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Interview with the Secretary General of the EMAlumni Association Penny Papaspyropoulou



The Press Office of the Global Campus of Human Rights had the opportunity to interview the Secretary General of the [EMAlumni Association](#), Penny Papaspyropoulou, about her now role, the main activities of

the organisation and the 25 years' anniversary of the EMA Master.

Could you tell us more about yourself and your new role as Secretary General of the EMAlumni Association?

I graduated from the EMA program in 2007 and since then, human rights play a central role in all my activities. As it was my wish to gain diverse experiences in the human rights world, I have been working with civil society, public and private institutions, the EU and the UN on topics like freedom of expression, migrants' education and training, corruption and investigative journalism, child rights and more, from policy making to project development and events' coordination. My new role as the Secretary General of the EMAlumni Association, is a particularly interesting occasion to offer my support to a thriving community of over 2000 alumni scattered around the globe, side by side with a highly-skilled team of nine board members. As an Association, we aim at further connecting our members, creating opportunities for knowledge and information sharing, new collaborations and increased impact when it comes to the promotion of democracy and human rights. We support our community of human rights defenders and human rights practitioners and the community supports the association. I am grateful to have been offered the opportunity to fully engage in such a creative and meaningful work.

Which are the most important activities and events of the EMAlumni association during 2022?

Every year there are certain established activities and various ad-hoc ones, depending on the initiative and engagement of the alumni community. The EMAlumni Award in June, that celebrates the outstanding work of an alum making a difference in the human rights field and the Career day in September, where possible career pathways are presented through live examples, are flagship activities of the association. The Conversations with Alumni, the Wellbeing Webinars, the Ambassadors and Hubs project, the Info Sessions on the second semester destinations are some of our recurrent activities. All these projects that cover a wide range of human rights issues, are organised thanks to the dedicated work of the association's board members and the interest of the wider alumni community to participate and take up an active role. Recently, we have initiated the Arts and Human Rights Workshop, recognizing the need to highlight the different linkages among arts, culture and human rights. What is of out-most importance in our work is the one-to-one communication between the members of our network, nurturing our bonds and connections in an on-going basis. We share news and updates via our bi-monthly Newsletter and through Social Media.

How will the EMA graduates celebrate the 25 years anniversary of the EMA Master Programme?

We are excited to celebrate another important anniversary of the EMA Master program and are in intense consultations over possible events and activities that could take place next September in Venice, highly dependent though on the course of the pandemic in the months to come. Among our ideas stands the aspiration to systematize and present the History of the EMAlumni Association, a project aiming to bring together and showcase as many of our members as possible and become a promotional tool for human rights

and the Master itself. We would be particularly happy to join forces with the GCHR and the GCA in possible joint activities for the upcoming celebrations.

What will the most important challenges be in relation to promoting human rights and democracy in the years to come? How might EMA graduates continue to help?

The need for human rights experts to push for change at all levels has always been and still is, urgent. Different parts of the world face different problems, rendering high specialization necessary to adequately address them. Unfortunately, the pandemic has established a reality, where rights and freedoms previously safeguarded are now at stake. At the same time emerging issues like climate change and environmental degradation, extensive corruption, digital threats, co-exist with social inequalities, conflicts, poverty and hunger. We, the EMA graduates have a leading role to play by mainstreaming human rights in all our professional and voluntary activities. Human rights education is of outmost importance and we are eager to support any activity with such a focus. Connecting our older graduates with the younger generations of alumni is one of our main goals, strategically placed around the need to act fast, coordinated and in a well-informed manner, in a rapidly changing environment. Deep knowledge of societal problems will be the sole way to fight against the root causes of human rights violations.

Do you think there is a way for Venice (as a city where the EMA Master takes place) to become more efficient, attractive and well prepared to host students, professors, experts, and authorities from all over the world?

Venice is a “jewel”, a city that all alumni keep close to their hearts and feel closely connected to. Issues of an aging population and scarce professional opportunities for young people are well-known. The EMA international guests could be an opportunity for a shift in such dynamics and a push for the city to create visitors’ friendly spaces, for short or longer term stay. Local initiatives that focus on creating an attractive environment for remote workers, and ideas on how to take advantage of the numerous empty spaces around the island are already on the table. In this context, an enhanced cooperation with such local initiatives and any possible support by the regional and local authorities is necessary, to create a welcoming environment for the international human capital of the Master. So yes, there is a way, as in all aspects of life, innovative ideas and inspiration, transfer of good practices, good planning and coordination among the various actors, are key to success.

Could you share a message with the Global Campus of Human Rights Community and members of the Global Campus Alumni Association in particular?

As EMA graduates, we are grateful to have been born from within the Global Campus of Human Rights, excited to be part of the Global Campus Alumni Association and happy to observe the shared dedication in the promotion of human rights education and the advancement of the network as a whole. Acknowledging the challenges and complexity of such work, our message is that you stay strong and determined to maximize the

impact of your work. The EMAlumni Association, always eager to initiate and support common activities aiming at human rights protection and promotion and the strengthening of our community, welcomes our on-going cooperation and any new, meaningful, common activities.

For more information contact our [Press Office](#)

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