
**The European Regional Master`s Programme in
Democracy and Human Rights in South East Europe
at its 15th Graduation Ceremony**

On the 29th of October 2016, at the premises of the Rectorate of the University of Sarajevo took place the 15th anniversary graduation Ceremony of the European Regional Master`s in Human Rights and Democracy in South East Europe. Widely known simply with its acronym, ERMA is a double degree programme by University of Sarajevo (CIS) and the University of Bologna (through the Institute for Central Eastern and Balkan Europe IECOB), co-financed by the European Commission and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Italy.

During the Ceremony 26 students coming from 10 different countries, in majority from the post-Yugoslav space, have been awarded with the ERMA double diploma after successfully completing the programme. At the same time the new class of 2016/17 has been welcomed, thus opening the 16th Academic Year of the Master. The international board of professors has also selected the four best MA dissertations on the base of their outstanding academic quality and originality, to be included within a Master Series of books where are published the best theses of the previous 14 generations.

The 26 ERMA graduates came across a very intensive, dynamic and diversified 12 months-long master course. This international group of students attended a full time interdisciplinary program structured in 3 terms. During the first part, the students followed courses in Sarajevo taught by more than 30 professors and guest lecturers coming from 14 countries within the “International Network Europe and the Balkans”; lessons were divided into five clusters: “Philosophy of Human Rights”, “Democracy and Human Rights”, “Nationalism, Ethnicity and Religion”, “Economic, Social and Cultural Rights” and “Mechanisms of Human Rights Protection and Implementation”. Students were

constantly assisted by a team of three highly qualified Academic Tutors. In the second term, students participated in seven-week internships period at selected IGOs, NGOs, think-tanks and research institutes working in the field of human rights and democracy across South East Europe. Finally, during the third term, the master candidates reconvened to Italy to focus on the finalization of their theses. They were accommodated by the CEUB University Residential Centre of Bertinoro, University of Bologna, in the town of Santa Sofia: a beautiful and picturesque residency in the heart of natural resort, where students successfully finalized their academic works.

As a long-standing tradition, the Ceremony represented the occasion to gather students, professors, institutions and donors. The welcome addresses of the Ceremony were delivered by Prof. Aida Hodžić, Vice Rector for Academic and Students' Affairs, University of Sarajevo, followed by the speeches of Mr Jan Snidauf, Head of Political, Press and Information Office of the Delegation of the European Union to BiH, and Ms Ilaria Ragnoni, from the Embassy of the Republic of Italy in Sarajevo. Professor Nina Belyaeva, from the Higher School of Economics of Moscow, addressed then the audience on behalf of the ERMA faculty.

The Ceremony was also the occasion for the co-director on behalf of University of Bologna, Prof. Stefano Bianchini, to recall the remarkable accomplishment obtained by the program in recent years, one above all the success in job career attained by the ERMA alumni. Currently among the former students there are ambassadors and high state officials who hold relevant positions at the ministries of foreign affairs, at governmental offices or at the parliamentary assemblies of their respective countries; others became scholars or assistant professors, work within the main international organizations or are leaders in NGO sector. The high rate of employment and prosperous career paths of the former students are accompanied by the high level of appreciation by the graduates of the programme and the programme's professional, educational and personal impact on their lives. Moreover, the successful continuation of the academic education of the former students was pointed out as one the biggest strengths of the programme proving the quality of the academic offer in the last 15 years of existence.

Notable number of the former students continue to PhD programmes at prestigious universities around the world spreading the important message of the programme's and contributing for better protection of the human rights worldwide. Last but not least, after 15 years of successful implementation, the programme has decided to launch a process of revitalization aimed at equipping the Master with a set of updates to the academic curriculum, as well as with a new organizational chart for the internal management ready to answer the new educational and administrative challenges.

With the graduation ceremony held on the 29th of October, the academic year 2015/16 is officially closed. ERMA, University of Bologna and University of Sarajevo did show once again that it is possible to invest positively to the future, by developing a high-level educational program, aimed at forging among young generations a new European élite, namely a transnational group of educated citizens able to operate in support of insightful alternative behaviors to the benefit of democracy, human rights protection, tolerance, respect of diversities and European integration in SEE. Moreover, Prof. Bianchini announced, the European Commission has assured the continuation of the regional human rights educational strategy worldwide after 2021 through the Global Campus, giving new impetus to a *global* inter-university consortium, new basis to its networking, and new financial mechanisms for the years to come. Furthermore, the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs has also confirmed its full support.

From early November the new ERMA Class of 2016/17 entered its academic year in Sarajevo where will stay for lectures and seminars till June 2017, before moving to their internship destinations and finally to Italy for the finalization of their theses.

Best of luck to all of them!

By IECOB Staff