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30.07.2014

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Reflections of a GC student on the Awareness Raising Event



The Bosnian coffee needs its time. In Sarajevo I had to abandon the inherent hurry - which is already present within the name - of an Italian espresso, to calm down and understand another coffee-based culture: the Balkan one. Things you learn travelling. I adapted myself taking my notebook in the coffee houses, working close to a *džezva* and sugar blocks. In one of these working sessions, I found out a mail in my inbox, an invitation to join a conference in Venice organised within the framework of the Global Campus. The topic fascinated me: an [awareness-raising event on the UN Migrant Workers Convention](#), or the acronym ICRMW for "us", human rights defenders.

On 28 July I found myself again in the wonderful premises of the Monastery of San Nicolò, on the Venetian island of Lido, where EIUC has its headquarters. The event was organised by (or should we say within?) the Global Campus, the collective term used to describe six master's programmes around the globe: among them, the European Regional Master's in Democracy and Human Rights in South East Europe, based in Sarajevo: and me, as its student. Along with me, a Bosnian colleague; two students for each programme was the rule. From Venice, from Yerevan, from Buenos Aires, from Pretoria, from Sidney. And then the speakers, from the academic environment, from the activists' world, from the secretariat of the UN Committee on Migrant Workers, from the International Labour Organisation.

The conference was well balanced between the wide range of topics around the subject, from legal to historical perspectives, inside and outside international organisations (maybe even too much "meat on fire", using an Italian expression, to say the day was extremely full: we concluded the work two hours after the planned finish line on the timetable). We know the numbers of this mistreated international legal tool: the "Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families" was born in 1990, waited 13 years to enter into force (a minimum of 20 ratifications is needed) and nowadays has been ratified by only 47 UN States, mostly between Latin America and North-West Africa. The absence of the richest "North", as well as the BRIC powers (Brazil, Russia, India, China), is striking.

A set of norms to protect migrant workers, to protect human rights in the exact moment in which citizenship loses importance, where the State is left behind you, somewhere else. To give migrants the right to have rights, to paraphrase Hanna Arendt.

To what extent this tardiness of States to adopt this document is a political rather than legal problem? Largely political, the Venice conference underlined. The speakers showed extensively not only the philosophical/moral (human) necessity of its ratification, but also the inconsistency of the resistance to it. There is no ground on which Europe could justify its absence from the list of Convention supporters, especially in its most important actor - the EU - that already has, on the paper, accepted in its jurisdiction most of the principles contained in the Convention. We are indeed in the centre of a populist storm, and xenophobia is spinning in the air: the anti-migrant wave witnessed during the last European Parliament elections was in front of our eyes.

All the participants in the discussion provided us with interesting insights, but personally I would remark on the intervention of Patrick Taran, who has three decades of experience working on migration at the UN and ILO; more from the "work on the field" than from the academic world, Taran underlined the connection between the migrant struggle and the overall crisis of the neo-liberal world; the end of the welfare ideology and the actual regression of the *right to work* itself are not far from the exclusion policies affecting migration. We cannot deal with it as a sole individual right of freedom: once again, the distinction between civil and political on one side, and economic, social and cultural on the other, loses its meaning. We need a structured, complete set of rights: and migrants first of all. Abstracting from the academy courtesy, it was nice to have an overview of the human presence in the room: people from five continents joining a discussion, with their voices, with their bodies. It was all about freedom of movement, or, to be more precise, richness of movement. We are all migrants, even if the paranoid obsession with the stranger, that has always sown its seed in the common perspective, induces us to redefine the vocabulary towards paradigmatic inclusion/exclusion, us/them, acceptable or non-acceptable foreigners.

Last consideration. One question could have been easily raised by the audience: why are we talking within each other? Somehow, as students, activists, researchers and scholars already interested in the term, we know the importance of the Convention, we know the struggle around it. It would have been logical to talk with governmental actors, politicians, *think tanks* that are primarily responsible for countries' policies (and, actually, I would have been quite amused to see governmental embarrassment). But that was not on the Conference agenda. Events in this genre uses a slower approach, that is trying to stimulate an inductive strategy to promote the promotion, to activate the activism. To give us a better understanding, that

translates into better tools for our advocacy.

Good example, impossible not to mention it, the E.MA students' campaign [Migrants Matter](#), promoting better protection of migrants' rights. During the conference we were shown the three winning pictures of a Global Campus photo-contest entitled “Migrants and Community Action”. My thankful thoughts and warm wishes to all of them.

Even if we are in hurry, the struggle to secure the universality of human rights needs its time. There is no espresso way.

Giuseppe Picheca,
student of the Master's Programme in South East Europe (ERMA)