
The European Regional Master's in Democracy and Human Rights in South East Europe at its 14th Graduation Ceremony

Sarajevo: on the 31st of October 2015, a sunny day of autumn, at the premises of the CIS - Center for Interdisciplinary Studies took place the 14th graduation Ceremony of the European Regional Master's in Human Rights and Democratization in South East Europe. Widely known simply with its acronym, ERMA is a double degree program 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 29 students coming from 11 different countries, in majority from the post-Yugoslav space, have been awarded with the ERMA double diploma after successfully completing the program. At the same time the new class of 2015/16 has been welcomed, thus opening the 15th Academic Year of the Master. The international board of professors has also selected the four best 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 13 generations.

The 29 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 30 professors and guest lecturers coming from 15 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 quiet residency at the beginning of a natural park, where students successfully wrote down 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. Ugo Vlaisavljevic, Vice-Rector for International Relations of the University of Sarajevo, followed by the speeches of Mr Renzo Daviddi, Deputy Head from the Delegation of the European Union to Bosnia and Herzegovina, 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 this year was a carrier of important news for ERMA: first of all, one of its founder and former co-director, Professor Zdravko Grebo, was appointed Honorary President of the program. The newly nominated co-director on behalf of the University of Sarajevo, Professor Asim Mujkic, addressed him a grateful speech, interpreting the feelings of all his colleagues for his outstanding work during the years. The audience felt the emotional shift of the ceremony and gave Prof. Grebo a deserved, long standing ovation. Another important nomination was then announced, the appointment of Prof. Francesco Privitera, ERMA's academic coordinator, to Vice-President of the [*Global Campus of Regional Masters in Human Rights and Democratization*](#) . The Global Campus, coordinated by the European Inter-University Center based in Venice, is a new strategy of the European Commission aimed to strengthen worldwide the cooperation among the network of Master programs in democracy and human rights based in Venice, Sarajevo/Bologna, Pretoria, Sidney, Yerevan, Buenos Aires. The new assignment of Prof. Privitera in this international framework is another prestigious achievement for the Master program.

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 them are ambassadors and high state officials who 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.

With the graduation ceremony held on the 31st October, the academic year 2014/15 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 2015 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 2015/16 entered its academic year in Sarajevo where will stay for lectures and seminars till June 2016, 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