, it became more clear to me that the internship was also an opportunity to develop new contacts for my future and slowly stepping into an insight of the job market.

Before the placement

While talking to some of my class mates from my master programme who also decided to undertake an internship, it became soon clear that it was not an easy process and that I should start looking for a placement quite in advance. The fact that my master program is structured in one year is a great benefit but it also has the disadvantage that one should be really careful to plan everything ahead.
It was the end of October and I had moved to Groningen only a month before and I was not thrilled with the idea of moving again after such a short time to another country (most of my classmates opted to apply in different international organizations or NGOs in Brussels) or even another city in the Netherlands. One day, though, I was talking to one of my classmates who did her bachelor studies at the University of Groningen and she started telling me about her internship experience at the Centre for European Security Studies (CESS) here in Groningen. Since that day, I started looking into the activities carried out by this NGO. In the meanwhile, I had already made an appointment both with Ms. Esther Haag, the contact person for Career Services of the Faculty of Arts and Mr. Bastiaan Aardema, placement coordinator for International Relations to have a first intake meeting. The intake meeting with Mr. Aardema helped me refine my interests and thus understand if CESS could be a good option in accordance with my interests.

I didn’t know much about CESS so I started looking into detail at its website and talking more to the friend who did her internship there to understand more about it. The activities carried out by the Centre as described in the website sounded really interesting: in particular I saw that they did several projects in Turkey such as the promotion of good governance in the country. Turkey has always been an area of great personal interest for me. I have had the chance to live for three years (2005-2008) in Ankara and the love for this country together with the interest/concern regarding the present political situation have led me to write my bachelor thesis about the cult of personality of Atatürk, the founder of the Republic, in comparison to the debated figure of today’s president Erdoğan. The fact that CESS had several conferences and activities carried out in Ankara during the years that followed my period there, increased my interest in their activities. Furthermore I became also interested in CESS’ trainings: I watched a video on their website explaining in practice what the aim of these interactive courses in the security reform sector in the region of interest really was. These simulation exercises reminded me of the experience I had with the Model United Nations (MUN) in New York which also consisted of simulations (in that case of diplomatic ones) between a small group of people. The participation in the MUN project was really stimulating for me because it represented a great opportunity to put my own ideas into a discussion with other people. I was thus motivated even more to apply for an internship at the CESS considering that it did something similar, even though completely different in scope and content and see how the staff at CESS structured these simulations.
At the beginning of November, I decided to send my CV together with a motivational letter to Mr. Merijn Hartog, the director of CESS. Mr. Hartog promptly responded and he scheduled an interview with me at CESS a couple of days after in order to discuss my interests and introduce myself directly. The meeting with Mr. Hartog was not really an interview but more an informal talk useful to get to know myself to him and for him to explain what CESS does and expects from an intern. On that day I also had the chance to speak to the intern working there at the time: this was useful for me also to familiarize with the working environment and the tasks carried out by her. Mr. Hartog wanted to have a couple more interviews with other candidates who applied for this position and told me to reschedule a further meeting in December, to have enough time to speak to all the candidates and make a decision. The 18th of December I was back at CESS; Mr. Hartog told me that new projects had been approved and the need of an extra help by an intern was needed. On that occasion I also met Mr. Jos Boonstra, senior researcher at CESS and coordinator of the Europe-Central Asia Monitoring (EUCAM) programme, who also gave me an overview of the tasks I would have carried out for him if I had been selected as an intern.

I received the official news of being chosen at CESS a couple of days after our second meeting. The official starting date was the 1st of February for a period of 3 months, until the 30th of April, working full-time for 5 days a week. In the first half of March, though, both Mr. Hartog and Mr. Boonstra offered me to stay with them until the end of June, in particular to help with the fellowship program (which will be discussed later) that was going to start in April. I was a bit hesitant at first since I should have started to focus on the work for my master’s thesis as well. They were very understanding and thus offered me to work for them only part time for two days a week so I would have time to work on my thesis. Given these conditions and the fact that I was really enjoying working with them I accepted and so my contract was extended until the 30th of June.

Since my placement was in Groningen I did not have to look for a new place to stay. I received 150 euros and as well as 2 days off work each month to distribute as I wished. 5 people including me worked at the office (plus the 3 Central Asian fellows who reached us in April as I will further discuss). All the staff was very welcoming and friendly and I could really feel part of their team since the beginning.
Expectations

I didn’t really have precise expectations from this internship at the beginning. I really wanted to use this opportunity to see if an NGO/civil society organization such as CESS could represent a possible working environment for me in the future. I can consider this my real first working experience and thus wanted to see this placement as a testing ground for me. This can be considered my first expectation: be more sure and confident with myself in a working environment and start defining my own path.

Mr. Hartog made it clear since the beginning that CESS doesn’t deal with security tout-court anymore which could have made me hesitant in choosing this placement given the fact that my master program is in International Security. Nevertheless, as I discussed above I was interested at the Centre’s projects since the start. A second expectation was, in fact, to learn more about both the whole Central Asia region which little did I know before and the specific countries’ situation such as Kosovo and Macedonia. I also knew that part of my tasks involved an administrative/logistical part. Mr. Hartog, in fact, explained that sometimes I should have also taken care of booking flights/hotel or help with some other minor logistical matters. I enjoyed carrying out these activities as well, though, as it represented a good balance with the other more intense activities.

I also hoped to enhance my research and writing abilities in English: I already wrote several papers in English but it was all constrained to the academic field. In this case a third expectation was to getting used to a specific terminology and appropriate sources to conduct my researches to draft proposals and concept notes.

CESS

CESS is an independent non-governmental organization based in Groningen, Netherlands. The Centre hasn’t directly dealt with security per se for some years. CESS works mainly in the fields of transparency, openness, accountability, inclusiveness and is especially involved in strengthening parliamentary activities in specific regions of the world. In particular, the Centre attempts to improve the rule of law and democracy by advocating both governments and civil society in facing their challenges. To put it bluntly, CESS mainly organizes trainings in the Balkans and Eastern Europe more broadly (but has worked also in Turkey, Georgia, Azerbaijan and the whole Caucasus region) to help strengthen their parliamentary basis. Through the principles of democracy and transparency, CESS organizes trainings, meetings,
round tables and open discussions in countries in which the process of democratization is still in progress or the Parliament itself needs further support in improving its democratic functions.

Furthermore, since 2016 CESS has established a new project in the Central Asian region (the 5 ‘stans’: Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Turkmenistan) creating the Europe-Central Asia Monitoring (EUCAM) programme. Over the years EUCAM turned into a knowledge hub on Europe-Central Asia. The main aim is to scrutinize European policies towards Central Asia; raise awareness on the importance of Central Asia and Europe’s engagement; expand the network of experts and institutions from Europe and Central Asia and create seminars for debate.

**DURING THE PLACEMENT**

**The activities carried out for CESS**

**Kosovo**- The very first task I had to perform dealt with Kosovo. In particular CESS’s aim was to support the Assembly of Kosovo in strengthening effective and accountable oversight, and the financial, legislative and representative capacities of parliamentary staffers and MPs. Besides organizing some logistic arrangements for CESS staff and its partners, I was tasked with writing a Kosovo dossier in view of this project. The dossier had to contain facts and figures about the political situation of Kosovo such as names of the President, the Prime Minister and the cabinet ministers, a study of the major and minor political parties but also the composition of the Parliament and the number of seats given to each party. Given the complex situation of this country I was then tasked with keeping updated with all recent news in Kosovo by looking at both local news (*BalkanInsight*) and international ones (*The Times, The Economist, Limes*, etc.). Little before I started the internship, the Serb leader Oliver Ivanovic was murdered while entering his party’s headquarter while the 17th of February marked the 10th anniversary of Kosovo’s auto-proclaimed independence which signed again the presence of a lack of compromise in the entire history of Kosovo’s politics. Given these events, it was interesting to start a research on this country which I knew very little about. After finding crucial articles regarding the political situation of the country after the political election of June 2017, I was also tasked in writing a personal critical comment to the article in order to see how the main points of focal interests could change given a different perspective if seen from a local or an international point of view.
Macedonia: Another project that CESS worked on was based in Macedonia. Among other things, I had to construct a concept note for this new project in Macedonia called *Strengthening Assessment and Monitoring Capacities: Linking Civil Society Organizations and Parliament in Macedonia* (SAMCA project). I had to work in drafting two chapters of this proposals. The first one dealt with the link with Macedonian National Strategies. In particular, I gave my support in reading the National Strategy for European Integration of the Republic of Macedonia of 2004, the Stabilization and Association Agreement as well as the EU Annual Progress Report which were useful to find more info on how the main theme of the proposed project, strengthening the role of CSOs in their relationship with the Parliament, was approached in these texts. Furthermore, I did a research on the Public Administration Reform in Macedonia 2018-2020 on the role of inclusiveness and oversight of Civil Society Organizations and looking at the differences of the text from its previous draft proposal of 2017-2020. The second chapter I had to work on, concerned the link with similar projects funded by other organizations. I had to research whether other organizations, similar to CESS had promoted similar activities in Macedonia in the last 5 years. I prepared a document in which I found out that some international organizations such as the Westminster Foundation, the United Nations Development Program in Skopje, the National Democratic Institute had done similar projects regarding the link between CSOs and Parliament. Furthermore, I did a research on the Macedonian Citizens’ Association MOST discovering that several projects in this field are still run by this organization. All of this was useful for CESS to see which areas were not covered by these organizations and thus implement them with new proposals.

Moldova: For the work on this project, *Europeanisation beyond process: Establishing Policy Bridges with the EU*, I assisted Mr. Sportel, Senior Programme Manager at CESS. This initiative contributed to both fostering the internal research & analysis and institutional capacities of the Institute for European Policies and Reforms (IPRE) based in Chisinau, Moldova and its main aim was to increase the quality and the outreach of the subjects of critical importance to the Europeanisation process of Moldova. For the drafting of this proposal I had to research different aspects. First of all I had to search for documents published by different European institutions, such as the European Parliament, the European Commission and the European External Action Service, which were related to parliamentary democracy and in particular find out how and to what extent does the EU support the Eastern Partnership. Secondly, another section I was tasked to investigate dealt with exploring good governance: introducing and linking parliamentary culture to political culture and eventually to good
governance. I had to look into the area of parliamentary culture and in particular how the concept of parliamentary culture is set out by identifying the different criteria that characterise this concept. Lastly, I had to analyse to what extent the criteria of parliamentary culture can be found in Moldova by assessing the EU and the leading EU member states’ intervention and assistance for the Parliament of Moldova.

**Ukraine**: For this project, called *Building Capacity in Security Sector Governance: A research, training and coaching programme to strengthen oversight of security in Ukraine*, I helped mainly with the creation for a budget proposal which included a research on possible costs of reservation for meeting and conference rooms in Kiev, the cost to hire an official translator, and the fees for the Agency for Legislative Initiatives.

**Institut für Auslandsbeziehungen- zivik funding Programme**: The zivik programme is an initiative promoted by the German Institut für Auslandsbeziehungen whose scope is that of promoting international peace projects in critical countries by funding non-governmental organisations in carrying out these crucial activities. My task was thus, to scrutinize the different requirements that IFA-zivik had, in order for CESS to be eligible for starting a project in a country of relevant importance and look in which countries and what type of previous projects had been implemented. I found out that several of the project themes that IFA-zivik sponsored precisely matched the focus area in which CESS is mainly involved: the creation of round tables and discussion panels for dialogue among diverging parties; development of traditional systems of mediation and most of all training of people in civil conflict resolution.

**Georgia**: At the beginning of May, the Dutch organisation Nuffic published on its website an open call for the *Orange Knowledge Programme-Tailor Made Training (TMT)* aimed at developing the long-term work of an organization by carrying out trainings for a selected group of its staff members. There were different regions available to start this project and the focus-area that CESS decided to work on was Georgia due to its previous experiences in the region. For this proposals, I had two main tasks. The first one was to draft a two-pages outline explaining what CESS is, its functions and its relevance for the project in this specific region. The second one was a bit more complicated and struggling for me. I had to find CESS’ previous projects that dealt only with parliamentary activities in order to provide sufficient experience for the purposes of the project. Selecting the projects (only projects that were no older than 3 years were to be explained) was not a hard task per se. The struggle came when I had to write for each activity a description of the training, the specific types of activities that were carried
out, which were the outcomes, the outputs and the overall objective. Of course, most of these projects were carried out prior to the start of my internship at CESS and digging through all of these previous activities in such detail was not easy at first. Fortunately, there was not a strict deadline to hand in the project proposal and this gave me time to accurately examine all projects (9 in total) and give a detailed description for all of them. At the same time, both Mr. Hartog and Mr. Sportel assisted me by giving me all information that I was not able to obtain by myself.

The activities carried out for EUCAM

The tasks carried out for the Europe-Central Asia Monitoring (EUCAM) programme, represented the most intense but also stimulating activities carried out during my 5 months internship. One of the most challenging but rewarding activity was the publication of my first article together with Mr. Boonstra on Voices on Central Asia, *Three Reasons Why the EU Matters to Central Asia*, [http://voicesoncentralasia.org/three-reasons-why-the-eu-matters-to-central-asia/](http://voicesoncentralasia.org/three-reasons-why-the-eu-matters-to-central-asia/). In mid-February, Voices on Central Asia, a platform of researchers, journalists and experts keen on the Central Asian region, asked Mr. Boonstra if he wanted to contribute by writing an article regarding the importance of the EU for Central Asian countries. Mr. Boonstra asked me if I wanted to help him out in writing the article by becoming a co-author and I gladly accepted even though I knew that a large amount of work had to be done. In particular, I started a thorough research regarding the following aspects: importance of the EU in the role of trade and education (e.g. how many students from Central Asia reside in Europe, how many EU universities have exchange programs with Central Asia and how much does the EU spend for education programs in the region). I created a sort of timeline of events that started since the implementation of the Strategy for Central Asia in 2007 and had to include: the different stages of the Strategy reviews through the years, the development aid programs created for Central Asia, the partnership cooperation agreements with all five Central Asian countries, the European delegations present in Central Asia and from what year is their presence active in the region and many other data regarding visits of Central Asian Presidents in EU, number of human right dialogues and so on. The work was intense and sometimes I struggled to find some information useful for the article but thanks to the exchange of emails with the European External Action Service to have some more specific input to find info that I wasn’t able to find online and Mr. Boonstra’s assistance I managed to provide all crucial information in time and the article was published on the 13th of March. I was very happy because it was my first publication and I was satisfied with the final outcome.
With the support of the Open Society Foundations (OSF), CESS-EUCAM has extended its work to offering fellowships at the CESS office in Groningen, Netherlands. The EUCAM-Strategy Fellowship (SF)’s aim is to train a group of Central Asian fellows in policy-oriented research and outreach and at the same time deliver input for the planned renewal of the EU Strategy for Central Asia by 2019. The initial struggle for me was again mainly due to the lack of any knowledge about the region; at the same time I never came across the concept of fellowship program, so at first I was a bit nervous to not be adequate enough to achieve the duties for Mr. Boonstra.

Given the fact that this fellowship project was something new for EUCAM as well, Mr. Boonstra gave me the job of looking more into the VISA procedure for the future Central Asian fellows. The initial idea was to host the fellows for a period of 4 months; I discovered though that a normal Schengen Visa allows a stay of no more than 90 days inside a period of 180 days. That information was useful for Mr. Boonstra to adapt the program he had in mind for the fellows into a shorter (30 days max.) one. At the same time I had to look into which specific embassy/consulate the different fellows would have to apply at finding out that it is the German embassy (in Dušanbe (Tajikistan), Ashgabat (Turkmenistan), Bishkek (Kyrgyzstan), Tashkent (Uzbekistan)) or the Austrian embassy (in Astana (Kazakhstan)) who issue Visa for people who want to travel to the Netherlands.

After looking into these more technical aspects, I helped Mr. Boonstra with the process of selecting the three candidates from the applications we received by scanning their CVs, their motivational letters and by seeing if they had previously undertaken other types of research fellowship programs. To do so, I created an operational matrix which included all the data of the applicants (research background, citizenship, interests and who recommended them) which was useful to have a clearer overall picture of the applicants. At the end of this process we decided to have a skype interview with 5 of the candidates and eventually come to a conclusion. I conducted the interviews together with Mr. Boonstra by focusing more on asking the candidates what their main research interests were and how would they develop their topic. Finally, Mr. Boonstra and I came to the conclusion to host a fellow from Kazakhstan, one from Tajikistan and one from Uzbekistan. After the selection had finished, I started creating an invitation letter to be attached to the Visa application for all three fellows: this letter included the scope of the fellowship program, the residency place and period and most of all a detailed outline of the activities (including trips and events) that the fellows were tasked to carry out.
For the Tajik fellow I also had to write a similar letter of support for her unpaid leave from her job at the time.

Furthermore, I created a logistical dossier with all useful information that the fellows needed before their arrival in Groningen. This comprised sending them the plane/train tickets but also giving them instruction on how to reach their new accommodations and info about the city in general.

Right after the fellows finally arrived in Groningen at the beginning of April, I started to keep in contact with CESS’s partner in Brussels, Andreas Marazis from the European Neighbourhood Council. The program, in fact, comprised a research and a debate week for the fellows to be held in Brussels in view of their researches.

In May, Mr. Boonstra, the three fellows and I took part in a two-hour debate with other Central Asian fellows from the George Washington University based in Washington D.C. who are currently engaged with the Central Asia Program (CAP) very similar to the fellowship program in Groningen. Mr. Boonstra asked me to write a report of the whole debate so that the fellows could have useful written input (especially regarding the two topics of internal migration and education) from their colleagues in the United States.

Another interesting event programmed for the fellows and which I also took part in, was the ‘Media and Security’ workshop organized by Rashid Gavdulhakov, an Uzbek PhD candidate at the Erasmus University of Rotterdam. The workshop mainly dealt with the role of both traditional and digital media and their impact on security and in the economic and political system of a specific state. For this workshop, the fellows had to make a presentation regarding the role of media in their respective countries. At the same time, I also wrote a report and made a presentation of the digital and traditional media role in Italy. It was interesting to analyze the differences but also the similarities that Central Asia and Italy share especially in the political influence’s area.

The fellowship’s final part of the program was for me the most intense but also hectic and inspiring. Mr. Boonstra asked me to join him and the fellows for the final debate-week in Brussels aimed at engaging in active outreach towards the policy community and discussing the fellows’ policy-oriented research and input with different actors (The Commission's Directorate-General for International Cooperation and Development (DG DEVCO), Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum and directly the EU Special Representative for Central Asia, Mr. Peter Burian).
My role was to create a report on all different events that took place during the week in Brussels. It was quite an extensive work especially because I had to make some further researches once I was back in Groningen in order to have a better understanding of some issues and aspects regarding the region that were given for granted during the events but that I was not familiar with at all. In total, I wrote 4 different reports: one for the training at the Commission's Directorate-General for International Cooperation and Development (DG DEVCO) organized by Mr. Frank Hess, one for an advocacy training organized by the International Partnership for Human Rights (IPHR), a third one for the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum training and a final one for the Uzbekistan roundtable event hosted by Open Society Foundations.

**Miscellaneous activities**

1. One of the task that was common to both CESS and the EUCAM project was to update their databases. This meant to use the database system SendInblue to map new contacts important to CESS (possible funders, partners or other actors who simply got in contact with the centre (e.g. foreign ministries, think tanks, NGOs, international organization and also the candidates who applied for the fellowship program).

2. My tasks comprised also of administrative responsibilities: mainly updating and maintaining CESS and EUCAM’s social media and website. This involved being active through Facebook and Twitter to share news, articles and both CESS and EUCAM’s newsletters. I also helped updating EUCAM’s newsletter alert for the period of my internship.

3. Furthermore for most of CESS’ trainings I has to prepare certificates of attendance, name plates and stickers for all the people who participated in the project.

4. CESS staff including me also met once every two weeks to discuss all the current and future projects. In these occasion I wrote a staff meeting report and distributed it to my colleagues.

**CONCLUSION**

**Personal reflections and prospects**

This 5 months internship has been one of the most formative experiences of my life. It helped me refine my interests, enrich my knowledge and collaborate with a team of
professionals. I would like to thank both Mr. Hartog and Mr. Boonstra not only at the working level but also on the human one. They have been excellent mentors and colleagues and I am sure that I will benefit greatly from their input in the future.

I can say that my master program in International Security has helped especially for my researches and construction of proposals and concept notes. The articles’ reviews and the dossiers I wrote were always accompanied by my critical reflection on the matter. This is something I learned to do just now during my master and especially through the courses Advanced Theories of International Relations and Governing Through Risk and the Politics of Uncertainty which have taught me to never give for granted news, statements, facts and so on but always give a critical interpretation to them. My placement at CESS is both an enrichment of my study path of International Relations/International Security and a deeper analysis of a region which I have never been involved with during my studies.

Regarding my expectations I can say that the second and third expectation have been totally fulfilled. I have now more experience in both the Central Asia region as a whole but also on the political/economical side concerning Kosovo, Macedonia and Eastern Europe in general. Regarding my first expectation, namely the redefinition of my path, I can say that my placement at CESS has partly fulfilled this. As of today I am still not sure if working for a civil society organization/NGO could be the most suitable choice for me. Still thanks to this internship, I had the opportunity to visit different European Institutions in Brussels and I started to be interested in that working area as well. I still can’t tell if the area of my placement will be the same as my working one but at least now I feel more sure of what working in an NGO means and what it means to work in the sector of good governance and transparency.

A small tip for students who would like to start a future placement at CESS is to not be afraid of asking: no question is stupid or unrelated. It is better to ask things twice than start a project clueless of what we are doing. Be open to your colleagues, tell them what your struggles are but at the same time always show motivation and interest.