

JEAN MONNET CENTER OF EXCELLENCE REPORT – 2022

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My dissertation asks the following question: What are the strategies of the opposition parties to counter incumbent populist leaders in Turkey and Hungary? It analyzes the challenges of populist leaders Erdoğan and Orbán to create an uneven playing field for the opposition and the opposition parties' responses in Turkey and Hungary. The graduate doctoral research award of \$1500 by the Jean Monnet Center of Excellence helped me a lot to travel to two countries, Turkey, and Hungary, to improve my dissertation research.

On this trip, I went to Istanbul and Budapest for my research. In Budapest, I presented a paper titled: "Opposition Strategies towards Populism in Hungary: Social Media as an Alternative?" at a conference named "The End of 'Freedom' in Central and Eastern Europe? Addressing the Challenges of an Illiberal Turn", hosted by Andrásy University. At the conference, I was chosen to moderate a public debate with three journalists about the freedom of media in Eastern and Central Europe. On this trip, I also interviewed party officials from the United opposition in Hungary and academics about the latest election results. Overall, the common point in these interviews is the impact of the Ukrainian War on domestic politics and the election. Moreover, they talked about the concessions that parties had to make to keep the opposition united. The Budapest conference helped me understand the country better because it was my first time visiting and gave me a better perspective while writing my dissertation. But I also created a network that helps me further my future research.

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In Istanbul, I had a chance to attend a workshop on a project called TurkuazLab, which had been researched for over two years in various cities in Turkey to understand how to overcome polarization. In that workshop, we had focus groups, including civil society leaders, academics, and journalists, to develop policy proposals for the depolarization of politics. This focus group exercise provided me with a different point of view to analyze the polarizing discourse used by the political elites and the people. The overall discussion aligned with one of my arguments on the opposition strategies: opposition parties increasingly use non-polarizing discourse to overcome populist discourse. Additionally, I interviewed experts from different schools and their projections for the upcoming election. I also had a meeting with a newly appointed Ambassador of Turkey in Budapest before her term started. Talking to her gave some hints about how the relationship between Turkey and Hungary will be set up diplomatically. Although Istanbul is my hometown, living away from it makes things harder to understand. Talking with the experts related to my study and observing people more closely gave me a better understanding of the current situation before the election next year.