During our internship to Padova we attended several courses, offered in English, about women’s human rights and gender politics, the European Union (EU), and human rights and international justice.

With regard to women’s human rights, such courses provided “theoretical, conceptual and methodological analysis of the issues that the UN has increasingly considered as part of the political agenda of human rights in relation to the status of women and decision making; [a conceptualization] that led to the consolidation of certain guidelines [and] policies”\(^2\), and informed our analysis of the Convention of the Elimination of all kinds of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW).

For what concerns European law and human rights, the courses we attended provided important knowledge of the fundamental texts of EU Laws (particularly the EU Charter of fundamental rights).

While in relation to gender politics and the welfare state in the EU, we studied the historical development of the concept of gender, and the subsequent processes and experiences that had been feeding the knowledge of gender equality; also, we have come to appreciate the mechanisms about how to get access to a gendered mentality and perspective.

We studied the case of reproductive rights: from acknowledging international mobilizations raising their voices to get access to the right to abortion, to

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abortion being considered a controversial issue to the degree that we have not heard of any electoral candidate discuss the right to abortion during his/her electoral campaign. Also, analyzing international statistics related to the abortion, I have noticed that the countries which are intensively mixed with the religious socio-cultural background are extremely influenced by these religious beliefs to the degree of considering the very discussion of the topic a taboo.

Finally, for what concerns international justice and human rights, we critically investigated the trajectory of the evolution of the recognition and promotion of social rights in Europe, considering in particular the interactions and intersections between the EU and the Council of Europe.

I also took a two module course that lasted six days (18-23 April 2016) and focused on training for international electoral observers. The aim of the training was to deepen and enhance our theoretical and practical knowledge about the process of observing elections and to provide relevant tools and skills to perform the role in diverse situations.

While in Padova, I also attended several conferences and events, which were extremely useful to share my own experience and getting more details about other countries’ realities and situations.

In the context of the course Gender Politics and the Welfare State in the European Union, offered by Prof. Lorenza Perini at the Department of Law, Politics and International Studies, I made a presentation about ‘Gender and Elections’ as an introduction to the importance of gender parity and women’s participation in public life. There I discussed two quota types, compulsory and voluntary, and linked them to the electoral systems. Finally, I presented non-quota measures to support women’s contributions in political life. All this stressing the crucial role of political parties as gatekeepers in the sharing of relevant and decision-making positions. In that presentation, I reported, as an example, the fact that in Syria the percentage of female parliaments in the legislature is 13% and it is a low percentage if related to the fact that the women comprise approximately
half the population in Syria. So, it would be important to allocate a compulsory quota for women as ‘reserved seats’, no less than 40%, and it is better to give constitutional protection to this measure.

Besides acknowledging the importance of this internship for my personal and professional carrier, in this context I would also like to make some remarks on women’s roles in peace processes. We should always keep in mind that women are actually crucial stakeholders in peace building and democratic reform, and yet they are too sidelined because of the entrenched gender based discrimination (DPI, 2012, p. 6); that they protect the coherence of their families despite the tragic impact of conflicts on their domestic and social lives, and that they struggle to maintain a measure of stability during the displacement. Therefore, we should never deny women’s immense capacities to exceed the sadness, and to build new hopes in the aim of securing safe futures for their families and communities (DPI, 2012, pp. 11-12).

In the end, I believe that, when it happens, engaging women in the resolutions of conflict has led to more positive and lasting outcomes, which are increasing the inclusivity, increasing the legitimacy of the process by making it more representative and reflective of the wider affected population and future society, and strengthening the ability to prioritize sustainable stability, democratic process, and peacemaking over the sharing of power and distributing political positions (DPI, 2012, pp. 30-31).

We all know that talking about involving women and gender considerations in peace processes is much easier than implementing it in reality: despite international standards that have led to radical changes in language and in the approach of the international community, little results have yet been seen in practice (DPI, 2012, p. 33).

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3. World bank data https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SG.GEN.PARL.ZS?locations=SY&view=chart. However, it is worth noting that according to the official website of the Syrian parliament, the percentage is approximately (11.6%) http://www.parliament.gov.sy/arabic/index.php?node=212#
All I have said also relates to women’s roles in peace processes in the Syrian situation: Syrian women – both those who have stayed inside the country and those who were forced to flee because of the war – are struggling for the survival of their families and to protect their children. Yet, even now, they are still underrepresented at all levels and at all stages of the peace process. It would be time, for all parties in the Syrian conflict, external and internal, to stop marginalizing the role of Syrian women, because without them sustainable stability and democratic life would be extremely difficult to achieve.

Finally, I want to conclude this short note by mentioning that studying comparative politics and policies, and adopting a comparative approach, has been so important in providing me with new ideas about possible methods and solutions to be applied in Syria; at the same time, it is really important to mention that there is no ‘one size fits all’ solution, as each society and conflict has its own unique features (DPI, 2012, p. 10).

Reference

