

**European Inter-University Centre for Human Rights and Democratisation
European Master's Programme in Human Rights and Democratisation**

***Graduation Ceremony for the Awarding of
"Joint Diplomas of European Master's in Human Rights and Democratisation"
for the Academic Year 2010/2011***

Scuola Grade di San Rocco, Venice, Italy, 25 September 2011

Address by

Iune Baravalle and Pieter-Jan Hamels, E.MA Student Representatives 2010/2011

Dear Professors and E.MA
Directors of the 41
participating universities,
Dear EIUC and E.MA staff,
Dear family and friends,
Dear Masterini,
And last but not least,
Dear fellow Masteroni,

Last year we were sitting
at the back of this beautiful
room. Some were still

struggling to overcome the effects of the party of the night before, others were wondering how on earth they got accepted in a master that hands out degrees in such a fancy room. Now, 12 months later, we look back to a year that has been, by all standards, challenging, demanding, interesting, sometimes frustrating but never, never, boring. Some are again struggling to overcome the party of the night before, and others are still wondering how on earth they got on the first row in such a fancy room, getting their degree.

For us, Student Representatives, and I am sure I can extend this to all of you, it has been a fantastic year. It has not only been an unforgettable year, but also one that we will cherish for the rest of our lives. It all began with an email from a certain Prof. Marrella, in which he included a few nice words welcoming us to the master and an enormous amount of preparatory readings and videos. After we ALL read ALL the readings and we ALL watched ALL the videos, we arrived to our second home, the Monastery of San Nicolò. No time was wasted, the classes started immediately, and for people like myself who have no legal background, Law became, strangely enough, interesting.

Our class was not shy to ask questions, and teachers were frequently questioned, challenged, and even criticized. We, students, did not only learn from professors, but also from each other. I remember Nasim's seminar on Iran, Ram's one on enforced disappearances in Nepal, Ysa and Victorias's on Venezuela's human rights situation, Matti's mission in Afghanistan, Lynn's experiences in Human Rights Watch, and many others...



Many professors visited the Monastery. But not only professors: human rights professionals from the European Union, the OSCE, the United Nations and many other organizations came here to teach us. And less obvious human rights activists were invited too: a senior official of a large and well known multinational challenged us with a role-play to see “the other side”. Business and human rights: for some, a strange marriage.

One of our most important tasks as student representatives has been giving voice to your concerns in the E.MA Councils and the E.MA Curriculum Group meetings. The reports we each time presented were based on gaps and suggestions identified by all of us through meetings, discussions and surveys. This Friday, we were happy to see that the great majority of our suggestions have not only been taken into account, but form already part of the new academic year. This is the main prove that the E.MA listens to us and is open for improvement. Thank you Masteroni, as you all contributed to make this master a bit better, and this gratitude extends also to you, Professors, for this extraordinary openness. It shows that, in many aspects, democracy is not only taught, but also practiced.

Our master is not only a master in human rights, but also in democratization, and believe me when I say: we all learnt the challenges of democracy while trying to decide on supposedly simple questions in the student councils. Democracy is not an easy task, even for human rights students. So, we built up a better student council, a more democratic one (thank you Diego, Marco and Matti). As we know, democracy is not only a challenge for developing countries; we all have to strive for it, every day, and moreover learn tolerance and listen to others.

A pointy issue that animated our student council debates was the suggestion of having less meat in the canteen. That did not create consensus among non-vegetarian students... Environmental and cultural concerns are sometimes difficult to combine. But we discussed the issue. Nevertheless, from the complaints on kilos gained in Venice, there is no doubt that we were all very well fed...

We also learnt about the misunderstood concept of gender. Look around. You will see that human rights students tend to be female. Men need to be more involved. It is a mission of humanity that concerns all of us. But at least I can assure you, and I will apologize to my extreme gender sensitive colleagues, that an island full of women made a lot of men happy.

The first semester was an island experience. The intense Monastery life in Venice left, nevertheless, space for some love stories, dramas, a fantastic pirate boat party where Prof. Marrella showed his best dancing steps and many of you surprised Marco and me with a birthday cake. Thank you for that evening. We can neither forget our human rights debates and discussions, the human rights photo competition, the *Building Bridges* film festival, or our parties and the famous spritzs at the Chiosco. Some of you even learnt Italian, or at least how to correctly order a spritz... I think our experiences and pictures speak by themselves, and we have a fantastic yearbook which proves that this year has been one of the most amazing of our lives. We learnt, we improved ourselves, we became even more committed to the human rights cause and we will dedicate our career to defend the values we strengthened thanks to this master.

The Kosovo field trip. It was such an amazing experience. We all went there with very high expectations, which were not only met, but also surpassed. Not every day you can ask a question to a Vice Prime Minister, visit a NATO military base, live with a local Kosovar family or drink coffee in a lead-contaminated Roma camp with people deported from Western Europe. The Kosovo field trip alone makes this master a life experience that no one will ever forget. We had the fantastic opportunity to meet a different culture and a young country at work with the many challenges it still faces.

The second semester was a different experience for all of us, and some times more experimental than expected. A mix of courses, thesis research, interviews, field trips, trainings, conferences, etc..., but some also learnt how to bike on Swedish snow (which in fact requires a lot of expertise), others lived in a Hamburg's alternative community, drove an ICRC humanitarian convoy in a German military base and was robbed in a (simulated) rebel check point, braved the cold of Northern Europe or sun burnt in Southern Spain, learned about the decadence of Portuguese "republicas" or its famous student houses or headed the Spanish Revolution in Greece and marched in occupied Athens. And we did so much more.

I think I can speak for all the Masteroni here when I say that we are all grateful for every bit of this master. We have had an excellent and dedicated E.MA Teaching Body, and a more than patient EIUC staff. We wholeheartedly thank you, you are a main part of the E.MA family.

And, my fellow Masteroni, Pieter-Jan and I really enjoyed our Student Reps' mission. I will miss the dozens of daily emails blocking my account. I will even miss the complaints of all kinds. It was nice to deal with all of this too.

The friendships we started last year will last forever, regardless the corner of the world in which we will be. You've been a great group. We are a great group. Let's keep this friendship and network of people sharing the same values, the same mission, alive. But we neither have to forget the persons who have helped us in this mission. Thank you too Professors.

It has been an honor to be part of this master, and to represent all of you.

Thank you all, and congratulations!

Iune Baravalle
Pieter-Jan Hamels