



AGENTUR FÜR  
QUALITÄTSSICHERUNG DURCH  
AKKREDITIERUNG VON  
STUDIENGÄNGEN E.V.

# FINAL REPORT

## EUROPEAN MASTER'S PROGRAMME IN HUMAN RIGHTS AND DEMOCRATISATION (MASTER OF ARTS)

### DEGREE AWARDED BY

- CA' FOSCARI UNIVERSITY OF VENICE, ITALY
- RUHR-UNIVERSITY BOCHUM, GERMANY
- UNIVERSITY OF DEUSTO, SPAIN
- UNIVERSITY OF GRAZ, AUSTRIA
- UNIVERSITY OF HAMBURG, GERMANY
- UNIVERSITY OF LJUBLJANA, SLOVENIA
- UNIVERSITY OF PADOVA, ITALY

June 2025



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**DECISION OF THE AQAS STANDING COMMISSION  
ON THE “EUROPEAN MASTER’S PROGRAMME IN HUMAN RIGHTS AND  
DEMOCRATISATION” (MASTER OF ARTS)  
DEGREE AWARDED BY**

- **CA’ FOSCARI UNIVERSITY OF VENICE, ITALY**
- **RUHR-UNIVERSITY BOCHUM, GERMANY**
- **UNIVERSITY OF DEUSTO, SPAIN**
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**Based on the report of the expert panel, the comments by the university and the discussions of the AQAS Standing Commission in its 25<sup>th</sup> meeting on 19 May 2025, the AQAS Standing Commission decides:**

1. The study programme “**European Master’s Programme in Human Rights and Democratisation**” (**Master of Arts**), degree awarded by **Ca’ Foscari University of Venice (Italy)**, **Ruhr-University Bochum (Germany)**, **University of Deusto (Spain)**, **University of Graz (Austria)**, **University of Hamburg (Germany)**, **University of Ljubljana (Slovenia)**, and **University of Padova (Italy)** is accredited according to the Standards defined in the European Approach for Quality Assurance for Joint Programmes.

The study programme complies with the requirements defined by the criteria and thus the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG) and the European Qualifications Framework (EQF) in their current version.

2. The accreditation is given for the period of **six years** and is valid until **30 September 2030**, taking into account the temporary extension of the former accreditation period of the programme in accordance with the decision of the AQAS Standing Commission taken on 27 September 2024.

The following **recommendations** are given for further improvement of the programme:

1. The first semester should be streamlined and reduced to 'core issues' that are considered necessary by the different stakeholders, e. g., by shortening/making some of the mandatory parts of the curriculum optional, updating reading lists, etc., also to reduce students' workload.
2. The use of modern didactic tools and methods as well as assessment forms should be expanded.
3. The whole communication flow within the programme (with students, second semester universities' administrative offices and supervisors, etc.) concerning information about student support, counselling, class enrolment, etc. should be improved, e. g., by regularly updating standardized information sheets on all partner universities and guidelines for administrative staff at second semester universities on how to deal with incoming EMA students, etc.
4. A process should be developed to include experts from the labour market into the programme's quality assurance, especially from organisations that offer internships and employment, e. g., to gain their feedback which topics should remain mandatory.

With regard to the reasons for this decision the Standing Commission refers to the attached experts' report.

**EXPERTS' REPORT****ON THE "EUROPEAN MASTER'S PROGRAMME IN HUMAN RIGHTS AND DEMOCRATISATION" (MASTER OF ARTS)****DEGREE AWARDED BY**

- CA' FOSCARI UNIVERSITY OF VENICE, ITALY
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- UNIVERSITY OF HAMBURG, GERMANY
- UNIVERSITY OF LJUBLJANA, SLOVENIA
- UNIVERSITY OF PADOVA, ITALY

Visit to the university: 9 & 10 January 2025

**Panel of experts:**

<b>Prof. Dr. Markus Krajewski</b>	<b>Friedrich-Alexander-University Erlangen-Nürnberg, Germany Chair of Public Law and International Law</b>
<b>Prof. Dr. Stefania Panebianco</b>	<b>University of Catania, Italy Associate Professor in Political Science</b>
<b>Philippe Hensmans</b>	<b>Accompagnateur de changement, Brussels, Belgium (representative of the labour market)</b>
<b>Tim Thiessen</b>	<b>Goethe-University Frankfurt, Germany (student expert)</b>

**Coordinator:**

Ninja Fischer	AQAS, Cologne, Germany
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## I. Preamble

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AQAS – Agency for Quality Assurance through Accreditation of Study Programmes – is an independent non-profit organisation supported by more than 90 universities, universities of applied sciences and academic associations. Since 2002, the agency has been recognised by the German Accreditation Council (GAC). It is, therefore, a notified body for the accreditation of higher education institutions and programmes in Germany.

AQAS is a full member of ENQA and also listed in the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR) which confirms that our procedures comply with the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG), on which all Bologna countries agreed as a basis for internal and external quality assurance.

AQAS is an institution founded by and working for higher education institutions and academic associations. The agency is devoted to quality assurance and quality development of academic studies and higher education institutions' teaching. In line with AQAS' mission statement, the official bodies in Germany and Europe (GAC and EQAR) approved that the activities of AQAS in accreditation are neither limited to specific academic disciplines or degrees nor a particular type of higher education institution.

## II. Accreditation procedure

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This report results from the external review of the “European Master's Programme in Human Rights and Democratisation” (EMA) (M.A.) offered jointly by the following degree-awarding universities: Ca' Foscari University of Venice (Italy), Ruhr-University Bochum (Germany), University of Graz (Austria), University of Deusto (Spain), University of Hamburg (Germany), University of Ljubljana (Slovenia), and University of Padova (Italy).

### 1. Criteria

The programme is assessed against the criteria defined by the European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes. The criteria are based on the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG) 2015.

### 2. Approach and methodology

#### *Initialisation*

The university consortium mandated AQAS to perform the accreditation procedure in June 2024. The university consortium produced a Self-Evaluation Report (SER). In July 2024, the consortium handed in a draft of the SER together with the relevant documentation on the programme and an appendix. The appendix included e.g.:

- The cooperation agreement,
- the Study Plan,
- the Student's Assessment Regulations,
- academic staff's CVs,
- the Diploma Supplement.

AQAS checked the SER regarding completeness, comprehensibility, and transparency. The accreditation procedure was officially initialised by a decision of the AQAS Standing Commission 27 September 2024. The final version of the SER was handed in November 2024.

### *Nomination of the expert panel*

The composition of the panel of experts follows the stakeholder principle. Consequently, representatives from the respective disciplines, the labour market, and students are involved. Furthermore, AQAS follows the principles for the selection of experts defined by the European Consortium for Accreditation (ECA). The Standing Commission nominated the aforementioned expert panel in September 2024. AQAS informed the university consortium about the members of the expert panel and the university consortium did not raise any concerns against the composition of the panel.

### *Preparation of the site visit*

Prior to the site visit, the experts reviewed the SER and submitted a short preliminary statement including open questions and potential needs for additional information. AQAS forwarded these preliminary statements to the university consortium and to all panel members in order to increase transparency in the process and the upcoming discussions during the site visit.

### *Site visit*

After a review of the SER, a site visit to the Global Campus in Venice took place on 9 and 10 January 2025. The experts interviewed different stakeholders, e.g. the senior management of some of the degree-awarding higher education institutions, the programme management and coordinating staff, teaching and other staff, as well as students and alumni, in separate discussion. The visit concluded by the presentation of the preliminary findings of the group of experts to the consortium's representatives.

### *Reporting*

After the site visit had taken place, the expert group drafted the following report, assessing the fulfilment of the criteria. The report included a recommendation to the AQAS Standing Commission. The report was sent to the consortium for comments.

### *Decision*

The report, together with the comments of the consortium, forms the basis for the AQAS Standing Commission to take a decision regarding the accreditation of the programme. Based on these two documents, the AQAS Standing Commission took its decision on the accreditation on 19 May 2025. AQAS forwarded the decision to the consortium. The university consortium had the right to appeal against the decision or any of the imposed conditions.

In June 2025, AQAS published the report and the result of the accreditation as well as the names of the panel of experts.

### III. General information on the universities

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The “European Master’s programme in Human Rights and Democratisation” (EMA) is a one-year postgraduate programme that aims to reflect the links between human rights, democracy, peace, and development. The programme is supposed to offer an action- and policy-oriented approach to learning for those seeking a pathway to work as professionals in the field of human rights and democratisation, as academics, staff members, or field workers for intergovernmental, governmental, and non-governmental organisations.

Established in 1997, the EMA is one of eight regional Master’s programmes that form part of a global network of regional human rights Master’s programmes within the Global Campus of Human Rights (GC; located in Venice). The EMA governing bodies, assembled by the universities involved in the programme, are supported by a permanent team based at the GC headquarters in Venice (comprising the EMA Programme Director, two EMA Fellows and two Executive Officers). Logistical, financial, and administrative support is provided by the Global Campus of Human Rights.

According to the SER, the EMA programme’s integrated approach is reflected in the following elements of jointness:

- a robust governance structure,
- a jointly designed and fully integrated academic curriculum,
- common implementation procedures,
- joint study and examination regulation,
- jointly developed and shared quality assurance mechanisms,
- a joint governance structure as well as a joint administrative and financial management,
- joint Degree Award and Joint Diploma,
- the EMA/Global Campus (GC) Europe team based at the GC headquarters in Venice which aims to guarantee the coordination, implementation, and co-design of the EMA programme with support from Global Campus headquarters’ transversal departments.

The European Master’s programme is, inter alia, delivered by the following seven European universities, that currently form the so-called inner circle universities and are the degree awarding higher education institutions:

- Ruhr-University Bochum, Germany
- University of Graz, Austria
- University of Deusto, Spain
- University of Padua, Italy
- University of Hamburg, Germany
- University of Ljubljana, Slovenia
- Ca’ Foscari University of Venice, Italy

All inner-circle universities are located in countries in which the European Approach is fully or partially implemented.

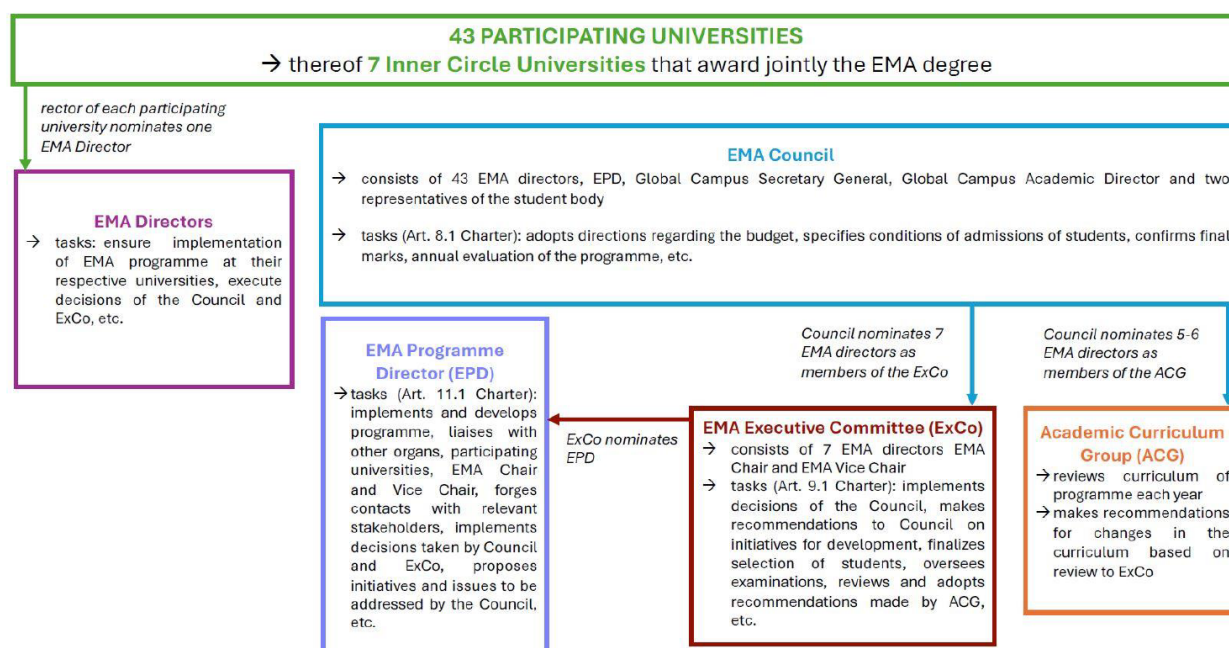
In addition, the EMA programme has created a European network of curriculum development and staff exchange among universities in the field of human rights and democratisation in Europe. The network consists of 43 participating universities in total, which are:

University of Vienna, Austria; KU Leuven, Belgium; Université Libre de Bruxelles, Belgium; Sofia University St. Kliment Ohridski, Bulgaria; University of Zagreb, Croatia; University of Cyprus, Cyprus; Masaryk University of Brno, Czech Republic; University of Southern Denmark/Danish Institute for Human Rights, Denmark; University of Tartu, Estonia; Åbo Akademi University, Finland; University of Helsinki, Finland; Université de Strasbourg, France; Université de Montpellier, France; Bundeswehr University Munich, Germany; Aristotle University of



Thessaloniki, Greece; Panteion University Athens, Greece; Eotvos Lorand University Budapest, Hungary; University of Galway, Ireland; University College Dublin, Ireland; University of Latvia, Latvia; University of Vilnius, Lithuania; Université du Luxembourg, Luxembourg; University of Malta, Malta; Maastricht University, the Netherlands; Utrecht University, the Netherlands; Adam Mickiewicz University, Poland; University of Coimbra, Portugal; New University of Lisbon, Portugal; University of Bucharest, Romania; Comenius University, Bratislava, Slovakia; University of Seville, Spain; Lund University, Sweden; Uppsala University, Sweden; University of Lucerne, Switzerland; University of Nottingham, United Kingdom; Queen's University Belfast, United Kingdom.

The governance structure of the programme depicts as follows:



Two key documents are said to build the basis for the governance of the programme: the Charter of Venice, which sets out the aims and organisational structure of the programme and the conferral of the degree procedures, and the Agreement on the European Master's Degree in Human Rights and Democratisation, which outlines the responsibilities of the so-called Inner Circle Universities (ICU).

As outlined in the Charter of Venice, the organisational structure of the EMA programme consists of the following organs which are collectively responsible for the administration of the programme:

- the EMA Directors from the Participating Universities for which the rector of each participating university must nominate an EMA Director who will represent that university on the EMA Council,
- the EMA Council, consisting of the EMA Directors of all universities involved in the programme, which meets at least once a year at the Global Campus headquarters in Venice,
- the Executive Committee (ExCo) that consists of seven EMA Directors (nominated by the Council), the EMA Chair and Vice Chair; the ExCo meets at least four times a year,
- the Academic Curriculum Group (ACG), constating of 5–6 EMA Directors nominated by the Council, which meets in March/April and evaluates the teaching components of the completed first semester and makes recommendations for the curriculum of the upcoming academic year,
- the EMA Programme Director (EPD), two EMA Fellow and two EMA Executive Officers (Global Campus Europe team).

## IV. Assessment of the study programme

### 1. Eligibility

*1.1 The institutions that offer a joint programme should be recognised as higher education institutions by the relevant authorities of their countries. Their respective national legal frameworks should enable them to participate in the joint programme and, if applicable, to award a joint degree. The institutions awarding the degree(s) should ensure that the degree(s) belong to the higher education degree systems of the countries in which they are based.*

*1.2 The joint programme should be offered jointly, involving all cooperating institutions in the design and delivery of the programme.*

*1.3 The terms and conditions of the joint programme should be laid down in a cooperation agreement. The agreement should in particular cover the following issues:*

- *Denomination of the degree(s) awarded in the programme*
- *Coordination and responsibilities of the partners involved regarding management and financial organisation (including funding, sharing of costs and income etc.)*
- *Admission and selection procedures for students*
- *Mobility of students and teachers*
- *Examination regulations, student assessment methods, recognition of credits and degree awarding procedures in the consortium.*

### Description

It is documented in the self-evaluation report (SER) that all degree-awarding universities are authorised to award the Master's degree as a joint degree and that all are universities according to each national higher education system by listing the legal basis (laws and related paragraphs).

The EMA programme is delivered in two semesters of which the first takes place at the Global Campus (GC) headquarters in Venice, and in the second semester students move to one of the EMA participating universities to enrol in specialised courses and complete their research Master's thesis (see chapter 6 for more details). The first semester is co-designed and delivered by all EMA participating universities; in the second semester, students can choose one of the partner universities according to their research specialisation and interests. The curriculum is adopted each year by the Council, following an analysis and recommendations by the ACG which are then examined by the ExCo, adopted by the Council (if necessary), and then implemented by the EPD with the support of the Global Campus Europe team.

The conditions for the awarding of the joint degree and the responsibilities of the Inner Circle Universities are outlined in the Agreement on the European Master's Degree in Human Rights and Democratisation. This Agreement outlines the following aspects:

- admission requirements,
- Call for Applications and student selection procedures,
- administrative seat of the programme,
- university of 'first enrolment' that takes the responsibility to enrol EMA students each year (University of Padova),
- aims and contents of the study programme, its teaching methodologies, rules of assessment, credits as well as didactic structure,
- issuing of the joint degree,
- processes for accession and withdrawal to the Inner Circle universities,

- protocol on the implementation of the EMA Joint Degree including the responsibilities of the Inner Circle universities.

### Experts' evaluation

The experts' impressions of the Master's programme are very positive. It is a long-established programme that is very clearly structured and can build on a trusting relationship between the participating universities. Those involved at all levels showed their commitment and dedication to the programme. This Master's programme is a large and impressive task that is being handled well by those involved. Responsibilities are clearly allocated and the governance structure is also clear. The positive impressions the experts already had from the documentation were confirmed and underlined in the discussions. Handling this enormous consortium of 43 universities involved in the programme can be perceived as a burden, but since it is politically intended this way by including universities from all over Europe for EU funding, and the cooperation builds on the experiences that were made in the decades since the programme started, it can be confirmed that this task is being mastered.

Still, as some of the programme's founders will be retiring in the near future, there will be challenges in maintaining the good cooperation. This should be kept in mind and successors should be sought at an early stage. Those in charge have already constantly dealt with changes in the consortium, with new universities entering the programme and personnel changes, so the experts are hopeful that the upcoming challenges can be mastered.

The documentation that was prepared by the consortium has made obvious that the so-called inner circle universities that are the degree-awarding entities are all higher education institutions in their countries, eligible to participate in the programme, and entitled to award the joint degree. The cooperation agreement ensures that the Master's programme can continue to be offered. The participating universities agreed to provide the necessary resources, the responsibilities and coordination of the programme are laid down as well as the relevant procedures such as admission, assessment, quality assurance, and governance of the programme. The necessary framework is thus ensured.

### Conclusion

The criterion is fulfilled.

## 2. Learning outcomes

- 2.1 The intended learning outcomes should align with the corresponding level in the Framework for Qualifications in the European Higher Education Area (FQ-EHEA), as well as the applicable national qualifications framework(s).*
- 2.2 The intended learning outcomes should comprise knowledge, skills, and competencies in the respective disciplinary field(s).*
- 2.3 The programme should be able to demonstrate that the intended learning outcomes are achieved.*
- 2.4 If relevant for the specific joint programme, the minimum agreed training conditions specified in the European Union Directive 2005/36/EC, or relevant common trainings frameworks established under the Directive, should be taken into account.*

### Description

The one-year EMA programme aims to bridge knowledge, understanding and skills in the area of human rights and democratisation in a holistic approach. The programme is supposed to consolidate a system of co-operative and operational teaching and research which aims to fulfil the demand for practitioners in the field with an interdisciplinary educational concept, including related aspects from law, international relations, philosophy,

political science, and history. The graduates are supposed to be able to master in-depth knowledge of recent and current developments in human rights and democratisation. Furthermore, they are supposed to be able to examine human rights and democratisation debates through a solid understanding of theories, concepts, and methods. At the end of the EMA Programme, students shall have acquired the ability to conduct independent research at an advanced level and evaluate materials critically. Additionally, the programme is supposed to enable them to show articulated English oral and writing skills including style, organization of ideas, and clarity of expression, argumentation, and presentation. Also, students shall have gained the skills to display analysis of research carried out on primary and secondary materials providing a foundation for professional work and academic research, engage in meaningful academic and policy debates, and apply practical and operational skills in diverse working environments.

Based on this, the following Intended Learning Outcomes (ILOs) are defined for the programme:

### *Knowledge*

The graduate is supposed to

1. be able to position human rights and democratisation in the different fields (universal and regional systems for the protection of human rights, the corresponding aspects of law, philosophy, history, international relations, and political science); identify issues of human rights and democratisation in those fields, know research results and the major research questions in the field;
2. be apt to identify interdisciplinary connections between the different fields concerning human rights and democratisation;
3. know the practical field of human rights and democratisation;
4. have specialised knowledge and skills in one specific area connected to the Master's Thesis.

### *Skills*

The graduate is supposed to be able to

1. analyse and resolve human rights problems using an action and policy-oriented approach;
2. conduct academic research in the field of human rights and democratisation;
3. write a scientific paper on a topic of human rights and democratisation according to academic standards;
4. search for information, critically evaluate the information and its sources, and synthesise the main ideas to construct new concepts;
5. communicate the results of their study orally and in writing in English to a public of academic peers as well as a public of laymen;
6. work and communicate in an interdisciplinary team in a governmental, intergovernmental, and non-governmental organisations;
7. link acquired knowledge and skills and apply them creatively in solving new and complex problems.

### *Attitude*

The graduate is supposed to

1. have an autonomous and critical attitude towards the legal system based upon human rights knowledge;
2. be able to engage in interdisciplinary work;
3. be able to work in different cultural environments;
4. be able to interact and work in close cooperation with people with different cultural backgrounds;

5. have developed an attitude to engage in a broad network of peers and maintain contacts.

The ILOs are to be translated within the programme as follows:

#### *Knowledge*

In the first stream during the first semester in Venice, students are supposed to gain an overview of the different thematic fields the programme addresses. They shall get acquainted to research questions in the fields. In the second stream of the first semester and in the second semester at one of the 43 participating universities, students specialise in a specific topic or broaden their knowledge on specific topics (e.g., LGBTQ+ rights, the rights of Indigenous Peoples, climate justice). The classes are to be taught in such a way that they invite students to approach problems in an interdisciplinary way.

#### *Skills*

Students are supposed to acquire these skills in the so-called Thematic Sections (TS) in the first and second stream (see chapter 6) in the first semester via specific teaching methods (such as academic writing, speaking in public, project management), and integrate those skills in bigger projects such as the field trip and the Master's thesis.

#### *Attitude*

By following the whole programme course, students are supposed to learn to develop their own attitude and idea about topics in human rights and democratisation. The two teaching periods (in Venice in the first semester and at one of the 43 universities in the second semester) is described as an extra stimulation to learn from other cultures. As there are participants of different cultures and backgrounds in the programme, students shall have the opportunity to get new inspirations and perspectives by learning from one another.

The interdisciplinary approach of the programme is supposed to teach students to take a view at problems and situations from different disciplinary points of view. Interactive teaching methods and the social cohesion of the student group during the first semester are supposed to give different opportunities to interact with students from different backgrounds and with diverse interests and to develop a broad network.

By the ILOs and the underlying programme's concept, the graduates shall have knowledge and insights that exceed the Bachelor's level. They are supposed to be able to apply their knowledge in new or unknown circumstances within an interdisciplinary context. The graduates are equally supposed to be able to formulate opinions based on limited information, taking into account social responsibilities. They shall be able to convey the insights from human rights and democratisation in a clear way to both a specialised and non-specialised audience. Finally, the graduates are supposed to have the knowledge and abilities to pursue additional studies with an autonomous character.

#### *Level*

Considering the respective qualifications frameworks (Qualifications Framework for the European Higher Education Area (QF-EHEA) and national frameworks), the Master's degree awarded is described as corresponding with Level 7 EQF (Germany: Level 7 NQF; Austria: Level 7 NQF; Italy: Level 7 NQF; Slovenia: Level 7 NQF; Spain: Level 3 NQF). With respect to the coding criteria for ISCED, the EMA programme is classified as: 0188, an interdisciplinary programme including the fields of Arts and Humanities (02), Social Sciences (03) and Business and Law (04).

*Achievement*

The programme as a whole is supposed to enable students to achieve the ILOs. In addition to the core activity of providing education at Master's level, EMA is supposed to facilitate internships, networking and access to professional careers for its graduates. It is explained in the SER that there are long-standing internship agreements with human rights civil society actors such as Human Rights Watch, Protection International, No Peace without Justice and Amnesty International, and with intergovernmental actors such as the EU Special Representative for Human Rights, the Delegations of the EU to the United Nations in New York and Geneva, and to the Council of Europe, UNESCO, the OSCE and UNICEF, among others. As shown by figures in the SER, about 45 % of the graduates find employment within the first month after graduation.

*Regulated professions*

The minimum agreed training conditions specified in the European Union Directive 2005/36/EC, or relevant common training frameworks established under the Directive, are not applicable for this Master's programme. The EMA programme does not give graduates a legal qualification to practice law.

**Experts' evaluation**

The programme's Intended Learning Outcomes (ILOs) are clearly and transparently defined in documents such as the diploma supplement, as well as on the modern, well-organized and user-friendly website. The learning outcomes cover the relevant skills and knowledge in the academic field and also adequately address more practice-oriented aspects. The ILOs clearly align with second cycle qualifications as defined in the Framework of Qualifications in the European Higher Education Area (QF-EHEA). Academic skills are developed at an advanced level and the programme focuses on the broad disciplinary field of human rights and democratisation. Students receive a solid foundation and the opportunity to set a disciplinary and thematic focus within the one-year programme, particularly in the Master's thesis, in which they work in-depth and scientifically on a specific topic related to the broad approach addressed in the programme. It is clear from the ILOs that the Master's programme has an international focus and that the programme is highlighted by its joint design which includes teaching staff from many different universities from all over Europe.

The fact that the profile of graduates is adequate and that the learning objectives are achieved by the programme was also confirmed by the labour market representatives with whom the experts were able to speak. They unanimously confirmed the high level of skills acquired by the trainees they had been able to welcome and who had completed the training. One of them, for example, stated that he usually does not take on any trainees except those who have completed this Master's course.

The minimum agreed training conditions specified in the European Union Directive 2005/36/EC or relevant common trainings frameworks established under the Directive are not applicable for the study programme under review.

**Conclusion**

The criterion is fulfilled.



### 3. Study programme

- 3.1 The structure and content of the curriculum should be fit to enable the students to achieve the in-tended learning outcomes.
- 3.2 The European Credit Transfer System (ECTS) should be applied properly, and the distribution of credits should be clear.
- 3.3 A joint bachelor programme will typically amount to a total student workload of 180-240 ECTS-credits; a joint master programme will typically amount to 90-120 ECTS-credits and should not be less than 60 ECTS-credits at second cycle level (credit ranges according to the QF-EHEA); for joint doctorates, there is no credit range specified. The workload and the average time to complete the programme should be monitored.

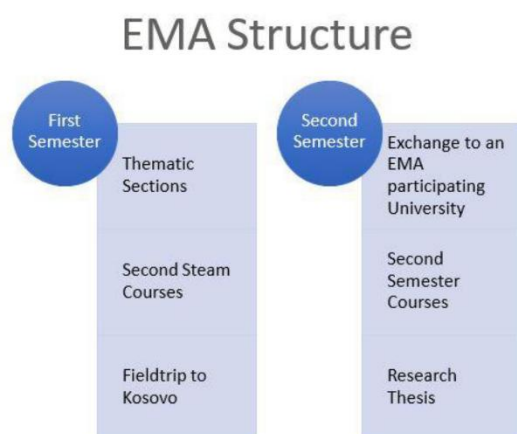
#### Description

##### Curriculum

The programme's curriculum comprises two semesters in which the students gain 60 CP (ECTS) in total. The first semester is spent in Venice at the Global Campus of Human Rights (30 CP gained by attending courses in five thematic sections, the second stream courses, and participating in a fieldtrip). In the second semester, the students take modules at one of the partner universities (9 CP) and write their Master's thesis (21 CP).

In the SER, the central principle of all modules is described as the indivisibility of all human rights (civil and political, social, cultural and economic) as essential for the integral protection of human dignity. Students are supposed to explore institutional and normative elements comprising the international protection of human rights and their historic developments after World War II. They shall learn to contextualize human rights and enhance them by making use of interdisciplinary and inclusive approaches. For this, students are supposed to deal with issues like the impact of globalisation on human rights and their role in mitigating the effects of globalisation. Moreover, contemporary challenges shall also be addressed through case studies and specific group exercises, such as the link between democratization and human rights, the successful transformation of political systems in countries of transition, climate change and climate justice, LGBTQ+ rights, and the rights of Indigenous Peoples.

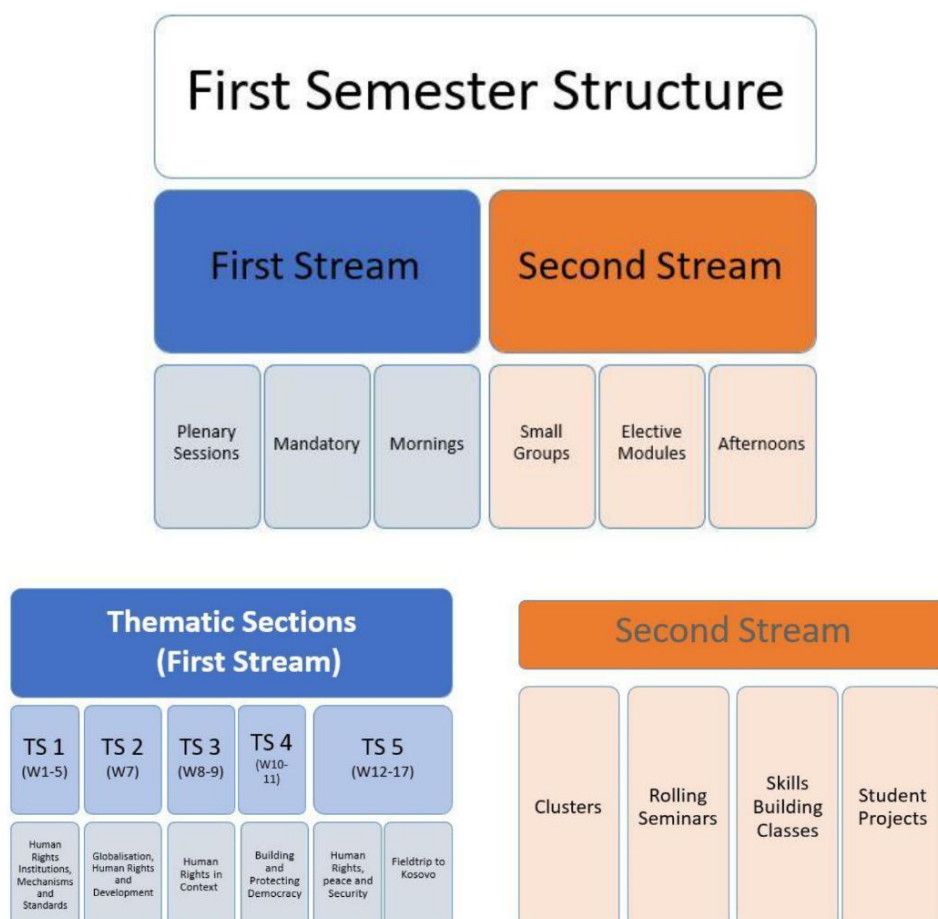
The curriculum looks as follows:



## Degree components



The first-semester curriculum consists of two principal elements: the First and the Second Stream. The structure of the first semester looks as follows:



The First Stream is described as the core of the first-semester programme and is taught in plenary to all students. The First Stream is divided into five thematic sections, and each thematic section is examined. The thematic sections are the following: “Human Rights Institutions, Mechanisms and Standards”, “Globalisation, Human Rights and Development”, “Human Rights in Context”, “Building and Protecting Democracy”, “Human Rights, Peace and Security”, “Fieldtrip”. According to the SER, the EMA Executive Committee (ExCo) appoints



Thematic Section Coordinators (TSC) on an annual basis. The TSC are responsible for the coordination and implementation of the specific curriculum components. They set the overall design of the thematic section, invite lecturers, and compile a reader. Within each section, lecturers may also be in charge of one or several weeks as so called Weekly Responsibles (WR), and they are also appointed for this role by the ExCo. The TSC as well as the WR are mostly academics from EMA participating universities. Throughout the semester, experts in particular fields may join them. Also, the TSC are supposed to jointly agree and coordinate the various thematic sessions of the first semester.

The Second Stream consists of both optional and mandatory units that are taught in smaller student groups in parallel sessions and include academic skills sessions, cluster classes on current topics (such as Bioethics and Biolaw, Children's Rights, Gender Relations and Human Rights, New Technologies and Human Rights, Transitional Justice from which students choose one), rolling seminars on the core disciplines of the programme (International Law, International Relations Theory, and Philosophy of Human Rights – of which students choose one), practical skills building classes (e.g. on mental health in human rights work and stress management), and optional students projects (such as the Human Rights Cultural/Film festival). The Second Stream is thus supposed to offer substantial training for working in the field, or as professional staff in inter-governmental, governmental, and non-governmental organisations or as academics. The SER explains that all courses combine a theoretical and a practical approach.

Also, during the first semester, a thesis proposal needs to be handed in. A form has been developed for it that is part of the second semester placement procedure. Its aim is to evenly distribute the students to their second semester university while at the same time respecting students' individual preferences and ensuring suitable supervision possibilities for the chosen research topics is attempted. In October, students submit a brief description of their research project and a list of six preferred host universities. To be able to choose the hosting university adequately, there is an info sheet on each university. Up to three students can be hosted by each participating university. The final distribution of students among the participating universities is the responsibility of ExCo at its meeting in early December. Students are usually expected to arrive in the second semester university in early February. In the second semester, students take specialised courses and write their research thesis on a topic related to human rights and/or democratisation under the supervision of a faculty member of the hosting university. The supervisor is supposed to be specialised in a field closely related to the chosen topic and responsible to supervise and coach the student in their research, learning and writing process. The courses are usually taken from existing study programmes at the hosting university.

#### *Credits and workload*

The degree programme has a study load of 60 credit points, whereby one credit is the equivalent of 25 to 30 hours of study (European Credit Transfer System/ECTS). According to the SER, the allocation of workload has been jointly agreed upon and is supposed to be evenly distributed.

As described in the SER, the workload is continuously validated based on the results of student's evaluations and inputs of the EMA team. The evaluation results and the adequacy of the workload are said to be regularly monitored by the ACG and ExCo. ExCo is in the position to take actions to modify the workload based on the evaluation results and recommendations from the ACG.

As shown by average figures of the last years, the majority of EMA students graduate within the academic year in which they enrolled (93–100 %). In the rare cases in which students request that their studies be extended, it is explained in the SER that these requests are made for individual and personal reasons.

#### **Experts' evaluation**

EMA is an interdisciplinary study programme applying a variety of disciplinary analytical tools (law, international relations, political science, philosophy, sociology, etc.) to better understand democratisation and human rights

and to acquire expertise on these topics. The structure and content of the EMA programme enables the students to achieve the ILOs within the two planned semesters. The learning outcomes are clear, and the graduates' profile is appreciated by the labour market representatives.

The EMA programme draws from a long-lasting teaching experience in the field of human rights and democratisation. It is clear from the concept and its documentation that these structures have been established for many years and are based on sound experience. The Academic Calendar 2023/2024 provides a detailed schedule of activities, including Thematic Sections' details per weeks. In general, the curriculum addresses current topics adequately, and experts from high-level institutions are often invited. This makes the curriculum of the first semester very complex, because it contains a lot of learning units that change from week to week. Having included current topics, also to follow students' wishes, might create problems without having revised the EMA structure thoroughly. It has to be acknowledged that the EMA Director and the EMA Chair are aware of these problems. However, the experts recommend a thorough revision of the content and a review of which topics should continue to be taught. By this, the experts see room for improvement by revising the curriculum to render it more adherent to the changing world and include innovative teaching methodologies. It is suggested to shorten some courses or to make some of the mandatory parts of the curriculum optional, so that students can focus more on those areas in which they are strongly interested, e. g., by offering optional seminar sessions in the afternoon of a specific week for those students who would like to deepen their knowledge on that specific topic, but without rendering them mandatory for all (**finding 1**; cf. **finding 5**). Furthermore, this would lower the high workload in the first semester, which for many students seems to be stressful.

The interdisciplinary approach is an added value of the EMA programme and requires that students acquire basic knowledge in different disciplines, especially in the first semester. Nevertheless, it could be useful – for example with the involvement of professional organisations – to revise the programme fundamentals and see which of them are to be regarded as 'core issues' today (**finding 1**). The same applies to the reading lists which might need an update – also to further avoid the impression of the programme being Eurocentric. This would be an adjustment that could easily eliminate the students' impression of Eurocentrism. This could also be supported by reaching out to younger teachers and/or teachers from the Global South to include them as teaching staff. Also, the involvement of more practitioners as lecturers would be much appreciated.

Efforts have already been made, as confirmed by those in charge of the programme, with regard to the concept of decolonization, the importance of which has been highlighted both by students from the Global South and by those who will be working in European spheres. This approach has taken on crucial importance in the countries of the South, both in the historical analysis they make of their relations with the former colonizing countries, and in the evaluation grid they use when examining their relations – diplomatic, commercial, humanitarian – with the countries of the North. However, there is a call by some students for a stronger focus on decolonization in the curriculum, as students feel that non-European human rights systems are underrepresented although the Master's is advertised as including global aspects. Decolonial approaches seem to be limited to short sessions on African and Asian contexts so far, according to students, that are not fully suitable to reflect upon the subject matter. Those in charge of the programme have clearly understood that this is a subject that must be a focus of attention in the years to come, and the experts support a greater integration of critical approaches and teaching staff from the Global South; this discussion should take place in the ACG, so the topic can be dealt with in greater depth in the future.

As it becomes clear from the description, the ECTS is used in the programme appropriately, and the workload is monitored through evaluations and students' feedback which was considered in the further development of the programme in the last years. However, it seems that the curriculum rather was revised by adding additional topics without significantly reducing the programme at other ends, as already mentioned before. By offering a one-year programme, the curriculum is naturally quite loaded, and the students gain 30 CP per semester, so they have to work on the courses full-time. However, graduates have reported that the first semester is

intensive compared to the second. A reduction would therefore make sense (**finding 1**). However, this is not a major problem, since students usually complete the programme within a year and graduate.

The EMA programme values students' self-development as a key asset and relies a lot upon the enhancement of individual skills such as academic writing, public speaking, project management. Learning in two different teaching environments in the first and second semester allows for a deeper understanding of democratisation and human rights in different cultural settings and backgrounds. However, this variety of modules and topics should not translate into a stressful learning experience.

## Conclusion

The criterion is fulfilled.

## 4. Admission and recognition

*4.1 The admission requirements and selection procedures should be appropriate in light of the pro-gramme's level and discipline.*

*4.2 Recognition of qualifications and of periods of studies (including recognition of prior learning) should be applied in line with the Lisbon Recognition Convention and subsidiary documents.*

## Description

### Admission

Applicants are selected by a Selection Committee, made up of the EMA National Directors for every EU country and the EMA academic team. The selection process covers an assessment of the applicants' qualifications and, if deemed relevant by the Selection Committee, a telephone or an online interview.

EMA is open to a maximum of 90 candidates from EU and non-EU countries. Admissions may be granted to applicants who submit complete applications and meet the following common admission criteria:

- have at least a three-year university degree (180 ECTS credits) or equivalent,
- have a certified knowledge of English at level B2 minimum; accepted certificates are IELTS (min. score 6), TOEFL (min. 80 for the IBT) and Cambridge exams (min. score 160-172), obtained no more than three years before the start of the programme;
- applicants completing the degree entry requirements subsequent to the application deadline are allowed to apply for the programme and might be admitted with reserve. Eventual admission into the programme will be conditional upon documentation of completed degree qualification within one day of the start of the programme.

All applicants must apply online via the Global Campus website. The following documents shall be enclosed with the application:

- transcript of records and degree diploma,
- curriculum vitae,
- two reference letters,
- copy of passport picture page,
- proof of English language proficiency,
- receipt of payment of the application fee of 50 Euro.

The EMA Secretariat sends copies of the applications to the respective EMA Directors of the National Coordinating University for each country represented in the EMA programme according to the nationality of the applicants or according to the country in which they completed their prior university education if different from nationality. This step is taken with the aim of ensuring that the academic achievements of students are evaluated by an EMA Director familiar with the standards of the national context. A central ranking list is compiled from all the individual evaluators. The applications are evaluated based on the applicants' qualifications and according to specific criteria (see below) and, if deemed relevant, an online interview.

Each applicant is awarded up to 30 points based on the following criteria:

- university final grade, evaluated by using a scale from 6 to 10,
- relevance of the degree and thesis subject (where a thesis is required for graduation), evaluated by using a scale of 1 to 5,
- relevant additional academic work/courses/publications, measured by using a scale of 1 to 5,
- relevant practical experience, measured by using a scale of 1 to 5,
- motivation, measured by using a scale of 1 to 5.

The selection of candidates holding a non-EU university qualification is carried out by the EMA academic team under the direction of the EMA Programme Director and according to the same criteria as EU candidates.

All evaluations and the ranking are submitted to the ExCo to approve the final list of admitted students by the end of June of each year. Only applicants who receive an overall score of at least 20/30 points will be considered eligible for the programme. All eligible applicants will be contacted for admission in accordance with the order of ranking. A maximum of 90 students can be admitted each year. The ExCo also decides on the allocation of the nine scholarships per year (also see section 6. Student Support). The University of Padova will proceed with the enrolment of students.

### *Recognition*

It is explained in the SER that competences and professional skills from previous studies are recognised if they are comparable. Examination results obtained in a Master's programme at other state or state-recognised universities shall be recognised upon request, provided that there is no significant difference between the acquired competences and the contents that are being replaced; an examination of equivalence shall not take place. This recognition shall serve the purpose of continuing studies and taking examinations.

On special application, qualifications acquired outside the university may be recognised to the extent of a maximum of 50 % of the credit points provided for this degree programme if this knowledge and qualification is equivalent in content and level to the examination achievements it is intended to replace.

### **Experts' evaluation**

The admission requirements ensure that students reach the necessary level of academic education and training, relevant practical experience is considered and also having the necessary language skills to benefit from an interdisciplinary Master's programme in the fields of human rights and democratisation. The system of awarding points to different selection criteria ensures comparability and objectivity across a large number of applications. The points awarded to the different criteria reflect the relative importance of the academic background and ensure that subjective criteria such as motivation are only additional aspects and do not play a central role.

An issue might be confidentiality of interviews during admissions, as this can pose risks for applicants from some countries. Strengthening security measures in this area should therefore be seen as necessary to ensure

the applicants' safety, especially for students from countries where democratisation and human rights are viewed critically.

The selection process, which involves the different EMA directors, seems complicated at first sight, but ensures that all participating universities contribute their experience and expertise with regards to the assessment of the applications against the admission requirements. This underlines the unique international character of the programme. The regulations regarding recognition of courses taken at other universities and prior learning also reflect the inter- and transdisciplinary nature of the programme. However, involving the different EMA directors also bears the risk of divergent approaches towards assessing the applications and awarding points. It is important that the EMA governing institutions continuously monitor this practice to ensure consistency of the different EMA directors' practice.

The admissions regulations are binding and transparent and follow the requirements of the Lisbon Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education. The admission requirements contain enough space and opportunities to ensure that the different skills and prior learning experiences of applicants from various different academic backgrounds are adequately assessed. They also ensure that knowledge and skills acquired elsewhere during the course of study can be recognised in principle – even though issues of mobility in a one-year programme with an integrated semester at one of the partner universities do not play a role in the concept, the basic regulations are in place.

## Conclusion

The criterion is fulfilled.

## 5. Learning, teaching and assessment

*5.1 The programme should be designed to correspond with the intended learning outcomes, and the learning and teaching approaches applied should be adequate to achieve those. The diversity of students and their needs should be respected and attended to, especially in view of potential different cultural backgrounds of the students.*

*5.2 The examination regulations and the assessment of the achieved learning outcomes should correspond with the intended learning outcomes. They should be applied consistently among partner institutions.*

## Description

### *Learning and teaching*

The interdisciplinary EMA programme is supposed to provide an action- and policy-oriented approach linking theory, practice, participatory learning, and case-based reflections, reflecting the indivisible links between human rights, democracy, peace and development. By this, the EMA programme aims to equip students with both academic and practical skills, to develop the ability to conduct independent and interdisciplinary research in relation to human rights and democratization as well as to provide them with fundamental know-how in areas relevant to human rights practice.

The programme begins with preparatory sessions, which are available for post-graduate level studies in politics, philosophy, and law to overcome possible deficiencies among students given their diverse backgrounds. In connection with the essays assigned for the first semester, essay writing workshops are also organised during the initial weeks of class, and individual support is to be given to the students along the way, in particular for students without experience in essay writing. It is explained that students receive a compendium with all the reading material necessary for each Thematic Session in the first semester. This is shared via a virtual learning platform.

The learning units of the first semester comprise different teaching and learning methods, from classic plenary lectures, rolling seminars (on International Law, International Relations Theory, or Philosophy of Human Rights of which students choose one and which aim at strengthening the interdisciplinarity and providing a space for smaller group discussions) and so-called cluster classes (in which students do research on specialised human rights topics, e.g., Bioethics and Biolaw, Children's Rights, Gender Relations and Human Rights, New Technologies and Human Rights, Transitional Justice – of which the students choose one) to workshops and skill classes, moot courts, negotiation simulations and human rights in field role play scenarios. These are delivered by the EPD, EMA Fellow, and academics from EMA participating universities, as well as experts, field officers, and international civil servants from IGOs and NGOs. The programme also includes a three-week-field trip to Kosovo as well as optional academic and research skills seminars.

Lectures, as mentioned above, are supposed to address key issues on the following topics: Introduction to International Law, Introduction to Theory of International Relations, Basic Features of the UN System for the Protection of Human Rights, and Topics in the Philosophy of Human Rights. Rolling seminars aim at reinforcing the foundations of those key issues and generally target students without an academic background in the area in question. Group exercises may contain, e.g., arbitration and conflict resolution games, moot courts and aim at practical application of learning contents. They are also supposed to address soft skills such as teamwork, interpersonal communication, and multicultural sensitivity in a group of international students.

The field trip to Kosovo aims at raising awareness regarding practical challenges related to human rights work in the field, providing deeper insight into the tasks, difficulties and expectations human rights officers in the field are confronted with as well as getting a better understanding of the real situations in a post-war country. The training week comprises visits both to international organisations and institutions and to local and regional non-governmental organisations.

The teaching and learning (as well as the assessment) of the two courses to be taken in the second semester depend on the hosting university's offers and requirements.

The teaching and learning methods used in the programme aim at the (further) development of the following skills building by its components as explained above.

## Skills Building Components

Research and Academic Skills	Skills building	Simulations
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Academic Writing</li> <li>• Critical Reading Skills</li> <li>• Academic Honesty</li> <li>• Thesis Preparation</li> <li>• Basic Introduction to Research Methodologies</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Digital Verification of Human Rights Violations</li> <li>• Communicating Human Rights</li> <li>• Human Rights Impact Assessment</li> <li>• Project Management</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ECtHR Moot</li> <li>• ICC Moot</li> <li>• Negotiation, mediation and dialogue</li> <li>• Human Rights in the field exercises</li> </ul>

### Assessment

First semester assessment consists of written assignments and end-of-semester written exams. TS and Weekly Responsibles liaise with the EMA Programme Director in relation to the design and marking of assessments. The EPD supervises the exams, essays and assignments, short papers, take-home exams and other project assignments, assisted by the EMA Fellows. Together, they are responsible for clarifying queries regarding exam questions, the essays, papers and assignments. Oral presentations may also be used for assessment.



In order to gain access to the second semester, students need to be awarded a minimum of 22 out of 30 units and need to obtain an average grade of 6.0 over the weighted marks. This implies that Thematic Section 1 must be passed. Examinations passed at the second semester partner universities are fully and automatically recognized and converted by the EMA Directors into the EMA standardized 0-10 (fail to excellent) grading scale; assessment that was not graded can be documented as pass/fail.

The EMA First Semester Exam Commission, composed of the EMA Chair and three professors from the EMA Council, meet at the end of the first semester to confirm the grades of the first semester, as well as to hear appeals and resit exams. A student will be admitted to the thesis defence upon the successful completion of the second semester courses and if the proposed mark for the thesis is at least 6.0. In case a student has not been able to succeed in obtaining the minimum of 22 out of 30 units in the first semester, a re-sit exam procedure is in place. A deferral of exams is possible in case of severe impediment, such as grave medical condition, and will be decided on a case-by-case basis by the EPD. In case of disagreement with a grade during the first semester, the student may challenge it in writing to the First Semester Exam Commission. In the second semester, a student may challenge the grade in accordance with the regulations that apply at the respective second semester partner universities.

Students and their research supervisor at the second semester participating university agree on the thesis subject. The thesis has in first instance to be accepted by two examiners at the hosting university. The thesis is then provisionally graded jointly by the EMA Director and the supervisor (where different) or another qualified person (where the Director is the supervisor) at the host university. The supervisor proposes a mark to the EMA Director, whose task is to read all the EMA theses of his or her university and to ensure consistency in the marking at university level. This mark is provisional, and subject to change on the basis of the student's performance in the oral defence and the evaluation of the Thesis Commission. The evaluation of theses at the EMA participating universities in all cases includes an assessment of possible plagiarism and other inadequate academic referencing. Students defend their theses in front of Thesis Defence Commissions during an oral examination in September each year. The Thesis Defence Commissions are composed of EMA Directors. Each student is examined in the presence of the EMA Director (or a qualified representative) from the second semester university of the student concerned. The definitive mark for the thesis is decided by the EMA Council after the oral examination.

### **Experts' evaluation**

The provided documents reveal the clear vision that lays at the basis of this programme: "central principle in all modules is the indivisibility of all human rights, civil and political, social, cultural and economic, as essential for the protection of human dignity", as it is stated in the SER. This principle is appropriately implemented in the programme and is also adequately taken into account at the level of teaching methods and forms as well as examinations. There is an evident correspondence between the study programme and the learning outcomes. EMA seeks to graduate 'human rights professionals', conceived as an experimental profession, not a regulated one, drawing from law, economics, philosophy, social work, etc. From an overarching perspective, the programme is therefore convincing; the following should thus be understood as suggestions and recommendations for further development.

The learning and teaching methods used in the EMA programme seem vague to some extent. EMA provides a variety of teaching units (mandatory/elective modules, seminars and training activities) in the first semester and a wide range of possibilities at the second semester university. Therefore, the whole programme relies upon a large number of instructors involved in various ways in the teaching activities. Coordination is thus a crucial element of high quality of teaching in the EMA programme, and a good equilibrium, also in terms of workload, among the two semesters, is to be guaranteed. Considering that students spend the first semester at the Global Campus Headquarters located in Venice, while for the second semester they are hosted by one

of the other EMA participating universities, inter-university co-operation is essential to guarantee the smooth implementation of students' mobility. This is a major challenge that everyone involved is facing. With more than 40 universities involved, networking must be hard with such a large consortium. Coordination and a continuous exchange of views among such a large group of teaching staff must be guaranteed. Clear communication and continuous dialogue to share teaching methods is required to provide high quality teaching. EMA is going in the right direction, considering tools such as the EMA Director's Guide 2023/2024, being "a practical instrument conceived to accompany [them] throughout the academic year". This surely is one of the reasons why students are generally satisfied and seem to be well supported.

For the upcoming accreditation period, the experts suggest taking care of the use of modern teaching methods which should be expanded (**finding 2**). In the next years, the teaching staff involved will experience a generational change (that is already underway), so this is a good opportunity to review and adapt the teaching and learning concepts to extend the use of modern university didactics tools for student-centred teaching and innovative learning. Moreover, in a global political system rapidly changing, current topics and issues should be continuously revised and updated (see also chapters 3 and 9).

Regarding the assessment methods used in the programme, they are very detailed and well explained in the enclosed documentation, providing also various samples. The EMA Directors Guide mentions the Charter of Venice establishing the grading system to be adopted in detail. Students appreciate the methods used (such as short essays) that are very much comparable to what is needed in work life, so they are helpful professionalisation tools. However, the inclusion of a more diverse range of forms of examination is desirable (**finding 2**). Moreover, deadlines for essays should be set in a way that they do not have to be done during the weekend, as it was reported by the students happening sometimes. Concerning the assessment feedback, students would appreciate to receive assessments quickly, so to have margins of improvements.

To guarantee that in the second semester students settle down smoothly, can follow classes and find their thesis supervisors, the 'preparation session' before they move to the host institution must be accurate. To render the transition from the first semester to the second semester as smoothly as possible (also see chapters 6. and 8.), dedicated student assistants, e.g. the figure of a 'buddy tutor' or similar taken over by graduates functioning as mentors, could be helpful. This could be considered for the future.

Regarding the structure and documentation, the EMA programme has a more flexible "Academic Curriculum" document instead of a traditional module handbook. This document provides detailed weekly schedules, outlining the learning objectives and listing the lecturers involved. It is subject to change every academic year through recommendations by the Academic Curriculum Group (ACG) and implementations by the EMA Executive Committee (ExCo) and the EMA Programme Director (EPD). The experts support the adjustable and flexible approach of handling the modules as it leaves space to incorporate the wide offer of teaching by the 43 participating universities. Students receive an introduction to this structure during the welcome week to help them navigate their first semester. While the experts recognize the necessity of this flexible approach, some students have reported instances of topic repetition in classes. Although the weekly coordinators and the Academic Curriculum Group aim to mitigate these inconsistencies and redundancies, ensuring that those groups and lecturers are closer in exchange could improve coherence. At the same time, it has to be considered that coordinating over 80 different lecturers bears challenges. In general, students acknowledge that when there is a problem, e.g. repetition of topics in classes or lack of consistency that might be caused by teaching staff not considering the programme's guidelines, the staff is always cooperative and solution oriented.

## Conclusion

The criterion is fulfilled.



## 6. Student support

*6.1 The student support services should contribute to the achievement of the intended learning outcomes. They should take into account specific challenges of mobile students.*

### Description

The EMA Student Guide covers information on the modules and the study programme, its joint, teaching activities, rules and methods of assessment, library support, student support and the contact details and profiles of academic and administrative staff. An overview of the joint Thematic Sections as well as first and Second Stream Courses are also given, and the specialisations of the different universities in the second semester are presented, as well as how the selection process works.

As described in the SER, students have access to the joint virtual learning platform, where materials are supposed to be offered for the Thematic Sections and lectures of the current academic year. The EMA Programme officially starts with an orientation week which usually includes an excursion to a cultural institution in Venice. This is followed by an introduction week that aims to set out the context of the EMA course and familiarise students with the main issues and disciplines they will study. During this week, students shall also be able to meet all EMA Directors at the “EMA University Fair” so that they can speak directly with them about the courses on offer in the second semester, and potential thesis topics that can be supervised at each institution. New students also have the opportunity to meet graduates from the previous year.

Prior to arrival in Venice, students are offered accommodation services which include advisors to assist them with visas and other legal issues in the arriving country. It is also explained in the SER that the EMA Team also coordinates other services: introduction sessions, language courses, university guidance service, social assistance service, support in contracting private health insurance, funding opportunities, sports and cultural activities, etc.

During the first semester, the Rolling Seminar series is supposed to provide space for discussion with a member of the EMA team about the content of the plenary lectures, and to engage in small group seminar work. According to the SER, each member of the EMA academic team holds weekly office hours and may also be available outside these hours, if necessary. The EMA Fellows are explained to be also available to provide specific academic support to students.

Once the distribution of students for the second semester has been finalized, EMA Directors and their allocated students establish contact in order to discuss matters of immediate relevance, for instance related to residence permits and accommodation arrangements. Non-EU students are supposed to be assisted with visa matters by EMA Directors and the relevant administrative offices at their university. The EMA Executive Officers can offer additional support, if necessary. Furthermore, students are supposed to be provided with information on the accommodation services available at the second semester universities as soon as possible. As explained in the SER, the EMA Directors (or an assistant at their universities) are responsible for helping students access university housing (where available) and advising them on how to access the private housing market as well.

The EMA Alumni Association also hold an information session with students each year to share their experience of the second semester. There are also so-called EMA Ambassadors who live in many of the second semester destinations. These are graduates of the programme who organise social events for the alumni community in their city of residence.

The EMA Director is responsible for organising an introduction to the new learning environment of the students and informing students on the university's rules on attendance, assessment and related academic matters. EMA Directors are also supposed to inform students of all student support services available to them. In case

a university hosts only one or two students, the EMA Director is advised to introduce them to other students. A good established practice has been to seek out student volunteers for this purpose.

Each year the student group elects two Student Representatives, and two vice representatives, two Student Activity Coordinators, Social Media Coordinators and Yearbook coordinators. The EPA and/or the EMA Fellows meet with the Student Representatives on a weekly basis throughout the first semester and on a monthly basis (or as needed) during the second semester. In addition, the EMA/GC Europe team is described as being a permanent point of contact for students during the first and second semester.

As explained in the SER, EMA students have access to a range of psychological and other support services. As students registered with the University of Padova, they are entitled to use all of the university's health facilities which includes psychological support offers. It also includes the Anti-Harassment Listening Desk that provides free listening and support services as well as the Anti-Violence Center of Padua which offers help to get in touch with social and health services, law enforcement agencies, or other institutions. Additionally, emergency assistance in Venice or Treviso can be organised, if required. The Rector's delegate for Inclusion and Disability of the University of Padua is responsible for related issues, and students can contact the Department advisors for Inclusion and Disability, the Student Services Office for Inclusion, and the Representative for Disability and Inclusion in the Student Council. In the second semester students shall have full access to all the student support services on offer by the host university. Services provided at each university are published on each university's website.

A total of nine scholarships were available for the academic year 2024/2025: six general EMA Scholarships, one scholarship for a candidate interested in pursuing a research topic in the field of IT and Human Rights (the Nicola Tonon Scholarship) and two scholarships funded by the Right Livelihood for candidates interested in pursuing a research topic related to children's rights. Applicants were given the option to select the scholarship for which they wished to be considered.

Career support is offered to students, e.g., by the EMA Internship Programme. Additionally, the EMA Alumni association hosts a two-day workshop with current students in which up to six alumni come to Venice and share their experience. In addition, in the second semester, the EMA team runs of webinars with human rights professionals, career support officers and others who provide students with guidance on aspects like how to navigate applications in inter-governmental organisations, networking, etc.

### **Experts' evaluation**

The EMA Master's programme provides a broad offer of student support, particularly regarding accommodation, visas, courses, and general inquiries. The coordination staff proactively ensures that students receive necessary assistance, addressing visa issues, providing trusted landlord lists, and maintaining close relationships with the students and the university body during the two semesters. Non-EU students benefit from dedicated student supervisors who facilitate visa applications and appointments with the authorities. Furthermore, students experiencing difficulties can always seek help from the EMA coordinating staff, which is perceived by the students as caring and effective support.

A structured tutorial system fosters group cohesion from the first semester, ensuring student presence and engagement. Academic development is reinforced through skills-building classes focused on research and academic writing, supplementing core human rights courses and legal simulations.

Financial student support provides nine scholarships for each cohort covering tuition fees, primarily awarded to students from the Global South to address structural global inequalities. Although this initiative is widely supported, living expenses in Venice and at the second semester university remain a challenge for students, which mostly is not possible to tackle with a side job due to limited work opportunities, a lack of language skills and a high workload, mainly in the first semester. Financial stability thus remains a concern for many students.

Establishing a hardship fund, as already suggested by programme representatives, would provide essential support for those facing unexpected financial difficulties, ensuring their continued access to education.

Internship scholarships for the top 15 students per year with the EMA network actively supporting the placements are highly valued as they often provide an entrance point for the job market. However, competition is perceived as potentially counterproductive, and opportunities for non-law and/or non-EU alumni remain limited.

Psychological support services, including an online counsellor, access to a psychologist in Padova and a psychological support fund exist, but are often underutilized due to high costs and insufficient awareness. In general, students' mental health is deteriorating, with almost 50 % of interviewed students saying that their mental health was negatively influenced by the EMA programme (EMA Executive Committee Student Report 2022/23: 2). Since a considerable number of students experience mental health challenges due to high workload and stress, affordable mental health support (on site) in Venice (in addition to Padova) would be beneficial. Furthermore, integrating well-being strategies for human rights defenders into the curriculum would provide students with essential tools to not only manage burnout and secondary trauma, but also with techniques to reduce mental stress during their studies. At least, communication to students about the resources on offer should be improved. Introducing an online counselling offer and informing about the fund at the beginning of the programme may help to lower access barriers. The experts therefore recommend improving the relevant communication processes (**finding 3**).

Additionally, the students the experts were able to talk to expressed the wish that more attention should be paid on the planning and coordination of the individual weeks and the associated examinations to ensure that examinations do not take place at the weekend or that tasks such as writing essays are planned in such a way that they can be submitted within a certain period of time without having to use the following weekend.

Concerning the selection of a second semester university, fact sheets and information sessions provide profound guidance, although students find the overwhelming number of choices challenging. The programme's representatives have responded positively to feedback, ensuring students are now informed about their second semester placements earlier. However, transparency regarding second semester university placements could still be improved as for many students it is not clear how the placement process leads to the given outcomes (regarding the prioritisation of students' preferences/choices).

While EMA's effort to promote a strong relationship between students and EMA staff in Venice is appreciated, access to support may vary, especially for non-EU students at partner universities. In general, central offices and contact points at the second semester universities should be better informed about the specialities of this Master's programme as feedback showed that students do not always feel that the host universities are aware of this programme. To do so, the contact persons in the administration and support institutions could, for example, be provided with an overview of the Master's programme by the EMA Directors on site. Furthermore, it could help to obtain feedback from the last cohorts about encountered problems at the respective university to tackle them in the future. Generally, it would also be helpful for students to know about the different support points at their second semester university. This could be handled through a generalized fact sheet handed out by the second semester university and a close contact to the EMA Director of the second university who should be informed about the different contact possibilities (**finding 3**).

Another area that should be paid attention to is that supervision is perceived with varying degrees of intensity in preparation to the students moving to their second semester universities. Some students receive extensive guidance, while others struggle with much less assistance. Standardizing and evaluating supervision at all participating universities would create a more equitable experience. This includes ensuring that EMA Directors at all participating universities are well-informed about student needs and are in contact with the students and supervisors/coordinating staff in case of difficulties. A general guide about how to deal with incoming EMA students at the second semester universities could be helpful for EMA Directors and supervisors (**finding 4**).

Regular meetings between student representatives and EMA coordinators allow for prompt responses to student concerns. EMA's commitment to addressing feedback is recognized, with the current cohort facing minimal notable issues. However, some student-led initiatives, such as setting up a student lounge and providing hygiene materials, highlight areas where EMA's involvement could be stronger. EMA students only having a timespan of one semester in Venice are not properly able to organise themselves politically. The support of informal student spaces could foster better community engagement.

Accessibility remains a pressing concern, particularly for students and staff with disabilities since the campus in Venice is located in an old monastery. The historic nature of the buildings creates challenges, such as the access of persons with mobility impairments, limited bathroom facilities, which lead to long queues during breaks, and heating issues, which should be addressed through infrastructural enhancements. It should be reviewed if modifications such as ramps or stair elevators could be installed to make the programme more inclusive. Additionally, the heating system in winter must be fixed or substituted to prevent students (and staff) from having to endure uncomfortable learning environments due to malfunctioning systems. This not only applies to the classrooms, but also to the study area (**finding 4**).

All in all, it would be advisable to review the whole communication flow between the EMA staff and students as well as EMA Directors and second semester universities in detail, concerning general information, information about support mechanisms, possible second semester universities as well as contacts and support mechanisms in place (**finding 3**). The implementation of AI tools such as a chatbot could also be helpful to make certain information more accessible to students. In addition, the external presentation and marketing of the programme could also be expanded. It would be highly desirable if it were made known to more institutions and organisations from the broad field of human rights all over Europe.

## Conclusion

The criterion is partially fulfilled.

## 7. Resources

- 7.1 The staff should be sufficient and adequate (qualifications, professional and international experience) to implement the study programme.*
- 7.2 The facilities provided should be sufficient and adequate in view of the intended learning outcomes.*

## Description

### Staff

The EMA programme is jointly run by academics from 43 participating universities who, according to the SER, contribute to the teaching on a voluntary basis. On average, approximately 70 professors and experts teach in the first semester curriculum. They are selected by the TS coordinators, under the supervision of the ExCo on a yearly (renewable) basis. In the second semester each student is assigned an individual supervisor to prepare their research thesis.

The EMA Directors are responsible for ensuring the implementation of the EMA Programme at their respective universities and execute the decisions of the Council and the Executive Committee. The EMA Directors of the National Coordinating Universities coordinate the programme activities at the national level.

In addition, the EMA/GC Europe team, who are employed on a full-time basis by the GC, are responsible for ensuring the implementation and development of the programme. This team comprises:

- The EMA Programme Director (EPD),
- two EMA Teaching Fellows,
- two EMA Executive Officers.

It is explained in the SER that the Global Campus of Human Rights Headquarters additionally provides logistical and financial services support, in relation to human resources, advertising, and premises management. Following the description in the SER, a personnel strategy and continuing education for its employees was installed by designing a performance assessment system which shall allow for an analysis of individual accountability, as well as a rewarding system linking performance and incentives.

In principle, during an ordinary week a core team of three to four lecturers teach the first stream components. Ideally, one person (i.e. the TSC or the WR) stays for a full week, and the two additional lecturers each for three days. The WR is supposed to devise the format of the week, and then to identify two senior colleagues for teaching components of the week. The TSC is also responsible for developing the exam in cooperation with the EPD.

#### *Facilities*

The Global Campus of Human Rights is located at the Monastery of San Nicolò, Lido-Venice where students spend most of their time in the first semester. According to the SER, it houses a specialised multi-disciplinary library on human rights and democratisation issues with a print collection comprising more than 15,000 monographs, 20 academic journals, database subscriptions related to human rights and international law as well as reviews and other kinds of publications which include access to:

- online journal subscriptions and open access journals,
- HeinOnline Academic Core Collection,
- E-books from different publishers,
- Open access databases like ERIC, DOAJ, EBSCO, among others.

The library also gathers some human rights publisher's series of the United Nations and the Council of Europe, and collections such as the European Human Rights Yearbook.

Teaching staff are asked to mainly make use of international peer-reviewed open-access journals. Likewise, students are said to be encouraged to publish results of their research in open access formats, such as the Global Campus Human Rights Journal.

The EMA programme offers students an online platform (Blackboard) which is said to offer access to lecture and seminar information, resources and presentations, discussion fora and a calendar of events.

The second semester is spent at one of the 43 participating universities (which includes using campus card, local libraries, computer facilities, sport centres, housing, discount restaurants). The available facilities at each university are made known to students through University Information Sheets.

#### **Experts' evaluation**

The programme has broad support from the participating universities. This leads to the exceptional situation that teaching can be carried out by professors and academic staff who have a very high level of expertise in the individual teaching areas, and many of them are internationally recognised experts. Teaching can therefore be optimally covered not only in terms of quantity, but also quality. There is no doubt that the ILOs can (continue to) be fully achieved. The fact that the students receive an appropriate academic qualification in both the first

and second semester was also clear from the final theses submitted. It can therefore also be assumed that students have access to suitable literature at the respective second semester university.

On site in Venice, the experts found that the premises were not accessible to people with reduced mobility (also see chapter 6). Being located in a former monastery in a World Heritage city poses certain problems. However, the extent to which measures can be implemented to facilitate mobility, such as ramps to the cafeteria, should be examined in greater detail. To make it easier for students to concentrate on their studies, it is also important to ensure that the ambient temperature is uniform and pleasant in all the rooms concerned (**finding 4**).

It is clear that the massive arrival of artificial intelligence will require the full integration of its advantages and disadvantages into the educational process. This means not only analysing its positive and negative impacts, but also – and more importantly, one might add – seeing how its use will foster the further development of students' skills. This means the skills of teaching staff in this area should be improved (**cf. finding 2**).

## Conclusion

The criterion is fulfilled.

## 8. Transparency and documentation

*8.1 Relevant information about the programme like admission requirements and procedures, course catalogue, examination and assessment procedures etc. should be well documented and published by taking into account specific needs of mobile students.*

### Description

As explained in the SER, the EMA Students Guide, its virtual learning platform as well as the Academic Curriculum include the intended learning outcomes, the course material, information on the teaching and learning methodology, programme and training activities, workload, assessment criteria and assessment methods, etc. The EMA Students Guide and related material is prepared by the EMA academic team in consultation with the Thematic Section Coordinators and Weekly Responsibles on the basis of recommendations from the Academic Curriculum Group and the Executive Committee. The Curriculum is adopted by the EMA Council each year. This information is supposed to be made available to students before they start their studies. Information about the programme like admission requirements and procedures, the course catalogue, etc. is published on the EMA website. The course rules and students' rights and obligations, including rules and regulations for the thesis and second semester placement procedure, are described in the Rules of Assessment as well as in the EMA student guide. Also, Master's theses are in principle published online at the Global Campus Open Knowledge Repository.

The information on hosting facilities and services regarding visa applications for non-EU students as well as general matters related to studying can be found on each partner university's website and in the University Information Sheets that are made available to students in August each year.

### Experts' evaluation

The framework conditions for admission and studying in the EMA programme are appropriately defined and clearly documented. The admission requirements and processes are transparent and fair. The information is available on the website of the programme and stated in the "Call for Applications". (A note on security questions during the application process can be found in chapter 6.)



Applicants are also made aware in advance that this is an intensive programme, allowing them to make an informed decision before applying. However, students stated that there is a difference between imagining a high workload and later experiencing and handling it, as many struggle with work-live-balance or even with completing the given tasks in time. Care should therefore continue to be taken to ensure that the workload remains manageable and as suggested above, the programme should be reduced and focused on what is currently essential (**cf. finding 1**).

While not every detail about this complex Master's programme may be immediately clear to students on the first day, students receive a comprehensive "EMA Student Guide" with their enrolment. This 47-page document provides an in-depth overview of the programme structure, academic calendar, teaching and learning methodologies, assessment methods, and other essential information. Additionally, the first week of the programme is structured to help students familiarize themselves with their peers and the academic framework, ensuring that initial uncertainties are resolved swiftly. The "EMA Rules of Assessment" and the "First Semester Assessment Information" provide detailed information regarding assessment grading, methods and dates. A guideline for the use of AI was developed to tackle upcoming questions of plagiarism. However, in some cases students still felt not to be fully informed about certain expectations concerning specific exams. This issue should be handled in conversations with the student representatives.

Furthermore, students have suggested a standardized presentation format for lectures and greater consistency in grading and feedback, as assessment criteria have varied across different seminars. However, it has to be mentioned that the assessment criteria are clearly laid out in the "EMA Rules of Assessment", wherefore the ACG could take a more explicit briefing on those criteria for the lecturers into account.

The EMA website provides details on admission requirements, application procedures, and the course catalogue, while the virtual learning platform and EMA Student Guide contain key documents outlining the curriculum, students' rights and obligations, thesis guidelines, and second semester placement procedures. However, the students communicated their concerns about the transparency of the second semester university placement process (also see chapter 6.). Some students find it unclear how placements are determined. The selection is primarily based on the thesis proposal and matching supervision availability at the partner universities. The Executive Committee prepares the placement process, but final decisions are made by the EMA Director at each university. While efforts have been made to improve transparency – such as simplifying the thesis proposal form and providing information on costs and visa requirements at the University Fair – some students remain frustrated by the lack of clarity regarding their placement. The experts believe that this topic is known to the EMA coordinating staff as improvement concerning this issue is visible.

The level of support at the second semester universities varies, with some students facing challenges in registration or obtaining residency permits (also see chapter 6.). The awareness of the EMA programme among university administrations differs, leading to inconsistencies in handling student matters. Issues some students reported were outdated information sheets, delayed information about courses, variations in thesis requirements, visa difficulties, and inconsistent supervisor support. A general guide about how to deal with incoming EMA students at the second semester university could be helpful for EMA Directors and supervisors as well as obtaining feedback from the last cohorts about encountered problems at the respective university to tackle them in the future (also see chapter 6). Also, the EMA coordinating staff could provide standardized information sheets for second semester universities, regularly updating them, and ensuring that university administrations are well-informed about EMA students' needs (**finding 3**).

## Conclusion

The criterion is fulfilled.

## 9. Quality assurance

*9.1 The cooperating institutions should apply joint internal quality assurance processes in accordance with part one of the ESG.*

### Description

The EMA/Global Campus Mission, Vision and Values, which have been adopted by all partners, lay down the general approach to quality assurance of the programme. As stated in the SER, quality assessment procedures in the EMA have been agreed upon by all partners and refer to the external and internal level.

#### *Internal*

It is explained in the SER that EMA has structured the process of curriculum design in the form of an on-going review. The Academic Curriculum Group (ACG), consisting of six EMA Council members who are appointed annually, meets every year in March/April to review the first semester curriculum and make recommendations to the EMA Executive Committee (ExCo). It thus has an advisory function. To evaluate the teaching components of the completed first semester, the ACG receives a report from the EMA Programme Director (EPD), a student report prepared by the EMA Student Representatives, and results of student surveys collected by the EMA team; evaluations of the programme by students are explained to be carried out in the form of online surveys at the end of each semester. Each year, the EPD is supposed to make proposals for the retention of elements of the first semester and specifies a series of discussion points on which s/he seeks the advice and input of the Council. Based on these proposals, the student surveys and input from the Student Representatives, the ACG makes recommendations to the EMA ExCo. The EMA Chair, EMA team and the EMA Student Representatives take part in the ACG. The EMA ExCo then decides on the implementation of changes for which the EPD and the teaching faculty in the new academic year are responsible. The recommendations for changes to the curriculum are also shared with the Inner Circle Universities each year.

The ExCo meets at least four times a year (September, December, April and June) to execute the decisions of the EMA Council, and its core work is to continually monitor and update the programme. In September, the EMA Council meeting and a meeting of the Exam Committee include a report of the EMA Programme Director of the last academic year (evaluation results, the EMA Fellow report, a report by the student representatives), proposals by the Academic Curriculum Group, a (draft) curriculum first semester, information about just arrived students and first experiences, and information from the Executive Committee about the last academic year and the planning for the following. In December, the ExCo meets to discuss the current reports by the EMA Programme Director and EMA Fellows, including interim assessments of the first semester courses (based on online surveys that are supposed to be collected regularly from students), a report by the student representatives, the distribution of students at the hosting universities during the second semester, the rules of assessment upcoming year, updates on advertising, as well as long-term strategic and programmatic development plans for the programme, and the setting of an agenda for the Academic Curriculum Group in the spring.

As an additional source for quality assurance, the report names the EMA Alumni Association with which the EMA Programme Director has regular meetings, also to foster connection between the programme and graduates.

The second semester courses/modules and master thesis research supervision are usually evaluated according to the hosting university's standards and procedures. Additionally, the EMA team points at collecting surveys from students on their second semester experiences, seeking evaluations of the courses, academic and administrative support and facilities available to them. These evaluations are explained to be reviewed by ExCo and in case of need, the EPD is supposed to address any recurring problems directly with the relevant EMA Director.



### *External*

It is described in the SER that external quality assessment is conducted at national level and at network level. Each partner university is part of its individual quality assurance system and is supposed to submit the joint Master's programme to its national quality assessment system in accordance with its national regulations and legislation. So far, national accreditations of the programme are carried out according to national legislation and standards (and also will be for universities located in countries in which the European Approach is not implemented yet), and reports must be submitted to the university bodies in charge of quality assurance in teaching.

To get a more comprehensive review of the programme than the annual reviews of the curriculum conducted by the ACG, the EPD currently organises an additional external review. As explained on the SER, an expert in human rights education has been employed as external reviewer to produce a report with an analysis of the current curriculum, a literature review, and recommendations for change.

### **Experts' evaluation**

The institutions and responsible structures of the programme engage in a high level and elaborate system of quality assurance. The EMA team and the ACG play a significant role in this regard. They ensure that teachers and staff work closely with the students and are aware of their perspectives due to this close contact, so the students' perspective can be involved significantly in the quality assurance process. This is also supported by student representatives who have regular meetings with the teaching and coordinating staff.

The programme has clear, transparent and regular processes that aim at assessing the quality of teaching and the overall learning environment. The system is based on a variety of different information sources including student evaluations and feedback as well as reports by the EMA fellows. The system also involves the EMA leadership institutions sufficiently, in particular in the ExCo. Furthermore, the other stakeholders such as the Inner Circle Universities are informed about the results of the quality assurance activities.

It was reassuring to hear that one of the programme's reoccurring concerns – i.e. the density of the curriculum in the first semester – was addressed through the process of quality insurance which led to some changes in the design and structure of the programme. The discussions with the students' representatives also showed that changes in the programme were implemented based on feedback from students. The quality assurance activities also involve input and feedback from alumni, which is very useful.

Regarding the quality assurance system, it is elaborated and helpful to continuously develop the programme. It is particularly gratifying that – in addition to the quality assurance measures that are already taken – an external review process of the curriculum was already initiated, which is a good means for further development. In order to further expand the possibilities for external feedback, the experts also recommend including experts from the labour market, especially from organisations that offer internships and employment, to collect their feedback and use it for the enhancement of the entire programme (**finding 5**).

### **Conclusion**

The criterion is fulfilled.

## V. Recommendation of the panel of experts

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The panel of experts recommends accrediting the “European Master’s Programme in Human Rights and Democratisation” (M.A.) offered by the following degree-awarding universities without conditions: Ca’ Foscari University of Venice (Italy), Ruhr-University Bochum (Germany), University of Graz (Austria), University of Deusto (Spain), University of Hamburg (Germany), University of Ljubljana (Slovenia), and University of Padova (Italy).

### Commendation:

The experts’ impressions of the Master’s programme are very positive. It is a long-established programme that is very clearly structured and can build on a trusting relationship between the participating universities. Those involved at all levels showed their commitment and dedication to the programme. This Master’s programme is a large and impressive task that is being handled well by those involved. Responsibilities are clearly allocated, and the governance structure is also clear. The good impressions the experts already had from the documentation were confirmed and underlined in the discussions.

### Findings:

1. The first semester should be streamlined and reduced to ‘core issues’ that are considered necessary by the different stakeholders, e. g., by shortening/making some of the mandatory parts of the curriculum optional, updating reading lists, etc., also to reduce students’ workload.
2. The use of modern didactic tools and methods as well as assessment forms should be expanded.
3. The whole communication flow within the programme (with students, second semester universities’ administrative offices and supervisors, etc.) concerning information about student support, counselling, class enrolment, etc. should be improved, e. g., by regularly updating standardized information sheets on all partner universities and guidelines for administrative staff at second semester universities on how to deal with incoming EMA students, etc.
4. Solutions should be found for the challenges posed by the localisation of the GC headquarter in an old building complex, both for students as well as teaching and coordinating staff.
5. A process should be developed to include experts from the labour market into the programme’s quality assurance, especially from organisations that offer internships and employment, e. g., to gain their feedback which topics should remain mandatory.