

Remarks by  
**Emma Bonino**  
Italian Minister for International Trade and European Affairs

to the

**EIUC**

celebrating the 10th anniversary (1997-2007) of the

**E.M.A**

*European Master's Degree  
in Human Rights and Democratisation*

Venice, 23 September 2007

**CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY**

President Fischer,  
Rectors,  
Sindaco Cacciari,  
Autorità,  
Signore e Signori,  
Dear "masterini", dear friends,

It is a great pleasure for me to be with you today. We are gathered here for three important reasons.

First, today we open the new academic year of the European Master in Human Rights and Democratisation (E.MA.), and I can already see a new generation of very committed masterini sitting here!

Second, we award the master's degree to the class of 2006/2007, with all our encouragement to use wisely the expertise they have gathered in this last academic year, both in Venice and at the other universities forming the European Inter-University Centre for Human Rights and Democratisation (EIUC).

Incidentally I very much like this idea of opening the new year and awarding the master's degree to last year's students on the same day, for it sends a wonderful message of continuity and a single family as well.

The third reason we are here is to celebrate the 10th anniversary of the Master, on which I have two very simple thoughts to share.

The first one can be summed up easily in one word: "congratulations!". Whenever you start a project, you are unsure of how it is going to work. My impression is that this project has so far worked much better than the most optimistic of initial forecasts.

The second thought is more forward looking. Quite naturally, all celebrations look to the past, to see what has been achieved, and for whom. But others in this room are better placed to do this.

Personally, I am more interested in the future, and in what we can and need to achieve in the forthcoming months and years.

I have been asked to briefly open the addresses to the masterini.

There are four things that I would really like to say. The first is a general reflection on human rights and processes of democratisation. The second refers more specifically to the EIUC and the E.MA Master. The last two remarks are more straightforward, and concern the masterini - this beautiful community of European young professionals - and the contribution I expect from them, from you!

First, human rights and democratisation. We may ask ourselves whether the world is a better place today than it was ten or twenty years ago. Quite frankly, I do not know. Violations of human rights are taking place daily in many corners of the world. Regional conflicts are raging, and we are confronted with the relatively new phenomenon of failing states, which give rise to tremendous sorrow in a number of countries, and countless consequences in terms of geopolitical instability, refugees, malnutrition, and poverty, not to mention basic freedoms such as the freedom of speech, and the more general freedom that everybody should have to pursue his or her own personal happiness.



Yet this is not a reason to give up. On the contrary, it is precisely because there is still so much to do that we need to invest all our physical, emotional and intellectual energy in helping the world to become a better place for all. Every day and night we hear news of how human rights are being discarded or violated, or of undemocratic developments. But think for a moment of how things would be had we not been fighting so strenuously all these years. Now tell me: how would the current situation be? My guess is worse. Definitely worse.

Sometimes we get the impression that our work is going nowhere. This will happen to you one day. When it does, do one simple thing: remember today. Remember the deepest reasons for which you began this career. And consider the desperate need that the world has of you, of *all* of you.

My second remark concerns the E.MA. project and the EIUC. I believe that we have here an excellent project which we need to develop further, in the same spirit of cooperation that we have used so far.

Professor Papisca had this wonderful idea a few years ago, and I must thank him for his reflection and commitment. Many other people in this room and elsewhere - in the European Commission and the European Parliament - have also made great contributions to make this possible, not least in terms of EU financial support. And I am very pleased to announce today that in my capacity as Minister for European Affairs, I will be representing Italy on the EIUC Board alongside the Regione Veneto and the Comune di Venezia. I take this both as an honour and a great responsibility.

Over the last ten years, this splendid venue, the former monastery of San Nicolò - where not only a lot of water, but also a lot of history has passed - has proved to be equal to the challenge! That is why I am very proud that Italy and Venice were chosen to host the EIUC and to act as the motor for this unique pan-European project. Rest assured that I will do everything I can to increase both the visibility and prestige of this centre, as well as its remarkable capacity to deliver concrete results. Many events of international relevance have already been organised at the EIUC in Lido, including the launch of a big campaign for the democratisation of the Arab world, and another bringing together the parliamentary representatives of all the Iraqi political parties. In this respect, I wish to express all my gratitude to an association to which I feel particularly close, *Non c'è pace senza giustizia*, for their commitment, along with Professor Fischer and Professor Ulrich, for their work in organising these events, as well as my hope that this successful relationship will be further strengthened in the near future.

I have always very much appreciated three main characteristics of the E.MA.

First, that you have been able to develop an *interdisciplinary* approach. In today's world all academic disciplines are becoming more and more specialised, and I believe that this increases rather than reduces the need and value of those who can act as bridges. To this I must add something important. Being open to many disciplines, and having knowledge of several domains and issues, is particularly relevant not only for your future professional careers, but also for the kinds of ideas that you will form. There are many ways to defend human rights and promote democracy, and I can give you an example from my current work as Minister for International Trade. Some people argue that you should not trade with those who are responsible for violating human rights.

In my opinion, however, trade is not only *not* part of the problem, but can often be part of the solution. This is particularly true when trade remains your only chance to (try to) influence the domestic policies of third countries. My question is therefore the following: when trade helps to foster dialogue, is it a bad or a good thing?

My message to you in this respect is very simple and straightforward: the world is no longer based on ideologies, and luckily so. But this represents an advantage insofar as we can prove that we are no longer dogmatic, and that we are able to face new problems with new solutions and a sense of concreteness, rather than with preconceived ideas. In this respect, we should recall the words of Albert Einstein when he said: «the important thing is not to stop questioning», and make them our lifelong motto.

I have just mentioned concreteness. And *concreteness* is the second extremely important characteristic that form part of the EIUC/E.MA philosophy. We are not in pure academia. What you learn here is the premise for action, for better and more effective action, the kind which translates into field operations or new policies. This close connection to reality is one of your major assets.

Third, here at the EIUC/E.MA, there is constant encouragement to go beyond the human rights specialists' community, in order to *reach the wider public*. In this respect, again, you act as bridges. This last characteristic is extremely important, and definitely the most far-reaching in terms of what we can concretely *achieve* – not just theorise – when we seek to promote human rights. Take, for instance, the strong commitment of the Italian government to the initiative for a universal moratorium on the death penalty. Believe me: we are facing resistance from many corners. Now, how do you think that this resistance can be overcome? To me the answer is clear: by launching debates, by fostering discussion, by going outside this room, and involving all those who can contribute to our common goal. When you are fighting for human rights, you cannot expect success if you work behind closed doors. You need to go public, and to involve the public. You need the support of the people, and the pressure people can exercise on their governments. Clearly, this is not a complementary approach. This is *the* approach.

I add: do not make the mistake of believing there is no need for this kind of approach *inside* the EU, that these difficulties only exist in far flung places far away from Europe. As you are all well aware, it was only very recently that European leaders could not even agree an anti-death penalty day, as the decision was vetoed by one EU member state.

I will limit my comments to the following: maybe we cannot change the mind of a single prime minister or president, but we can do much more: *we can work to transform societies*. The small world we live in increases our chances, our capacity, to reach everybody, and we should exploit this. I do not know when we will be able to obtain the anti-death penalty day, or win the fight for a universal moratorium on death penalty. But I am confident that with your commitment, your energy, your enthusiasm, and your willingness to reach the wider public, our chances of success are greater today than ever before.

Let me now conclude by making two final remarks that concern you, dear students. Venice and the EIUC/E.MA initiative give you all an extraordinary chance to gather, live, study, work and form projects together. This is not a simple by-product of your time here. In fact, it is a substantial part of what you will do – of what you will be *able* to do – in your future.

I am confident that the community growing up here will play an ever more invaluable role. Both *within Europe*, where we still have to explain what you have already understood is the real recipe of the future EU integration process – that is, young Europeans sharing common experiences – and *beyond the EU's borders*, where you must become «ambassadors of Europe», of this project which is not based on geographical criteria, but founded on common values and the common aspiration to democracy, human rights and peace. The EIUC project is one of the best examples around of what real solidarity, cooperation and common commitment at the European level can produce. Universities from all of the 27 member states, and

students from all over Europe – and from the rest of the world as well – form this European community. This is particularly fertile soil, I must say!

Finally, if I were to offer you one piece of advice it would be the following: *be curious*. Curiosity is what leads us to discover the world, its beauties as well as its ugliness. It is what makes us the way we are. And it is even more important for you who are sitting in this room, who are eager to leave, and spend your time, energy, and passion on taking care of the world. The word “curious” comes from Latin and means “careful, diligent”, akin to *cura*, which means “care”. Europe and the world have a tremendous need of both: your thirst for knowledge, as much as your willingness to take care of what you find at the end of this process of discovery.

Dear masterini, you have all my encouragement and support!

Buona fortuna! Good luck!

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