



UNIVERSITY OF TRENTO

“We are Amaya”

Advocacy for Academic Freedom

Advocacy Seminar Series

2018-2019

Final Report

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SCHOLARS AT RISK

NETWORK  ITALY SECTION

WE ARE AMAYA

UNITRENTO PER LA
LIBERTÀ ACCADEMICA



UNIVERSITÀ DEGLI STUDI
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SCHOLARS AT RISK
NETWORK  ITALY SECTION



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Introduction

This report aims to present the activities carried out during the 2019 edition of the Seminar Series on “Advocacy for Academic Freedom”. The cycle was promoted by the Department of Sociology and Social Research (DSRS), in collaboration with Scholars At Risk (SAR). It was launched as a first national experiment in spring 2019. The seminars were opened to all the students attending the University of Trento, although this year the enrolled students were mainly from International Relations studies. SAR seminars offer the possibility to coordinate and experience advocacy campaigns, which focus on specific cases of violation of academic freedom. Coupled with protection of academics and training, advocacy is a pillar of SAR’s activities. Advocacy actions are indeed vital to rise students’ awareness, and consequently to inform academic community and civil society, about specific cases of violation. Through advocacy campaigns, SAR attempts to defend the right of institutional and intellectual autonomy from political and/or private interferences, as well as freedom of expression and research for scholars, students, and staff. Furthermore, SAR drives its efforts also to stimulate the social involvement in the defence and protection of academic freedom.

The participants at the first advocacy seminar are five students: Pietro Carra, Ion Foltea, Francesca Ongaro, Federica Tagliavini and Clelia Zardini. They were coordinated by Ester Gallo, from DRSR and SAR delegate for the University of Trento. Ester Gallo also coordinates SAR-Italy with Claudia Padovani and Francesca Helm (University of Padua). Students were offered three different cases¹ of violation of academic freedom: they chose the one that interested them most, and organised and managed the advocacy actions autonomously. The self-managed strategy of the program offered students the possibility to experience actively and more consciously how much social activism is essential to protect freedoms and rights, which in many contexts are taken for granted while in others are often denied or banned.

Introductory classes about the international role, the objectives and the work of SAR have been essential to better contextualise our work and to gain a general overview on the current challenges faced by academic freedom and university autonomy worldwide. While students found the three cases equally important and challenging, they eventually selected Amaya Eva Coppens’ case.¹

1. The cases were suggested by Adam Braver (SAR) and included: Amaya Eva Coppens, a fifth-year medical student at the National Autonomous University of Nicaragua, who was arrested in September 2018, in apparent retaliation for her participation in a nationwide protest movement; Xiyue Wang, a fourth-year graduate student of history at Princeton University, who was arrested in Iran in connection with his doctoral research and accused of ‘infiltration’; Peter Biar Ajak a PhD candidate at University of Cambridge and a prominent political activist, who was arrested in South Sudan in July 2018 by National Intelligence Security Service officers and accused of terrorism, treason, and the promulgation of false statements against South Sudan.

Amaya is fifth-year medical student at the National Autonomous University of Nicaragua, who was arrested in September 2018, in apparent retaliation for her participation in a nationwide protest movement against the government. Since then, she has been imprisoned with many other political prisoners at the “La Esperanza” jail.

Amaya’s story and personality led the students to feel particularly empathetic and to advocate for her situation.

During the case-selection process news about her release started spreading: on the 21st of March, President Daniel Ortega publicly declared that in 90 days he would have granted the liberty to all political prisoners arrested during the 2018 protests. Notwithstanding the breaking news, students decided together to continue their work on the case. Indeed, following from a consultation with Adam Braver, it emerged how – despite the above mentioned promises – the political situation in Nicaragua remained uncertain for all prisoners like Amaya, and how the students’ research would have, in any case, contributed to enhance awareness among Trento university community (and beyond) about the violation of academic freedom and freedom of expression in the chosen context. This choice turned out to be the correct one, because students had the opportunity to better understand students’ democratic movement - previously unknown to them - that struggle for the democratisation of Nicaragua. They also gain knowledge about the consequences that this struggle could have for members of higher education communities, like students and researchers. Ultimately, students had the chance to organise and manage concrete activities - related to class discussion, but undertaken in the university and the city public spaces – which are rarely offered in Italian undergraduate programmes. This played an important role in reaching awareness of the rewards, and yet also duties and responsibilities, in working on a ‘live case’ of human rights violation.

The advocacy seminar

Planning

The advocacy seminar lasted from March to June 2019 and, as mentioned, was held at the University of Trento. The first meeting counted ten participants, who became five since the following classes. This drop in number was to a large extent due to the fact that the coordinator clearly outlined from the very beginning that participation to the program required constant commitment and effort – individually and jointly in the team – as well as both in class and in outdoor advocacy activities. The introductory remarks aimed to discourage potential free-rider attitudes as well to reduce the possibility of class withdrawal in the middle of the program, fact that would have disrupted the aims of collegiality and solidarity among the working group.

The remaining students, Francesca, Federica, Clelia, Pietro and Ion, have organised and conducted all the advocacy actions. Eleven meetings, of three hours each, were originally scheduled for the seminar and divided into four main areas of activity: background and organisation, research on the case, advocacy activities and writing the report. Following below, you will find the seminar schedule's poster and a brief description of the seminar framework, which will be illustrated in detail further.



UNIVERSITÀ DEGLI STUDI
DI TRENTO

DIPARTIMENTO DI SOCIOLOGIA E RICERCA SOCIALE

seminari di credito



Academic Freedom – Advocacy Seminars

SCHOLARS AT RISK
NETWORK

Coordinator:

Ester Gallo

Speakers:

Students; Various scholars (via Skype)

Department of Sociology and Social Research - via Verdi 26

Date	Topic	Time	Venue
Tuesday 19th March	PART A – BACKGROUND AND ORGANISATION Human Rights Advocacy on Academic Freedom: What it is; Selection of the Case-Study; Plan/Timeline of Activities and Distribution of Tasks.	16-19	6
Thursday 21 st March	PART A – BACKGROUND AND ORGANISATION Contemporary Challenges to Academic Freedom: An Overview	16-19	11
Tuesday 26 th of March	PART A – BACKGROUND AND ORGANISATION Discussing our plans with: Adam Braver, Roger Williams University – US-SAR Chair and Coordinator of Advocacy Seminars	16 - 19	6
Tuesday 2 nd April	PART B – RESEARCH ON THE CASE The Political Context and Humanitarian rights situation in scholar's country of origin; IR/global standing of the country.	16-19	6
Tuesday 9 th April	PART B – RESEARCH ON THE CASE Scholar's career, activism and circumstances of imprisonment.	16-19	6
Thursday 11 th April	PART B – RESEARCH ON THE CASE Media coverage on the case; Actions taken by human rights organisations, governments and others regarding the case. Connection via skype with a country expert (tbd according to the selected case).	16-19	11
Tuesday 16 th April	PART B – RESEARCH ON THE CASE Adam Braver, Roger Williams University; Q&A on students' research activities and debate.	16-19	6
Tuesday 7 th May (to Tuesday 21 st May)	PART C: ADVOCACY ACTIVITIES IN THE UNIVERSITY AND THE CITY In these two weeks, students will promote advocacy activities beyond regular classes, which will involve the university and the city, and possibly neighbouring universities. The activities will be decided with students. Among some possibilities there is: viral social media, tables to collect signatures, social events in the university, seminars in Uninr or in neighbouring universities, writing a petition letter to the signed by the Rector of Trento and possible the Rectors of other SAR-Italy member universities, meeting local political or NGOs representatives, writing a newspaper article, campaign in the city squares, other.	Regular follow-up meetings on Tuesdays (16-19) whenever necessary	6
Thursday 23 rd May	PART C: ADVOCACY ACTIVITIES IN THE UNIVERSITY AND THE CITY Follow up on advocacy activities with Adam Braver, Roger Williams University; Q&A on students' advocacy activities and debate.	16-19	11
Tuesday 4 th June	PART D: WRITING AND PRESENTATION OF THE FINAL REPORT (in Italian and in English) General discussion on the drafting of the final report.	16-19	6
Tuesday 11 th June	PART D: WRITING AND PRESENTATION OF THE FINAL REPORT General discussion and finalisation of the report.	16-19	6

The *Advocacy Seminar Series on Academic Freedom* require students to work in coordination with their teacher at UniTn and with SAR-Advocacy team in the US on a selected case-study. The latter concerns one student (or scholar) who is facing persecution due to his/her political ideas/activism and/or his/her research. Scholars at Risks will propose to our working group few ongoing cases, which necessitate further research and documentation. The aim is – **after having chosen one case** – to carry together research and advocacy in support of the person, and to write a final report (in Italian and in English). The latter will be distributed to international and national organisations that are active in the defence of human rights. **Please note that seminar hours (block of 3 hours) are meant less for lectures, and more as occasions for students and the coordinator to work and debate together on the selected case.** The report will be authored by the students under the supervision of the teacher.

The cases that SAR proposes at the moment are briefly outline below (they may be subject to change in the coming month, according to circumstances):

- Amaya Eva Coppens:** a fifth-year medical student at the National Autonomous University of Nicaragua, who was detained on September 10, 2018, in apparent retaliation for her participation in the 19th of April Student Movement, which sought democratic reforms, protested austerity measures, and called for President Daniel Ortega to step down. [SAR's action alert is here.](#)
- Xiyue Wang:** a fourth-year graduate student of history at Princeton University, who was arrested in Iran in connection with research he was conducting for his doctoral dissertation. He has since been convicted and sentenced to ten years in prison on charges of "infiltration." Further information: <https://www.scholarsatrisk.org/report/2016-08-08-princeton-university/>.
- Peter Biar Ajak:** a PhD candidate at the University of Cambridge and a prominent political activist who was arrested by National Intelligence Security Service officers on July 28, 2018, and has been imprisoned in South Sudan since. The grounds of these charges remain unclear. [SAR's action alert is here.](#)

The Advocacy Seminars are **open to all the students of the University of Trento**. This experiential laboratory is designed to give students a foundation in: human rights research; organizing and advocacy; persuasive writing; leadership and teamwork skills.

Since this is the first time that this activity is carried by the coordinator - and in our university more generally - we will begin by working in a small group of 12 students, and we will limit ourselves to one case.

Requirements: In the consideration of the fact that students and their teacher will work on a sensitive issue, what we expect from each other is motivation and the possibility to commit ourselves to the project until its completion. Further, students should consider that, while the teacher will be there throughout to coordinate and support the activities, autonomy and spirit of initiative in deciding how, where and with whom to carry advocacy is highly important. Finally, a good knowledge of English (writing, speaking and listening) is essential.

Students should participate to the **80% of the activities** listed in the parts A-D and fully contribute to write the final report. Upon the successful completion of the activities students will be recognised **3 CFU (crediti formativi universitari)**.

Registration open until Thursday 14th March at: <http://www.sociologia.unitn.it/100/seminari-di-credito> (Places available: 12).

For information contact: Ester Gallo, DSRS. Ester.Gallo@unitn.it.

Background and organisation

During this phase the students firstly approached - both conceptually and historically - the topic of academic freedom. Secondly, they selected the specific case they wanted to advocate on among the three proposed by SAR, and they started thinking about the advocacy activities they could have carried out during the semester. During the first meeting they got in touch via Skype with Adam Braver in order exchange their ideas and to have his suggestions about the case and on how better undertake the project.

Overall, the informal atmosphere given to the seminar helped to create an efficient, productive and friendly team. The students felt confident and proactive because they were approached by the coordinator as autonomous, trustworthy, and mature people. During the meetings in class, the desks were usually arranged in circles to facilitate teamwork and group discussions. Moreover, the coordinator also joined in the circle; the aim of this action was to reduce the distance between the figure of the coordinator and the students.

As a result of these devices, the advocacy seminar was conducted by a merged group of students and the coordinator, who successfully planned and organized all the activities together. These characteristics should be taken seriously into consideration for all future advocacy seminars editions.

Research on the case

As anticipated, students chose Amaya Coppens's case, mainly due to age similarities and to the fact that Amaya is an undergraduate student. At the beginning of the seminar, they focused on the Nicaraguan's geopolitical situation, on the regional and international relations of the country, on the measures taken to grant the respect of human rights and on the circumstances and conditions of Amaya's arrest and detention. Each student chose and focused his/her research on one specific topic among those listed above, and subsequently shared the outcome of the research with the group. The array of collected information had been organised and used to create the all the graphic materials used during the activities.² During this phase, the students have decided the name of the advocacy campaign; they wanted a title that could also be used as a slogan. After several discussion and title proposals, the students and the coordinator opted for the title "We are Amaya". The title needed to be simple to be remembered, captivating and must have carried a message. The key point of the title is the concept of solidarity: even if the Nicaraguan reality is not comparable to the Italian one, the students have empathized with Amaya's story and activism, therefore, by using the subject "we" they tried to share the burden of defending academic freedom.

Nearly the totality of the researches has been conducted online. The students gathered the core information about Amaya's story on the SAR webpage dedicated to her.³ Then they checked and broadened their knowledge by consulting the webpages of different NGOs that defend human rights, such as *Front-Line Defenders*⁴ and *Amnesty International*.⁵ However, most of the information was acquired derives from newspaper articles. The students consulted international newspapers such as *The Guardian* and *The New York Times* and South America newspaper such as *Nodal* and *La Nación*. Some information was obtained by reading reports and documents, especially when deepen the human

2. All the graphic materials can be found in the Appendix

3. More information are available at the link <https://www.scholarsatrisk.org/actions/amaya-eva-coppens-nicaragua/>

4. More information are available at the link <https://www.frontlinedefenders.org/en/profile/amaya-eva-coppens>

5. More information are available at the link <https://www.amnesty.be/infos/nos-blogs/le-blog-de-philippe-hensmans/amaya-libre?lang=fr>

rights situation in Nicaragua.

However, students have encountered some difficulties in the research phase. First, students had to value the reliability of the information found; some of the Nicaraguan newspaper were considered not trustworthy because of their relationship with the government. Second, some aspects about Amaya's story were neither clear nor defined, therefore students had to check different sources to try to match the information. Third, the Nicaraguan reality is very far from the Europe one and the interest for this country is not quite high, therefore the students had some difficulties in finding printed material useful for their work. Although the obstacles mentioned above, the students succeeded in gathering all the knowledge necessary to start the advocacy activities.

All the information researched was shared among the students' group. In class, students usually brainstormed together and shared the finds also through Google Drive.

By deciding to advocate for Amaya, students had to enter a completely different reality. At the beginning of the research process all the students knew little about the history of Nicaragua. Now, they comprehend how the Nicaraguan political party are organized and how they have developed during the years; in addition, they now have a comprehensive knowledge of other states' influences onto the Nicaraguan government. Moreover, students also learned about democratic movements, which advocate for a change in the regime.

Advocacy activity

Students have considered and debated a varied number of possibilities in order to structure the advocacy campaign, and worked to be realistic especially considering that the group was formed 'only' by five people. Eventually, they decided to:

Petition and signature collection. Join the online petition issued by SAR, which can be consulted at the link: <https://www.scholarsatrisk.org/actions/amaya-eva-coppens-nicaragua/>. In order to support the dissemination of the petition, and to raise consciousness about Amaya's case, the students organised several info points in five different university's Departments, and they collected signatures from students, researchers and staff.

Evening 'Sangria' aperitivo. Take part in the event organised by UDU Trento⁶ "Sangria a Sociologia" ("Sangria at Sociology Department") in order to collect further signatures and spread Amaya's story into the academic community. "Sangria a Sociologia" is an evening event organized twice a year in the inner garden of the Department of Sociology and Social Research. It is an informal and relaxing night; students meet, talk and dance to the rhythm of the music. The students' participation is always very high. Usually other students' organization or university projects organize tables to promote their initiatives. The students of the seminar believed that by participating at this night event they could have the opportunity to advocate for Amaya in an informal context, but still in one of the main university building. Therefore, they organized a table to collect signatures and answer students' questions.

6. UDU-Trento is a university-level students organization created at the university of Trento in 2009. Their aim is to promote equality and solidarity among students and within the University, they fight for the right to study and access to education. They also organize cultural and recreational activities. More information about UDU-Trento can be found at the following link: <https://www.udutrento.it/>

Meeting with the Rector. Present the project to the Rector of the University of Trento, Paolo Collini, and ask him to support the petition. The whole meeting has been photo-reported and shared with the academic community throughout a press release, which has also captured the attention of local newspapers that published articles about it. This helped to spread the advocacy campaign, which reached also the civil society.

Peer seminar at the University of Padua. Organise a presentation that was carried out in front of the students of the master degree DSPGI at the University of Padua. The aim of the presentation was to introduce the theme of academic freedom, to analyse the seminar schedule and to present the advocacy activities organized by the students of the University of Trento. The final goal was to give a first feedback on the seminar, with the hope to start a SAR advocacy seminar at the University of Padua next year.

Participation to conferences. Join the 2019 Annual Conference of the University Coordination for Development Cooperation (CUCS) to present our project. This year the event will take place in Trento and will focus on the theme “Citizenship and common goods”. Precisely, our presentation will be included within the panel “Defending academic freedom and freedom of expression. The role of universities and international organisations”, jointly organised by Ester Gallo, Claudia Padovani and Francesca Helm. The panel will involve scholars, journalists and international organisation representatives to discuss the role of universities in enhancing international collaboration on academic freedom and freedom of expression. More information can be found at the following link: <https://event.unitn.it/cucs2019/>.

Researchers' Night Annual Event. Take part in another event known as “Notte dei Ricercatori” on the 27th September 2019 to present SAR and the students' experience in the seminar. The program will soon be available at the following link: <https://event.unitn.it/nottedeiricercatori2019/>. The ‘Notte dei Ricercatori’ is an annual and open one-night event organised in every Italian university at the beginning of the academic year - and in collaboration with public and private research foundations - with the aim of disseminating knowledge about researchers' work and of growing interest in society. Different designated posts are spread on the campus and in different city locations, where researchers discuss informally their work and reply to questions and curiosities by youth, families, and overall very heterogeneous people. Exactly because this event is meant to bring academic knowledge beyond the institutions and spaces of universities, it seemed to students a unique occasion to promote knowledge of academic freedom, of the work of SAR, and of the project of advocacy seminar series to the wider population. Along with the coordinator, students have submitted a proposal in late June 2019, which was successfully accepted by the organising committee.

Reflection on the activities within and off campus

The list above was a result of a process of selection of wider possibilities. While planning the advocacy activities, the students initially considered the idea of creating also an Instagram and Facebook pages, in order to share on social media their experience and to draw attention to Amaya's case. The students planned to collect and post visual materials to keep people informed about the seminar progresses. However, the idea was discarded because the seminar participants realized they would not have had enough time and resources to update the pages. Fortunately, the most important advocacy information and activities have always been shared by the SAR team on SAR's Facebook page.⁷

The students are deeply convinced that a dedicated web page for SAR-University of Trento and for SAR-Italy is essential to support future advocacy seminars. This obstacle notwithstanding, thanks to Communications Offices of our University, the students managed to create a calendar web page, hosted on the University website, where all the materials and the scheduled advocacy activities have been posted.⁸

The students felt the need to produce some graphic material in order to carry out a visual advocacy campaign and to capture people's attention. However, none of the students had any graphic knowledge, therefore it was necessary to work with a graphic designer that could make the material captivating. Luckily, Emiliano Fanti (Clelia's friend and student at *Accademia delle Belle Arti* in Brescia), created for us the graphic material that we used during our advocacy activities: a leaflet, a poster and stickers with different QR codes.⁹ Graphic material is vital for this kind of activity and we were extremely lucky to have a professional friend who kindly helped us free-of-charge. Consequently affordable and feasible solutions should be provided for future seminars.

Initially, considering the available time and the small size of the group, the students planned the advocacy activities in the restricted area of the University of Trento. The general idea was to focus primarily on students, or more generally to target the academic context. However, as the project progressed, the students realised that they could aim for more ambitious goals and take the case and their experience out of the university. Therefore, as suggested by Ester Gallo, they decided to present the project to the students of the University of Padua (another member of SAR Italy); to participate in the CUCS 2019 Conference and to participate at the event "Notte dei Ricercatori". This has allowed the students to reach both the academic and the civil society, within and beyond Trento.

During the advocacy activities, follow-up meetings in the classroom served mainly for updating the progress of the project, to update the coordinators about the choice and carrying on of the activities, to take stock of the situation, to rework the division of tasks and to coordinate subsequent actions. Two scheduled class meetings were dedicated to discuss the organisation of signatures' collection, while the other moments for the collection of signatures and all the other advocacy activities took place outside the originally established calendar. Most of the actual research on the case study was carried out individually, outside the institutional timetable of the seminar.

The small number of participants in the seminar and their strong motivation made the organization of the activities to a large extent agile. The time schedule has been adjust

7. More information are available at the following link: <https://www.facebook.com/scholarsatrisk/>

8. See the following links:

<https://webmagazine.unitn.it/evento/sociologia/59957/we-are-amaya-unitrento-per-la-libert-accademica>

<https://webmagazine.unitn.it/evento/sociologia/56648/academic-freedom-advocacy-seminars>

<https://webmagazine.unitn.it/en/evento/sociologia/60837/we-are-amaya-unitrento-for-academic-freedom>

9. All the graphic material can be found in the Appendix

several times to the needs of the project, therefore some events took place at different times compared to those planned. With more participants, the organisation would have probably been more difficult in terms of coordination and equal sharing of tasks, but it would have allowed the group to carry out more complex and ambitious activities. In this regard, a number of students between 8 and 12 would appear more appropriate. The students could then be organized in two subgroups that could work in parallel; they would be able to organize a greater number of activities without sacrificing their quality.

The reservation of the university spaces for the preparation of the info/signature collection points were made by contacting via email the secretariats of the various Departments: it did not present specific problems, but the response overall took more time than what expected. This should be taken into account when planning the advocacy campaign. The students suggest developing a list of advocacy activities to be organized from the very beginning and scheduling their timing and sequence precisely. Many aspects of an activity can be managed in advance, however for some actions it is necessary to collaborate with other people, and this requires time. Therefore, by having a clear and structured plan it is easier to face deadlines and confront eventual problems. By giving an example, the students decided to produce graphic material, but they did not know how much time it takes to create nor to print it. So, the students ended up not planning enough time for it and rushing both the graphic designer and the copy shop. From this experience, the students surely have learnt that timing is very important. The participants would also suggest anticipating the beginning of the seminar, specifically at the end of February, so it coincides with the beginning of the spring semester. It would be useful to end the seminar before the beginning of June, when exams start. In that month students usually do not have enough time to manage properly advocacy activities due to study.

The seminar students took great advantage of the collaboration with university students' organizations. The resources of the seminar were limited, in terms of students involved; by interacting with the organizations, the participants managed to engage in events and promote the campaign in situations that it would have been impossible otherwise. Moreover, these students' organization actively promoted the advocacy activities onto their social media pages, fulfilling the lack of seminar's own social media profiles. The seminar group put down roots to start a tight collaboration with the university student's organization. Both the seminar and the organization can take an advantage of it: the projects gain publicity and the student's organization can create online content.

Students mainly worked with their laptops and mobile devices and collected information through websites. They used mainly the sites of major international newspapers, in English and Spanish; some sites of organizations specialized in the defence of human rights, such as Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch and Frontline Defenders; Freedom House's Annual Report on the state of democracy in the world; resolutions and reports published online by intergovernmental organisations and their bodies, such as the Organization of American States and its committees. The monitoring of the case was also carried out on the Internet, through the search of updated news. Additionally, Adam Braver regularly updated the students on Amaya's case by sending newspaper articles via email.

The Internet has been a precious tool, not only to conduct researches online, but it has also enabled the students to create connection with people around the world. The students made contact with both American and Nicaraguan students, however the information exchange has only been limited. The participants of the seminar found very interesting confronting with people that work on the same case or work with similar purposes; it helps to share ideas and to find multiple points of view. By collaborating in different teams - whether national or international - it would also be possible to generate a greater impact onto the community and to succeed in the advocacy activities.

In order to exchange information and share the collected material easily and fast, a folder was created on the cloud using Google Drive. In the early stages of the work, students also used the Moodle platform of the University of Trento, which was then quickly abandoned because the loading of the material by students proved to be too complex compared to

Google Drive.

Moreover, SAR has provided us with materials from their MOOC course on Academic Freedom developed at the University of Oslo within the broader Academic Refugee Project.¹⁰ The material shared was mainly related to define what academic freedom is: its definition, its limits and threats and the importance of academic freedom in democratic societies. While the material was very interesting for the group, it could be used only partially. This was due mainly to time managing. In fact, the material was not scheduled to be used during the seminar lessons and the students concentrated more onto planning the advocacy activities rather than attending the online course. Therefore, what the students like to suggest is to extend time availability of the online course, if possible, so that it is accessible in other time periods. Managing the seminar and attending the regular bachelor courses took a great quantity of the students' time, following the online course during the seminar would have been simply too demanding.

10. For further information see: <https://www.uio.no/english/about/global/globally-engaged/academic-refuge/events/dangerous-questions:-why-academic-freedom-matters.html>

The research

Historical and political overview of Nicaragua

In order to understand Amaya Eva Coppen's case, we need to briefly outline the major recent historical and political events that characterise the contemporary situation of the Republic of Nicaragua. The triumph of the Sandinista Revolution in July 1979 marked the end of the dictatorship of the General Anastasio Somoza Debayle. The Sandinista Revolution gradually left the place to the authoritarian turning point of Daniel Ortega's government, which increased after his re-election in 2007. Since the early years of the 20th century, the history of Nicaragua has been profoundly marked by the influence exercised over the country by the United States. The years from 1912 to 1933 saw the occupation of the territory by US troops while, at the time of the American withdrawal, the power was left in the hands of General Anastasio Somoza Garcia, who was leading an armed force organized by the US Government. Progressively - during the 1930s and 1940s - Somoza and his family seized considerable power, eliminating opponents and securing the support of the police. In 1961 the Sandinista National Liberation Front was founded as a revolutionary movement inspired by the figure of Augusto Nicolás Calderón Sandino, a general who had already fought against the Somoza in the 1920s. The Sandinista Revolution fought for a socialist and popular transformation of Nicaraguan society, by opposing to the Somoza dictatorship, the movement gained more and more popular consensus over the years and succeed in its attempt to overthrow the Somoza dynasty in 1979. The Sandinistas then rose to power. Daniel José Ortega Saavedra, a member of the National Executive of the Liberation Front and a leading figure of the Sandinista Revolution, was firstly elected as President of Nicaragua in 1985. The US Government continued the embargo to the country – thereby limiting the potentialities of economic reforms – and funded paramilitary groups that remained loyal to the Somoza family, which in turn wage a counter-revolutionary guerrilla war known as the Contra guerrilla. This situation produced several effects. On the one hand, Ortega, the head of government who was fighting against US-backed guerrillas, gained international visibility and became a left-wing flag opposing US imperialism. On the other hand, the contra-guerrillas were unable to overthrow the regime, but they succeed in taking power away from Ortega, who was defeated in the 1990 elections.

Subsequently, Ortega run for presidential elections twice again in 1996 and 2001; he was defeated again both times. However, he won the elections in 2006 and became President in 2007. In 2011 the Supreme Court allowed Ortega to run for the elections once again, even though the Nicaraguan Constitution bans two consecutive presidential terms. Furthermore, in 2014 the Constitution was amended to allow Ortega and his wife to run again for the presidency and vice-presidency in 2016. In the 2016 elections the main candidate from the opposition was excluded from the competition by the Supreme Court. In addition, international observers were not allowed during the elections, and the level of abstention reached the 70%. Ortega was re-elected with 72% of the votes, but his third election was accompanied by a growing popular discontent (Foreign affairs, 2018).

In April 2018, a reform of the social security system was announced. It aimed to introduce a tax on pensions and to increase the value of the contributions claimed. In response, a violent protest broke out on the 18th of April, initially involving students from public universities and pensioners, who were joined in the following days by other sections of the population. The reform was soon withdrawn, but the protests escalated. The demonstrators were calling for a return to democracy and for Ortega to relinquish his power. The students, the main actors of the protests, organized themselves in a movement called Movimiento Universitario 19 Abril (MU-19A). The movement was founded on the 25th of April 2018 at the Polytechnic of Managua and its name was chosen to commemorate the day of the

death of the first student during the protests (The New York Times, 2018). The protests continued until December 2018, and throughout the period students were violently repressed by the police and by paramilitary squads supporting the government (The New York Times, 2019). International observers estimated 324 victims, including 23 children, and 2000 injured (Human Rights Watch, 2019). In addition, 400 people, predominantly students, were arrested.

During the period of repression, the police first used tear gas, then switched to rubber bullets, and finally used heavy and assault weapons. International observers, including members of the Organization of American States (OAS), also reported summary executions, carried out without regular trials, cases of torture and numerous disappearances. Although the protests were repressed in blood, the dissent against Ortega, who remained firmly in power, is still high and is taking the form of several 'clandestine' organizations. The international community has not remained indifferent to the Nicaraguan situation. Drawing from its historical aversion to the Sandinista Revolution, the United States took the dominant position through the approval in December 2018 of the "Nicaragua Human Rights and Anticorruption Act of 2018", a bill that imposed sanctions to people and institutions deemed responsible for human rights violations in Nicaragua and which froze the many possessions of Ortega and his family in the US (United States Congress, 2018).

The Catholic Church has also played a key mediation role, along with the International Red Cross and many NGOs. The combination of these interventions allowed the opening of the negotiations for the release of political prisoners, including students, who were arrested during the protests. The release eventually began in May 2019 and ended in June 2019 (The Washington Post, 2019), when many political prisoners were released including Amaya Eva Coppens. However, not all charges were dropped, as initially promised by the government, but, out of 400 prisoners, 286 were transferred to house arrest and are still under indictment (Human Rights Watch, 2019).

Current human rights situation in Nicaragua

The Nicaraguan government condemnation of the protests facilitated the tightening up on numerous human rights. Currently, according to Freedom House data, Nicaragua is an undemocratic and non-free country with an aggregate score of 33/100. (Freedom House 2019). As far as academic freedom is concerned, there have been a considerable number of attacks on different universities. The Autonomous University of Nicaragua in Managua, occupied by students in protest, was attacked in July 2018 by police forces. The armed attack resulted in two deaths and the dismissal and expulsion of dozens of professors and students. The University of Central America was attacked in May, as demonstrators fleeing the violence committed by the police had fled there. Since August, all classes have been suspended and a professor with background in social movements has been arrested and charged with terrorism (Freedom House 2019).

During the year 2018, the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) conducted an investigation into the protests and responses of the government and verified that the repression led to a serious human rights crisis. In particular, the IACHR considered excessive use of force by the police and paramilitaries, which resulted in more than 212 casualties (at the time of the Commission visit), 1300 injured and around 500 arrests. The Commission concluded that the State of Nicaragua has violated the right to life, human treatment, health, freedom of expression and association, which Ortega has prohibited, in September 2018 any kind of public event (IACHR 2018).

International relations of Nicaragua

The Republic of Nicaragua is a small and politically vulnerable state, but with a specific geopolitical importance, as it is located within the turbulent Central American region, which includes Honduras, Guatemala and El Salvador. This block of countries has historically been the subject of contention by the US influence, and it is still defined by the US as "a threat to national security" as the main source of migrants attempting to enter the country

across the border with Mexico, and at the same time a transit zone for drug trafficking (“America centrale, Triangolo del Nord e Nicaragua. Una regione in fermento – Mondopoli”; Gianandrea Nelli Feroci, 2019).

Unlike other countries in the area, Nicaragua has not established a preferential diplomatic channel with the People’s Republic of China, but maintains privileged relations with Taiwan. Nevertheless, on the 31th of October 2012, the Ortega government signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the Chinese company HKND in Managua (Hong Kong Nicaragua Canal Development). It was intended to finance and construct an inter-ocean channel between the Pacific and the Atlantic Ocean within five years. For the construction of the imposing infrastructure, which would be an alternative commercial channel to the Panama Canal, concessions for land expropriation and the taxes exemption were granted to Chinese industry in exchange of financial shares for the Ortega government. Since then, there have been rumours that portrayed the agreement as a Chinese attempt to counter US hegemony by building a channel for their own personal use in the vicinity of Panama (“La “telaraña” de Wang Jing” Octavio Enríquez, 2014). Analysts indeed have feared serious environmental damage caused by what would be the largest earth movement in human history, 4.5 billion cubic meters (Octavio Enríquez, 2014).

However, nowadays there are still no observable indications of the imminent start of the works, fact that raises questions about the real capacity/intention of the Hong Kong-Managua alliance to carry out such an ambitious project.

The case of Amaya Eva Coppens

Amaya's story: an activist student

Amaya Eva Coppens is a Belgian-Nicaraguan student who, at the time of the 2018 protests, attended the fifth year of medicine at the Autonomous University of León. Amaya is also a member of the University Coalition for Democracy and Justice (CUDJ, University Coalition for Democracy and Justice), of the Civil Alliance. In addition, she is one of the leaders of the *Movimiento Universitario 19 Abril*. The movement contributed to the organization and, of course, took part in the protests in the country that began in April 2018. The focus of the protests was initially limited to the proposed reforms of the national pension system, but it soon expanded. It was also attended by actors promoting different instances, including the world of higher education, which supports and seeks to spread democratic ideals. In this specific context, Amaya and many other students were actively involved in the struggle to defend freedom of protest and democratic civil and political rights.

Amaya's case

Since the beginning of the protests Amaya had been reported to the National Police with the charge of directing the demonstrators and having set on fire an installation at the Autonomous University of Nicaragua during the protests in the city of León: *"Podemos observar imágenes cuando la terrorista Amaya Eva Coppens va dirigiendo las barricadas en la ciudad de León"* (We can observe images of when the terrorist Amaya Eva Coppens directs the Protestants in the city of León) said in a press conference the head of the Judicial Directorate helping the Police during the arrest of Amaya (La Nación AFP, 2018).

After the beginning of the protests, Amaya became a symbol of the struggle against the regime and the threats against her have consequently increased. She was then forced to leave León and to hide in a safer shelter toward the end of summer. However, she was arrested on the 10th of September along with her friend and activist Sergio Midence. The circumstances of the incident are not yet completely clear. International organisations report that a group of hooded paramilitaries have broken into the place where they were hiding, without an arrest warrant and without identifying themselves as members of the police (Front Line Defenders, 2018). Both were immediately transported to the maximum security prison "El Chipote" in the city of Managua. This prison is famous for the systematic violations of prisoners' human rights, especially in the use of torture during interrogations (IACHR, 2018).

The police did not immediately report the student's arrest as required by Nicaraguan law, but only after 48 hours the arrest of the student was publicly presented to the press. At this juncture, she was not allowed to contact her family members, her lawyer, or to appear before the judge for the preliminary hearing of her arrest, all rights under Nicaraguan law. (Marco Appel, M. A. Amaya Coppens, la joven activista que enfrenta a Bruselas y Managua – Proceso, October 2018). Furthermore, the student was accused of owning three rifles, a gun and a magazine with eight bullets. The preliminary hearing took place on the 18th of September and, after receiving a public defender, Amaya was legally followed by a group of volunteers lawyers specialized in human rights and the Nicaraguan Centre for human Rights (CENIDH) has followed her case. Amaya was accused of terrorism, kidnapping, psychological injury, illegal possession of weapons and disruption of public service. Together with Sergio Midence, they were also accused of recruiting more than 200 people to block the road from León to Managua from the 20th of April to the 8th of June, the day when police and hooded paramilitaries cleared the streets by force (Marco Appel, 2018). After the preliminary hearing, the student was transferred to the women's prison "La Esperanza", located north of Managua City, awaiting the trial. The first date was set for the 10th of December 2018 but it has been postponed for several times: first on February 2019, then on April the 1st.

On the 26th of October 2018, a group of masked men raided the prison and beat many of the political prisoners. The Permanent Commission on Human Rights of Nicaragua has repeatedly tried to enter the women's prisons to assess the health of prisoners, but access by government officials has always been denied. On January 2019, Amaya received in prison the visit of representatives of the European Parliament, who were visiting Nicaragua to observe closely the socio-political crisis of the country. The committee was the first body to take access to the prison. It noted the precarious conditions in which prisoners were held and collected video evidences in order to show to civil society. In that occasion, Amaya was proposed the extradition to Belgium, but she refused the offer, asking for the release of all political prisoners together with her (Reddaciòn maje, 2019).

Case development

The turning point in the case of Amaya, and of many other political prisoners, began on the 21st of March 2019, when in a live television press conference, President Daniel Ortega promised the release of all political prisoners within 90 days of this date. This decision stems from the need to reopen a dialogue with the political opposition in order to end the protests against the regime and to start the democratic process. The news was received with limited enthusiasm: many times in the past the Nicaraguan Government had promised the release of the prisoners, without keeping its word.

Yet, the first reassurance about the liberation of Amaya arrived on the 11th of April 2019, when the International Committee of the Red Cross, engaged in facilitating the liberation process, drew up a list of 230 recognised political prisoners, including Amaya who could have been released immediately (Agencia EFE; 2019, April 9th). Since the news of the possible liberation, some prisoners at "La Esperanza" started a hunger strike. The reason for this decision stems from the need for these women not to become a temporary tool in the hands of the Ortega government to reach a minimum agreement with the opposition (Expatica, "Nicaraguan prisoners suspend hunger strike: relatives - Expat Guide to Belgium", 2019). Indeed, the dialogue between the government and the opposition was opened, according to the prisoners, at a time when the conditions requested in the protests had not yet been reached. To inform the families of their decision, prisoners managed to leak a letter from the prison containing their intentions and motivations. On the 22nd of May the Inter-American Court of Human Rights ordered the government of Nicaragua to release Amaya and 16 other prisoners considered at risk. On June 10th, 10 days after the end of the presidential promise, in the prison "La Esperanza" there were still 4 political prisoners, including Amaya.

Case conclusion

At the beginning of June 2019, the government passed an amnesty law, which allowed the release of all political prisoners. On June 11 Amaya Eva Coppens left the prison "La Esperanza" and returned home to the city of Esteli (NODAL, 2019). In many online videos, the student shared her relief for having been liberated, but urges to continue the struggle for justice in Nicaragua and to avoid accepting an amnesty pact with the government. Since that day, Amaya has issued numerous interviews, talking about her imprisonment and plans for the future, stressing the need to continue the protests. After the 90 days promised for liberation, 84 political prisoners are still incarcerated (NODAL, 2019).

Below is the transcription and the translation of an interview of Amaya with Radio Dario 89.3 in the framework of a wider interview project¹¹ that the radio has carried out with some freed political prisoners.

Interviewer: “What message would you like to send to President Ortega and his wife?”

Amaya: “First of all, we do not recognize this gift that he has given us; the law of amnesty is totally unacceptable. We cannot ignore the situation or let it continue like this, let them at any time [government] imprison whoever they want, including some of us. Since the situation in Nicaragua has not changed, the reasons for our struggle are still valid and we have still not achieved justice. No problems have been solved in Nicaragua.”¹²

International actions on the case

The seminar, and the related advocacy campaign, began when internationally already much had been done: since our very preliminary research, the students have noticed the abundance of material concerning the political situation in Nicaragua and, above all, Amaya’s case. In fact, there were already numerous articles on Amaya, who – for the press and for many international organisations - stands as a symbol of the summary imprisonment of students who were exercising their right of expression in the public sphere. A telling example of the international attention received by the case, there were two campaigns to collect signatures in favour of Amaya’s release: the first was hosted by the platform “Change.org” (Free Amaya Coppens; 2018, 5 October) while the second was promoted by “SAR-scholars at Risk” on its official page (SAR; 2018).¹³ Also Amnesty International took action to support Amaya: on 8th October 2018 Amnesty International organized a sit-in in front of the Nicaraguan Embassy in Belgium (Amnesty International Belgique; 2018, 8th October). Other organisations/associations were active in the defence of Amaya, such as the “Committee of concerned scientists” (Committee of concerned scientists; 2018, 27th November), “Front Line defenders” (Front Line defenders; 2018, 27th September) and, again, individuals such as William Nicholas Gomes, who published his letter addressed to Nicaraguan President Daniel Ortega, requesting the immediate release of Amaya (William Nicholas Gomes, W. N. G. 2018).

Ultimately, further visibility to the Nicaraguan situation was provided by a report published by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR, 2018). The report highlights human rights violations and abuses committed in the context of the protests in Nicaragua. Similarly, the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (CIDH) has expressed concern about Amaya and the other detainees following the protests.

11. The interview is available at the link : <https://www.facebook.com/radiodario89.3/videos/35031293567934>

12. Here is the Spanish transcription

Reportero: “¿Cual es el mensaje que quieres enviar al Presidente Ortega y a su mujer?”

Amaya: “Mas que todo, que esto regalo no es algo con lo que estamos conforme, esta ley de amnistia es totalmente inaceptable [...] Nosotros no olvidemos que la situación sigues, y en que cualquier momento pueden encarcelar a cualquiera quieran, incluso cualquiera de nosotros. Porque la situación no has cambiado aquí en Nicaragua, sigue habiendo motivos por esta lucha y no hemos conseguido justicia. No se han resuelto algunos problemas en Nicaragua.”

13. The petition is available at the following link <https://www.scholarsatrisk.org/actions/amaya-eva-coppens-nicaragua/>



*Nicaragua, September 2018,
Amaya Eva Coppens,
She appears in public for the first time
after the arrest.*

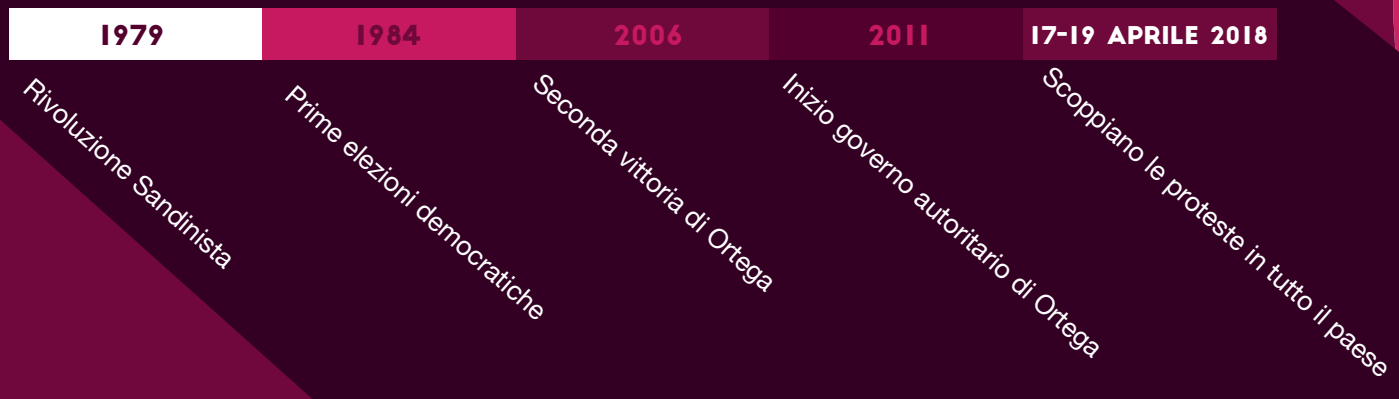
*Nicaragua, June 10th 2019,
Amaya Eva Coppens,
Free in the city of Esteli.*



NICARAGUA



Nicaragua (Republic of Nicaragua) timeline:



Perché le rivolte in Nicaragua?

A seguito della repressione violenta delle proteste da parte delle forze di sicurezza nazionali e di gruppi paramilitari fedeli al governo, movimenti studenteschi in tutto il paese si sono sollevati contro la condotta autoritaria e antidemocratica del presidente.

Rimozione dei limiti costituzionali alla rielezione del presidente
Tagli alla spesa pubblica per le pensioni

Oltre **325 morti** dei quali svariate decine colpiti da armi da fuoco, oltre **2.000 feriti** e numerosi **casi di sparizione**.

- Uso eccessivo e ingiustificato della violenza.
- Negazioni de facto della libertà di espressione ed informazione.
- Detenzione arbitraria e negazione di assistenza legale.
- Discriminazione per motivi politici.
- Dal 2006 l'aborto è illegale in qualsiasi circostanza.

Freedom House ha declassato il Nicaragua da partly free country a non free country e segnala un deterioramento democratico (February 4, 2019).

Gli Stati Uniti hanno imposto sanzioni diplomatiche al paese premendo per la cessazione delle repressioni.

RAGIONI DELLE
PROTESTE

QUANTE
VITTIME?

CRISI DEI
DIRITTI UMANI

REPUTAZIONE
INTERNAZIONALE

CHI È AMAYA?



Amaya Coppens è una studentessa al quinto anno di medicina e attivista politica. Nata e cresciuta in Nicaragua, lotta per la difesa dei diritti civili e politici del suo Paese. Oltre ad essere una dei leaders del Movimento studentesco di Leon del 19 Aprile, è coordinatrice universitaria di CUDJ (Coordinadora Universitaria por la Democracia y la Justicia).

IL CASO

Arrestata in seguito alla protesta con capi di accusa quali terrorismo e incendio doloso, è detenuta in attesa di processo presso la prigione femminile “La Esperancia”. Diversi sono i **diritti** costituzionalmente riconosciuti che **sono stati violati dalle istituzioni pubbliche**: diritto di protesta pacifica; di libera associazione; di difesa legale. Inoltre, durante la detenzione le sono state negate le visite (inizialmente) e fonti autorevoli hanno accertato che **è stata vittima di aggressione psico-fisica**.

STATUS QUO

Il processo, rinviato più volte, presumibilmente **subirà una svolta entro 90 giorni** a seguito della pubblica ammissione di volontà del Presidente Ortega di liberare tutti i prigionieri politici “per riaprire il negoziato per la transizione democratica”.

A closer look at advocacy activities

On campus advocacy

The students tried to carry as many activities as possible, given the limited time at their disposal. Some activities were more formal - such as the meeting with the University Rector or the sectarian offices - while others were organized with the aim to involve students, such as the information tables set up in various Departments, or the evening events. These activities aimed to make not only the students, but also the civil society aware of the problem of academic freedom violation and advocacy, by also presenting and discussing concrete on-going cases.

At the beginning of the seminar series, the students discussed the realization of graphic materials, to support the advocacy activities. They have chosen to realize three different materials.

First, a poster to hang during the activities in the Departments: the poster includes a picture of Amaya, the seminar's slogan, the University's and SAR's logo.

Secondly, they decided to create a pamphlet divided into four different pages: the first one is very similar to the poster, the second one is about the geopolitical context in Nicaragua, the third one is about Amaya's story and the very last one is fully dedicated to explain SAR as an international network.

Lastly, they decided to create some stickers to paste around the city of Trento. The stickers were created to be enigmatic: the graphic is very simple, just a question and a QR code, to entice whoever to scan the code that is link to the University page with the explanation of the seminar.

These materials had been used during all the activities we have carried out, listed and described below.

Petition letter

To act actively in support of Amaya's case the students decided to start a collection of signatures. For long time the participants of the seminar have discussed about the characteristics of the petition: whether it should be online or paper based, whether to draft a new petition or to use an existing one. In the end, they opted for using the petition originally created by SAR for Amaya, available on their website.¹⁴ The petition letter written by SAR is addressed to Nicaraguan President Daniel Ortega in person and it gives voice to great concerns for Amaya's imprisonment and for her health conditions, demanding her release. The letter also addresses ambassadors and prime ministers of the countries involved, and some UN officials.

The students decided to collect the signatures written on paper and subsequently upload them on SAR's website, so that the collection process could have been as fast and smooth as possible. The text was translated to Italian to make it easily understandable by the majority of Trento's University students. The collection of signatures was promoted in every on-campus activity, and through social media. The students gathered an overall of 220 signatures; many of which came from students, academic/professors and the citizens of Trento. The full text of the petition can be found in the appendix.

Webpage

The students decided that it was necessary to create a web page, because they thought that by using only the pamphlets to advocate they would not have reached as many people as possible. The calendar page that was created is hosted on the University of Trento webpage. The page includes information about the geopolitical situation in Nicaragua, Amaya's story and details about SAR network. In the 'download box' - at the bottom of the page - many materials created during the seminars are available for download, specifically the petition paper, some pictures and several newspaper articles. The page also holds the link to the SAR's petition page. On the web page it was also included the seminar's scheduled activities. At the very beginning, students considered the possibility to open up profiles on different social medias, but for the already explained reasons they eventually decided to invest all their efforts into the calendar page.

The webpage is available at the following link: <https://webmagazine.unitn.it/en/evento/sociologia/60837/we-are-amaya-unitrento-for-academic-freedom>.

14. The body of the petition is available at the following link: <https://www.scholarsatrisk.org/actions/amaya-eva-coppens-nicaragua/>

Tables

Since the goal was to both inform people about SAR and Amaya's story, the participants decided to set information tables in every university Department. A minimum of two students attending the seminar was present at the informative desk. Each table was garnished with the informative materials. Specifically, the posters were used to draw the attention on the tables, the pamphlets were distributed with the aim to inform and the stickers were given to signatories to disclose the seminar. What students wanted to achieve by organizing informative tables was to create awareness on academic freedom while chatting about Amaya's case as a clear example of violation. The tables were hosted in the departments of Humanities, Sociology, Law, Economics and Engineering. The participation was high, and it gave the students the opportunity to engage in debates on relevant themes such as academic freedom and students' right of expression in the public sphere. In three different "table days" they collected around 140 signatures.

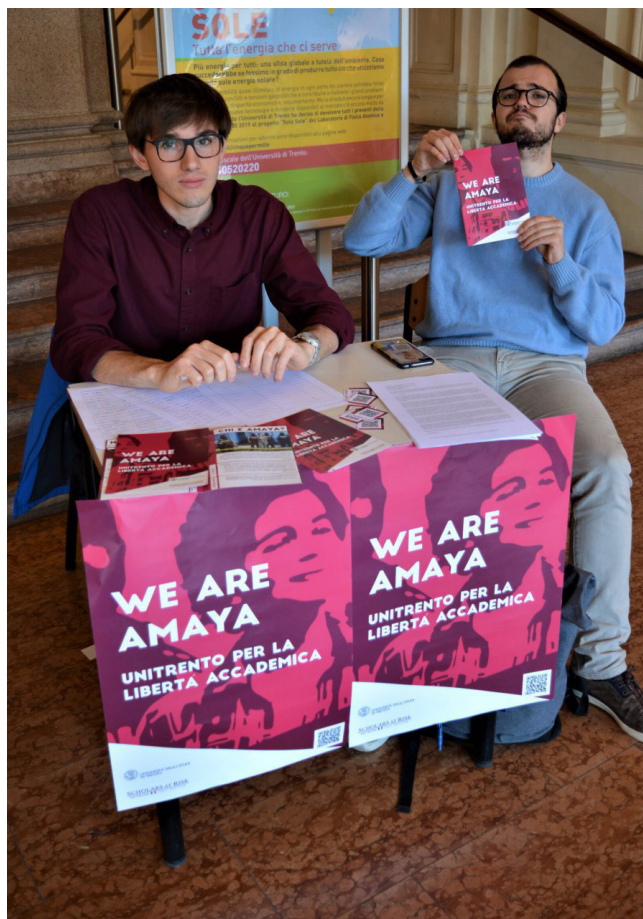
Students would like to note how, in their experience, this was by far the simplest manner to approach students, the same that all students' organizations adopt to become well known. They believe these actions were useful in order to reach a basic but fundamental objective: start debates on academic freedom among people and inform them on the case of Amaya.

Yet, it was not always easy to be listened by the students who were often heading to their classes or looking for a quiet place to study. In some cases, it was helpful to encourage each other and remind themselves of the purpose they were there for, especially those times when people were being elusive or polemic. In fact, some students refused to sign the petition letter not because they did not find academic freedom important, but because they did not recognize the petition as a valid device to take action. Other students focused more onto the political situation in Nicaragua, arguing whether to support a party that has its roots in the Sandinista revolution.

The students also had the opportunity to dialogue with scholars both from their Department (Sociology and Social Research) and from other faculties, who looked at the issue from a very different point of view, less political and more economic or legal. However, they were excited to see that students with different backgrounds were just involved in the case as they were, and showed real interest and concerns for the debated topic of academic freedom.



Department of Sociology and Social Research, Trento,
 the students Ion and Pietro promote advocacy activities by collecting signatures,
 On the left, the coordinator Ester Gallo supervises the activities.



Faculty of Law, Trento,
 group photo of the participants of the first advocacy seminar,
 from left, Ion, Clelia, Federica, Pietro e Francesca.



Contact with Coordinadora Universitaria por la Democracia y la Justicia

The participants of the seminar had the possibility to contact the students association “*Coordinadora Universitaria por la Democracia y la Justicia*”, of which Amaya is one of the leaders. In order to communicate, students used the Facebook platform. Most of the contacts occurred in the last phases of the seminar, and were not constant, but were always very enthusiastic.

The Nicaraguan association also sent them a denunciation document, expressing their concern for the democratic violations. Specifically, the document underlines the University crisis in Nicaragua. The paper highlights the violation of the principle of autonomous educational institutions and the disrespect of human rights in the Nicaraguan academic community. The document, written in Spanish, it is divided into 4 sections: professors’ rights, students’ rights, university governance and university spaces. In each part, the infringement of human rights by the government is demonstrated by making direct references to the violated legal articles, would these be national or international. The document was very useful; it helped the students to develop a general idea of the academics community’s situation in Nicaragua.

Equality and Diversity Office

Since the beginning of the seminar, a tight collaboration within the Equality and Diversity Office and the participants of the seminars unfolded.¹⁵ The Office’s aim is to promote justice, equality, transparency and equality in every degree course and in the University structure. The students met the office staff to present the format of the seminar, the advocacy activities planned and Amaya’s case. All SAR activities are managed in collaboration with the Equality and Diversity office, that supports and collaborates actively with the network. Moreover, the office promoted vividly the seminar’s activities through their social media pages.

Several informative meeting were organized between the participants at the seminar and the students representative of the Equality and Diversity office. During these encounters, the students discussed about Scholars at Risks, specifically focusing on the importance of defending academic freedom and of the seminars activities. The election of new students representative of the E&D Office took place after the beginning of the seminar, therefore their direct participation was limited, but they have always showed interest in the advocacy activities, promoting them where possible.

15. For more information visit the website: <https://www.unitn.it/en/ateneo/53111/equality-diversity>.

Sangria at Sociology

Besides formal activities, students have decided to organize an informal event in which it would have been possible to talk easily about academic freedom. Instead of organizing an event on their own, the participants decided to join in a program regularly organized by UDU students' association, mostly for time and resources reasons. Therefore, they participated at the event called "Sangria a Sociologia" ("Sangria at Sociology"), held on the 9th of May at the Department of Sociology and Social Research.

"Sangria a Sociologia" is an informal evening organized twice a year. In those nights the university backyards are open till midnight: students can encounter there, listen to music, socialize and chat with other students presenting their initiatives at the tables. This event is a possibility to present and promote a project or students' organization, and it is quite popular among students of different Departments. The seminar group participated by organizing a table. The aim was both to promote SAR activities and to collect signatures to release Amaya.

During the evening the students have collected around 80 signatures. What fascinated them was the possibility to chat freely with the students, answering their questions and starting small debates. Initially the seminar group thought about organizing an interactive activity to draw the attention onto our table, but the space available to them was too limited. Francesca took pictures all night long; all the pictures are available for download at the seminar webpage.¹⁶ Some pictures are shown below.

16. The pictures are available here: <https://webmagazine.unitn.it/en/evento/sociologia/60837/we-are-amaya-unitrento-for-academic-freedom>



Department of Sociology and Social Research, Trento, Federica. Francesca and Pietro participate in the event “Sangria a Sociologia”, the students population collaborates in the advocacy campaign “We are Amaya”





Department of Sociology and Social Research, Trento, Federica. Francesca and Pietro participate in the event "Sangria a Sociologia", the students population collaborates in the advocacy campaign "We are Amaya"



Meeting with the Rector

During the first phases of the seminar, the students decided to try to involve in the activities both the professors and the university executives, to gather more support for Amaya's release. Thanks to the intermediation of the coordinator Ester Gallo, the students obtained the support of the University Rector, Paolo Collini. Since the very beginning, he showed sensitivity for Amaya's story and he agreed to sign the petition realized by SAR, address to the President Daniel Ortega. The students met the rector the 21st of May.

After the meeting, the University press office released a communication, which can be found at the following link: <https://webmagazine.unitn.it/news/ateneo/62585/una-firma-per-amaya-anche-il-rettore-collini-sostiene-la-liberazione-della-giovane>. Many local newspapers followed up the news by writing articles about the meeting between the students and the rector. These include *Il Dolomiti*, *La Voce del Trentino* e *l'Ansa*.¹⁷ The media contribution has been very important for the circulation of Amaya's story and the spread of the advocacy seminar. At the events that followed the press release, especially at the tables, many more students knew about the seminar and the advocacy activities because they had already read the newspaper articles.

Due to the great response received by the student population after the University press release, the seminar students would like to suggest anticipating the meeting with the Rector. This specific activity enhances the attention and activates the interest of the wider Trento community, therefore by bringing it forward the advocacy activities could generate a greater impact.

17. All the articles are available in the Appendix



*Rectorate of the University of Trento,
the Rector signs the petition to liberate Amaya.*



Off Campus Advocacy

The off-campus advocacy started once the activities organized within the university finished in June 2019; and they will continue until the end of September 2019. These activities differ in format and moments. Only one of these activities has already taken place: two students - Clelia and Francesca - gave a presentation at the University of Padua, which is also a member of SAR Italy and will soon run advocacy seminar in 2020. There are two more off campus events to be attend by the students in September: "Congresso Universitario per la Cooperazione allo Sviluppo" (CUCS: University Congress for Development Cooperation) and "Notte dei Ricercatori" (Researcher's night).

Presentation at the University of Padua

The presentation was held the 6th of June 2019 at the Department of Political and Legal Science and International Studies (SPGI) at the University of Padua. Clelia and Francesca, assisted by the seminar coordinator Ester Gallo gave a presentation to the students of the master degree DSPGI. This off campus activity was possible thanks to Claudia Padovani, Padua SAR referent and national co-coordinator, who kindly offered us her lecture hours.

The presentation was supported by a PowerPoint, and it was so structured: firstly, the students introduced the theme of academic freedom; secondly, they talked about SAR and its network; thirdly, they focused on the advocacy seminar, specifying each activity that had been organized. Initially, the students prepared the presentation in Italian, but given to the elevate number of foreign students, Clelia and Francesca gave the presentation in English. The students decided beforehand that they did not want to give a lecture-structured presentation, also because they felt not ready for the task. Therefore they decided to 'break the ice' by beginning with a brief initial quiz/debate on academic freedom. The debate was facilitated by presenting some - invented by us - fake news related to violation of academic freedom, and by asking students their ideas and comments. Then, Clelia and Francesca moved on explaining the activities that they have carried out, showing pictures and graphic materials.

The aim of the presentation was both to disclose what has been done during the advocacy seminar and to encourage Padua students to join the same seminar that will start next year in their university. Students' participation was surprisingly very high. Trento students hope to be able to stay in touch with the students that in the future will start the seminar in Padua, in order to share comments, experience and suggestions. One thing that Clelia and Francesca discovered during the seminar is the great importance of university networks: the possibility to interact with different universities helps to create a national and international ground to promote university cooperation in defending academic freedom. The group hopes to further develop this cooperation with the Padua's SAR section and to open new connections with other Italian and international universities which carry advocacy activities on academic freedom.



*University of Padua,
Department of Political Science, Legal Studies and International studies,
Professor C. Padovani welcomes the students Clelia and Francesca*



Conclusion and individual feedbacks

Conclusion

To conclude, due to the variety of tasks taken out, as for the students' autonomy in organizing the activities, the Advocacy Freedom seminar Series considerably differs from any other extracurricular activity proposed by the University of Trento. Below students have collected their personal opinions on the program, and have analysed the positive and negative aspects that emerged during the activities. The aim is to underline strengths and weaknesses of the pilot experience that was carried at the University of Trento, on advocacy seminars, with the hope to reproduce and improve it in the future.

Individual feedbacks

Francesca:

Taking all in consideration, I have an excellent opinion on this seminar series because it surprisingly helped me to deepen in the advocacy world. I feel more conscious about the advocacy now, than in every other academic course I took under my undergraduate programme. I found the freedom to create, develop and finish a project very satisfying. Moreover, I appreciate the responsibility that was given us, specifically when making decisions and planning the activities. We might have acted in small circumstances, but I know I have put all my effort in this seminar, and I now know better SAR's message and activities. The advocacy seminars opens up questions usually students do not ask themselves, as freedoms and rights are taken for granted in our context. If only I could suggest some improvements, I would dedicate more time to develop a stronger theoretical background on the history, theory and concept of academic freedom; in my opinion it is useful when engaging in a debate.

Pietro:

SAR's seminar is the very first advocacy programme I have ever taken part in. Personally, I find this experience to be unique and it differs from the other activities offered by the University of Trento because of its stimulating capacities. What I evaluate as the most rewarding is the freedom left to the students to organize and manage all the advocacy activities. At the beginning, I was surprised by the commitment needed to carry out the activities, not time regarding, but because it really meant getting involved. In fact, we had to stop people at the tables, steal them some time to talk about SAR and about Amaya's case; from time to time I also had to defend my ideas. As I am writing, I can state that the thing that scared me the most - that is engaging in conversation with people that I do not know - is one of the most positive aspects of the seminar. With much difficulty I would have been able to develop the skills I have gained by participating in this seminar, by only attending the regular lectures. To conclude, I would like to underline some negative aspects. As Francesca has already said, I would spend more time understanding what academic freedom is. I also think that not having a graphic expert in the group represents

a problem: maybe the University graphic offices could be a valid solution by providing the seminar with graphic support. Having said that, it is normal to find little problems when something is done for the first time, and I am sure that everything can be improved for the next editions.

Federica:

Taking all in consideration, I evaluate the SAR seminar very positive. By saying the truth, when I registered for the seminar I did not exactly know what academic freedom is, even less I had had advocacy experience before. The seminar has made me more conscious about the importance of defending academic freedom and of the real possibility to take action in case of violations. However, I feel that my knowledge lacks of theoretical basis about academic freedom; I find this aspect to be very useful when starting a debate, it helps articulate the conversation. This lack can be overcome by spending some more hours at the beginning of the seminar lessons to discuss academic freedom. What I enjoyed the most is the practical activities required by the seminar, as usually Italian degree curricula do not require it. By organizing the activities I developed the so call “soft skills” such as flexibility, complementarity and teamwork, much needed in the job sphere now-a-days. However, the small group of participants, 5 students and the coordinator, was a limit of the first edition of the seminar. By having more students participating, many more activities could be planned and managed, and therefore the advocacy could have a greater impact. To conclude, the SAR seminar is a possibility for personal enrichment, as students have the opportunity to play a primary role in defending academic freedom. The small problems I have highlighted in this paragraph can be easily overcome; the premises of this seminar seem to lead to a bright future.

Clelia:

As my colleagues have already said, I think this experience has had a positive impact, specifically referring to the role played by the students, who can think, plan and manage the activities by themselves. The possibility to act independently is not typical of the Italian university system, but perhaps of states such as the US, exactly where the SAR network was born and developed. The limited number of students participating, who were not very expert in the field of academic freedom, has narrowed the range of the activities organized (in number and extent). However, we were highly motivated, therefore we have had an impact onto society nevertheless. One part of the seminar that I have found very interesting was the possibility to study in deep the geopolitical situation in Nicaragua. The aim of these researches was to understand the situation and then inform others, both students and part of the civil society. Regarding the possibility to deepen the background research, I regret not having developed a tighter contact with Amaya’s activism group, as it could have given us better insights on the situation. In the end I hope that our experience could be a support for future seminars.

Ion, aka Nello:

In my specific case, the seminar is a positive culmination of a journey started almost two years ago, that I perceive as fundamental for my personal growth. In fact, because in the past I had been students’ representative, I had already met the coordinator Ester Gallo, who introduced me to SAR in 2017. Together we took part at the “SAR 2018 Global Congress” that was held in April 2018 in Berlin. During those days, I had the possibility to participate in different seminars that help me understand what academic freedom is, and how much of it is taken for granted in the Italian context. Being part of the Global Congress was pivotal, as I comprehended the role and nature of SAR and I developed precious instruments and knowledge that I was able to use and share in the course of this seminar. Moreover, during the Congress, I was shocked by how a common goal and vision -defending academic freedom- could bring together so many different people, coming from different part of the world and social contexts. After a year, I found the same interest in our small group

of participants at the seminar, that the coordinator Ester Gallo was able to start in the spring of 2019. I must admit that we, as a group, were very cohesive and determinate, but we were also lucky to have the presence and support of both the coordinator Ester Gallo and Adam Braver. Taking all in consideration, I am extremely enthusiastic about this experience. Some aspects could be improved, but I will not focus on that since my colleagues have already done it. However, every little problem is overcome by the great qualities this seminar has. To conclude, I would like to thank both all the participants to the seminar and Ester Gallo, without whom the seminar would not exist.

General comments

Positive aspects

The peculiarity of SAR's seminar is the great commitment necessary to undertake its responsibilities. Besides attending the scheduled meetings, developing a personal interest has been necessary in order to continue the work outside the University buildings. In fact, without the single additions brought to the meetings by the students, the advocacy campaign would not have been as successful as it has been. All the efforts that we put in the seminar have been rewarded; we all have developed different soft skills, first of all the ability to work in team and to share tasks. Moreover, we were able to understand some institutional procedures typical of our university, such as booking a space at the different Departments to collect signatures or the different phases that lead to the sign of a document by the Rector. Thanks to the seminar we overcome our shyness and were able to stop students on their way to classes, talk with them and try to convince them to sign our petition.

In short, we believe that the best part of the seminar is trying first-hand what an advocacy campaign is. We perceive this experience as necessary for students that are majoring in International Studies.

This "rollercoaster" journey was possible thanks to the fundamental help of Ester Gallo, who dedicated time and effort to reach with us our initial goals. Even if it was her first experience too, her role was crucial for the success of the seminar. All considered, the support given by Scholars at Risk was fundamental to the conclusion of the seminar. In particular, Adam Braver has always been present and available at answering all our questions; he had believed in us since day one, and that helped us believing in ourselves too.

To-be-improved aspects

Because this has been the very first edition of this kind of seminar in Italy, we thought it might be helpful to underline, besides the positive aspects, the things that could be improved in future seminars.

Firstly, we would suggest to start the seminar a bit earlier, or even to do it during the winter semester. We think that by starting earlier the students would have much more time to dedicate to the activities. This year, our group started in the middle of March 2019 and we realized that we would not have gotten enough time to plan and manage all the activities that we had proposed. We had to give up activities that might have gathered great support, such as an open workshop with speakers expert about SAR or the geopolitical situation in Nicaragua. Also, if we would have had more time dedicated to the advocacy activities, we might have been able to organize a table in every Department and collect more signatures.

Secondly, we all have felt the lack of theoretical knowledge on academic freedom. Although some time was scheduled for it, we would suggest dedicating more time to

deepen students' knowledge on the topic. To our knowledge, the topic of academic freedom is generally not studied the Italian universities. At the beginning of the seminar we had some problems at recognizing academic freedom violations compared to real-life situations.

Thirdly, we have found the small number of participants at the seminar a limit. Although our group worked well in team, if there were more people we would have been able to carry out more activities. Some of us believe that the number of participants should be extended, to avoid the initial renunciation. In fact, during the first two weeks almost the 50% of the students registered dropped out. Therefore, what we suggest is to extend the number of people who can register to the seminar. But, if no one drops out, the participants group would be too big to work properly.

Lastly, we hope that in the future other Italian universities will develop similar experiences. Being the first ever to take part in such a seminar is rewarding, but it is also a burden that brings responsibilities and difficulties. We find to be interesting the possibility to interact with other students participating in similar advocacy seminar elsewhere, to share information, beliefs and concerns. This could also help to start an Italian Students Network that collaborates in defence of academic freedom. Therefore, we hope that the presentation given at the University of Padua could be the beginning of the diffusion of advocacy seminars in Italy.

In addition, we would like to note some suggestions to SAR and its coordinators. We believe it could be interesting if the overall project could be firstly introduced by the American representatives of the network; they could give the students precious insights of the world of the advocacy and transmit profitably SAR's objectives and its message.

Lastly, a second call was scheduled to be held with Adam Braver, more or less after half of the seminar lessons, to check what the students had done and to plan and discuss the future activities. However, the call has never took place because of insufficient time available from both sides. We think it would have been helpful to have a discussion with him half way through; he could have answered some novice students' doubts, risen from the advocacy activities.

To conclude, we believe that the Seminar Series on Advocacy for Academic Freedom has been a success, even in the context of the limitations outlined above. During the course of it, we became more conscious about the pivotal importance of academic freedom and about the role played by international organisations such as Scholars at Risks. We strongly hope that the future SAR seminars held at the University of Trento will be at least as successful as the 2019 edition. We hope the participants will be capable to engage more students in concretely defending academic freedom.

Clelia, Federica, Francesca, Ion, Pietro,
September 2019.

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Appendix

In this section we have collected all the newspaper articles about the project, the petition written both in English and in Italian and all the graphic material that have been used during the advocacy activities

The documents are available in the following order:

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UNA FIRMA PER AMAYA

Anche il rettore Paolo Collini sostiene la liberazione della giovane detenuta in Nicaragua. La petizione promossa da studenti e studentesse nell'ambito dell'impegno dell'Ateneo di Trento per la libertà accademica nel mondo

Trento, 21 maggio 2019 – (e.b.) Hanno scelto di partire da Amaya Eva Coppens, studentessa del quinto anno di medicina dell'Università Autonoma del Nicaragua, con sede a León, arrestata il 10 settembre del 2018 a causa della sua partecipazione a un movimento di protesta nazionale. E così, studenti e studentesse dell'Università di Trento, dopo aver approfondito la situazione della libertà accademica e, in particolare, il suo caso hanno organizzato alcune giornate di raccolta firme, in varie sedi, per la sua liberazione. L'iniziativa ha come slogan "We Are Amaya. UniTrento per la libertà accademica" ed è promossa da Pietro Carra, Ion Foltea, Francesca Ongaro, Federica Tagliavini e Clelia Zardini, studenti e studentesse dei seminari di "Advocacy for Academic Freedom" coordinati dalla docente Ester Gallo (Dipartimento di Sociologia e Ricerca sociale).

Questa mattina il gruppo ha incontrato il rettore Paolo Collini per presentargli il caso della studentessa del Nicaragua detenuta per motivi politici e proporgli la petizione. Invito che è stato accolto. Il rettore ha, infatti, sottoscritto la lettera a favore della liberazione di Amaya.

L'Università di Trento da novembre 2017 aderisce a "Scholars at Risks" (Sar), rete internazionale di università, che promuove la libertà accademica, intesa come libertà di ricerca e insegnamento e come diritto di accesso allo studio, nonché come diritto di espressione nella sfera pubblica da parte di docenti, studenti e staff amministrativo. L'Ateneo trentino è, inoltre, tra i fondatori della sezione Sar-Italia, che è stata istituita lo scorso 19 febbraio. Ester Gallo è delegata Sar per UniTrento. La petizione per la liberazione di Amaya Eva Coppens è rivolta alla comunità universitaria e a tutta la cittadinanza e può essere sottoscritta anche online.

Ulteriori informazioni:

www.scholarsatrisk.org

<https://www.scholarsatrisk.org/actions/amaya-eva-coppens-nicaragua/>

<https://webmagazine.unitn.it/node/59957/>

Foto ©GiovanniCavulli per UniTrento in allegato e [nella cartella Google Drive](#) dell'Ufficio stampa.

Rettore Trento firma petizione per studentessa Nicaragua

Chiesta liberazione di Amaya Eva Coppens



12:21 21 maggio 2019- NEWS - Redazione ANSA - TRENTO

(ANSA) - TRENTO, 21 MAG - Il rettore dell'Università di Trento, Paolo Collini, ha sottoscritto la petizione a favore della liberazione di Amaya Eva Coppens, studentessa del quinto anno di medicina dell'Università autonoma del Nicaragua, sede a León, arrestata il 10 settembre 2018 dopo la sua partecipazione ad un movimento di protesta nazionale.

Sul suo caso alcuni studenti dell'ateneo trentino, coordinati dalla docente Ester Gallo del Dipartimento di Sociologia e ricerca sociale, hanno organizzato giornate di raccolta firme, in varie sedi, per la sua liberazione sotto lo slogan "We A Amaya. UniTrento per la libertà accademica". Questa mattina l'incontro con il rettore Collini. L'appello può essere sottoscritto anche online.

L'Università di Trento da novembre 2017 aderisce a "Scholars at Risks" (Sar), rete internazionale di università che promuove la libertà accademica.

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CONDIVIDI



Una firma per Amaya. L'Università di Trento sostiene la liberazione della giovane studentessa arrestata in Nicaragua

L'iniziativa, che ha come slogan "We Are Amaya. UniTrento per la libertà accademica", è promossa da Pietro Carra, Ion Foltea, Francesca Ongaro, Federica Tagliavini e Clelia Zardini, studenti e studentesse dei seminari di "Advocacy for Academic Freedom" coordinati dalla docente Ester Gallo del Dipartimento di sociologia e ricerca sociale



Foto di Giovanni Cavulli

Publicato il - 21 maggio 2019 - 13:29

Condividi

TRENTO. Anche il Trentino si muove per **Amaya Eva Coppens**, studentessa del quinto anno di medicina dell'**Università Autonoma del Nicaragua** a **Leòn**, arrestata il 10 settembre del 2018 a causa della sua partecipazione a un **movimento di protesta nazionale**.

E così, studenti e studentesse dell'**Università di Trento**, dopo aver approfondito la situazione della libertà accademica e, in particolare, il suo caso hanno organizzato alcune giornate di raccolta firme per chiedere la sua liberazione.

L'iniziativa, che ha come slogan "**We Are Amaya. UniTrento per la libertà accademica**", è promossa da **Pietro Carra, Ion Foltea, Francesca Ongaro, Federica Tagliavini e Clelia Zardini**, studenti e studentesse dei seminari di "**Advocacy for Academic Freedom**" coordinati dalla docente **Ester Gallo** del Dipartimento di sociologia e ricerca sociale.

Il gruppo di studenti ha incontrato **Paolo Collini** per presentargli il caso della studentessa del Nicaragua detenuta per motivi politici e proporgli la petizione. Un che invito che è stato accolto. Il rettore ha, infatti, sottoscritto la lettera a favore della liberazione di Amaya.

L'Università di Trento da novembre 2017 aderisce a "**Scholars at Risks**", rete internazionale di università, che promuove la libertà accademica, intesa come libertà di ricerca e insegnamento e come diritto di accesso allo studio, nonché come diritto di espressione nella sfera pubblica da parte di docenti, studenti e staff amministrativo. L'Ateneo trentino è, inoltre, tra i fondatori della **sezione Sar-Italia**, che è stata istituita lo scorso 19 febbraio. Ester Gallo è delegata Sar per UniTrento.

La petizione per la liberazione di Amaya Eva Coppens è rivolta alla **comunità universitaria**, ma anche a tutta la **cittadinanza** e può essere sottoscritta anche online.

La studentessa Amaya è tornata a casa, era stata arrestata in Nicaragua. Anche l'Università di Trento impegnata per la sua liberazione

Amaya era stata arrestata lo scorso 10 settembre in quanto faceva parte di un movimento universitario nato per protestare contro alcune dure riforme portate avanti in Nicaragua. Il suo caso era stato seguito anche da alcuni studenti dell'Università di Trento che hanno promosso la campagna "We Are Amaya. UniTrento per la libertà accademica"



Di Giuseppe Fin - 01 luglio 2019 - 22:17

Condividi

TRENTO. Amaya Eva Coppens, la studentessa e attivista belga-nicaraguense del quinto anno di medicina dell'Università Autonoma del Nicaragua, **è stata liberata.**

La sua vicenda è stata seguita da vicino anche dall'**Università di Trento** attraverso lo studio del caso portato avanti da **Pietro Carra, Ion Foltea, Francesca Ongaro, Federica Tagliavini e Clelia Zardini**, studenti e studentesse dei seminari di "Advocacy for Academic Freedom" coordinati dalla **docente Ester Gallo** del Dipartimento di sociologia e ricerca sociale. Lo stesso rettore **Paolo Collini** aveva sottoscritto una petizione per chiedere la libertà della giovane studentessa.

Amaya era stata **arrestata lo scorso 10 settembre** in quanto faceva parte di un movimento universitario nato per **protestare contro alcune dure riforme portate avanti in Nicaragua.**

Amaya. UniTrento per la libertà accademica" (QUI IL LINK). L'11 giugno, sotto anche le pressioni internazionali, il governo nicaraguense ha deciso di liberare alcuni prigionieri e tra questi c'era anche Amaya. Assieme a lei sono stati liberati i giornalisti Miguel Mora e Lucia Rineda.

LA VICENDA

In aprile dello scorso anno il governo del Nicaragua ha proposto una **riforma del sistema previdenziale** che prevede dei **tagli importanti al sistema universitario** del Paese ma anche **una tassa sulle pensioni e l'aumento del valore dei contributi richiesti.** In risposta, il **18 aprile è scoppiata una violenta protesta** che ha coinvolto inizialmente gli studenti delle università pubbliche e i pensionati, a cui si sono uniti nei giorni successivi altri strati della popolazione. La riforma venne ritirata ma **le proteste si ampliarono con la richiesta da parte dei manifestanti di un ritorno alla democrazia e che Ortega lasci il potere.** Gli studenti, principali attori delle proteste, si sono organizzati in un movimento, che prese il nome di **Movimento Universitario del 19 Aprile (MU-19A).** Il movimento fu fondato il 25 aprile 2018, presso il Politecnico di Managua, la capitale.

Le proteste sono state portate avanti fino a fine anno con un bilancio finale che stima tra le **325 e le 481 vittime e i 2000 feriti**, a seconda delle fonti, prevalentemente studenti. Accanto a questi **ci sono 500 persone arrestate**, quasi tutti studenti. Per le repressioni, la polizia ha usato prima **gas lacrimogeni**, per poi passare ai **proiettili di gomma**, e utilizzare infine **armi pesanti e d'assalto**.

Amaya Eva Coppens è una dei principali leader del “**Movimiento 19 de Abril**”. Dopo l’inizio delle prime proteste Amaya è divenuta un simbolo della lotta contro il regime e le minacce a lei indirizzate sono drasticamente aumentate. È stata quindi costretta a lasciare León e rifugiarsi in un rifugio più sicuro verso la fine dell’estate. Tuttavia, proprio qui è stata arrestata il 10 settembre insieme all’amico e attivista Sergio Midence.



Le **pressioni da parte delle organizzazioni internazionali** hanno portato il **presidente Ortega nel marzo di questo ad annunciare la liberazione di alcuni prigionieri**. Il 22 di maggio la Corte Interamericana dei Diritti Umani ha ordinato al governo del Nicaragua la liberazione di Amaya e di altri 16 prigionieri considerati a rischio. L’11 di giugno, finalmente, Amaya Eva Coppens ha lasciato la prigione “La Esperanza” ed è tornata a casa nella città di Estelí.

L'IMPEGNO DELL'UNIVERSITA' DI TRENTO

L'Università di Trento da novembre 2017 aderisce a “**Scholars at Risks**” (Sar), rete internazionale di università, che **promuove la libertà accademica, intesa come libertà di ricerca e insegnamento e come diritto di accesso allo studio**, nonché come diritto di espressione nella sfera pubblica da parte di docenti, studenti e staff amministrativo. **L'Ateneo trentino è tra i fondatori della sezione Sar-Italia**, che è stata istituita lo scorso 19 febbraio. **Tra i coordinatori nazionali delle rete Sar c'è Ester Gallo delegata per l'Università di Trento.**

Da questa rete sono stati **organizzati dei seminari di “Advocacy for Academic Freedom” al dipartimento di Sociologia dell'Università di Trento** ai quali hanno partecipato cinque studenti frequentanti il secondo e il terzo anno di laurea triennale in Studi Internazionali: Pietro Carra, Ion Foltea, Francesca Ongaro, Federica Tagliavini e Clelia Zardini.

Da loro il lavoro di **approfondimento sul caso di Amaya Eva Coppens con un'attenta e approfondita ricostruzione dei fatti** che hanno riguardato la giovane studentessa ma anche la situazione politico e sociale del Paese.

Studenti e studentesse dell'Università di Trento, dopo aver approfondito la situazione della libertà accademica e, in particolare, il suo caso di Amaya, **hanno organizzato alcune giornate di raccolta firme**, in varie sedi, per la sua liberazione. **L'iniziativa ha avuto come slogan “We Are Amaya. UniTrento per la libertà accademica”.** (**QUI L'ARTICOLO**)

Successivamente è stato organizzato un incontro con il **rettore Paolo Collini** per presentargli il caso e proporgli la firma della petizione. Invito che è stato accolto. **Il rettore ha, infatti, sottoscritto la lettera a favore della liberazione di Amaya.**

Presidente della Repubblica del Nicaragua
Daniel Ortega Saavedra
Frente a Palacio Nacional, calle 4 Noroeste
Managua, Nicaragua, 11001
Fax: +505 2228 9090

CC: Alto Commissario delle Nazioni Unite per i diritti umani, Ambasciata del Nicaragua, Direttore della Polizia Nazionale, Primo Ministro del Belgio, Ambasciata del Nicaragua a Bruxelles, Rettore dell'Università Nazionale Autonoma del Nicaragua, Missione Permanente del Nicaragua negli Stati Uniti, e Scholars at Risk

Vostra Eccellenza:

Scrivo per esprimere seria preoccupazione per Amaya Eva Coppens, una studentessa al quinto anno di medicina alla National Autonomous University of Nicaragua - León (UNAN-León), che è stata arrestata il 10 settembre 2018, in una chiara rappresaglia a seguito della sua partecipazione a un movimento di protesta studentesco che sta coinvolgendo l'intera nazione. Vi esorto rispettosamente ad assicurare un immediato e incondizionato rilascio della Sig.na Coppens e a far cadere tutti i capi d'accusa relativi all'esercizio non violento dei suoi diritti di libertà di espressione e di associazione.

Secondo Scholars at Risk, la Sig.na Coppens, cittadina sia belga sia nicaraguense, era una partecipante attiva al movimento di protesta che dall'aprile 2018 aspira a riforme democratiche, si oppone alle misure di austerità e chiede al Presidente Daniel Ortega di rinunciare al governo. Più di 320 persone sono state uccise nel corso delle proteste e più di 1870 sono state ferite, tra queste gli studenti sono numerosi. Oltre a essere una dei leader del Movimento Studentesco del 19 Aprile, la Sig. na Coppens è anche un membro della Coalizione Universitaria per la Democrazia e la Giustizia (CUDJ), di Alleanza Civile e del Network dei Movimenti Sociali.

Apprendo da SAR che da quando sono iniziate le proteste, la Sig. na Coppens ha ricevuto numerose minacce attraverso i social media ed è inoltre stata vittima di altre forme di aggressione e intimidazione. A causa di queste minacce, la Sig.na Coppens ha dovuto temporaneamente lasciare la sua casa e trovare protezione in un luogo sicuro. Il 10 settembre la polizia e alcuni paramilitari hanno fatto irruzione nel luogo in cui si rifugiava e l'hanno condotta nella prigione di El Chipote. Il 19 settembre un tribunale ha accusato la Sig.na Coppens di sequestro di persona, terrorismo e possesso illegale di armi da fuoco. Fino a quel momento, alla Sig.na Coppens non è stato permesso parlare con il suo avvocato e nemmeno con la sua famiglia. Fonti del SAR riferiscono che successivamente la Sig.na Coppens è stata trasferita nella prigione femminile "La Esperanza", fuori la città di Managua.

Dato che non vi sono informazioni che possano rendere possibile la comprensione di questi eventi da parte nostra, i fatti finora descritti suggeriscono che la Sig.na Coppens sia stata arrestata in relazione al pacifico esercizio dei suoi diritti di libertà di espressione e di associazione, esercizio che è espressamente tutelato dai dispositivi del diritto internazionale in materia di diritti umani, inclusa la Convenzione Internazionale sui Diritti Civili e Politici, di cui il Nicaragua è firmatario. In aggiunta ai danni subiti dalla Sig.na Coppens, incidenti come questo indeboliscono le fondamenta delle società democratiche e hanno un effetto negativo sulla libertà accademica.

Conseguentemente, insisto rispettosamente affinché la Sig.na Coppens sia rilasciata senza condizioni e affinché siano fatte cadere tutte le accuse che derivano dall'esercizio non violento della sua libertà di espressione e di associazione; inoltre, chiedo che fin da subito -e fino al rilascio della Sig.na Coppens- sia garantito il suo benessere in prigione e che il suo caso sia trattato secondo gli standard di giusto e dovuto processo e trattamento umano dei prigionieri, in conformità agli obblighi che il diritto internazionale impone al Nicaragua.

Ringrazio per la Vostra attenzione a riguardo di questa importante questione e rimango in attesa di una Vostra risposta.

Cordialmente,

President of the Republic of Nicaragua
Daniel Ortega Saavedra
Frente a Palacio Nacional, calle 4 Noroeste
Managua, Nicaragua, 11001
Fax: +505 2228 9090

CC: United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Embassy of Nicaragua, Director of National Police, Prime Minister of Belgium, Nicaraguan Embassy in Brussels, Rector of Universidad Nacional Autónoma de Nicaragua, Permanent Mission of Nicaragua to the United Nations, and Scholars at Risk

Your Excellency:

I write to express grave concern for Amaya Eva Coppens, a fifth-year medical student at the National Autonomous University of Nicaragua - León (UNAN-León), who was detained on September 10, 2018, in apparent retaliation for her participation in a nationwide student protest movement. I respectfully urge you to secure Ms. Coppens' unconditional release and to drop any charges that stem from her nonviolent exercise of the right to freedom of expression and assembly.

According to Scholars at Risk (SAR), Ms. Coppens, a Belgian-Nicaraguan dual citizen, was an active participant in the nationwide protests that began in April 2018 that sought democratic reforms, protested austerity measures, and called for President Daniel Ortega to step down. Over 320 people have been killed and more than 1,870 injured during the protests, including many students. In addition to being one of the leaders of the 19th of April Student Movement in the city of León, Ms. Coppens is also a member of the University Coalition for Democracy and Justice (CUDJ), Civil Alliance, and Social Movements Network.

I understand from SAR that, since the protests began, Ms. Coppens began receiving threats over social media and was subjected to other forms of harassment and intimidation. Due to the threats, Ms. Coppens left her home to temporarily reside in a safe house. On September 10, police and paramilitary officers raided the safe house and detained Ms. Coppens at a prison known as "El Chipote." On September 19, a court charged Ms. Coppens with kidnapping, terrorism, and illegal possession of firearms. Ms. Coppens had not been permitted to speak to her lawyer or family until that day. I understand from SAR that Ms. Coppens has since been transferred to the women's prison, La Esperanza, located outside of Managua.

Absent any information that may clarify our understanding of these events, the facts as described above suggest that Ms. Coppens was detained in apparent retaliation for her peaceful exercise of the right to freedom of expression and freedom of association—conduct that is expressly protected under international human rights instruments, including the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, to which Nicaragua is a signatory. In addition to the harm to Ms. Coppens, such incidents have a chilling effect on academic freedom and undermine democratic society generally.

I therefore respectfully urge you to release Ms. Coppens unconditionally, and drop any charges that stem from her peaceful exercise to the right to freedom of expression and freedom of assembly; and, pending this, to immediately ensure her well-being while in prison and that her case is addressed in a manner consistent with internationally recognized standards of due process, fair trial, and the humane treatment of prisoners, in accordance with Nicaragua's obligations under international law.

I thank you for your attention to this important matter, and look forward to your response.

Sincerely,

This petition can be signed online at: <https://bit.ly/2UKZ32Y>

WE ARE AMAYA

UNITRENTO PER LA
LIBERTÀ ACCADEMICA



UNIVERSITÀ DEGLI STUDI
DI TRENTO

SCHOLARS AT RISK
NETWORK  ITALY SECTION



SCHOLARS AT RISK

NETWORK  ITALY SECTION

Scholars at Risks (SAR) è una rete internazionale di università, fondata nel 1999 e con sede presso la New York University.

Comprende attualmente 450 università in 40 paesi.

Website: www.scholarsatrisk.org.

Il fine di **SAR** è promuovere la libertà accademica, intesa come libertà di ricerca e insegnamento e come diritto di accesso allo studio, nonché come diritto di espressione nella sfera pubblica da parte di docenti, studenti e staff amministrativo.

SAR protegge studiosi in pericolo di vita o il cui lavoro è severamente compromesso. Porta avanti tre tipi di attività:

- (a)** Protezione, attraverso borse di ricerca temporanee;
- (b)** Advocacy per sensibilizzare la società civile e politica verso casi di attacco alla libertà accademica in diversi contesti nazionali;
- (c)** Ricerca e formazione sui temi dei diritti umani, libertà accademica e politiche di accoglienza di ricercatori e studenti.

L'università di Trento ha aderito a SAR nel Novembre 2017. SAR opera all'interno dell'Ufficio di Equità & Diversità. Referente dell'ateneo di Trento per SAR: Ester Gallo, DSRS: scholarsatrisk@unitn.it.

Il 19 Febbraio 2019 a Padova viene formalmente inaugurata la sezione SAR-Italia dal Rettore dell'Università di Trento e dal Rettore dell'Università di Padova. SAR-Italia comprende ad oggi 13 università ed Istituti di Ricerca.

WE ARE AMAYA

UNITRENTO PER LA
LIBERTÁ ACCADEMICA



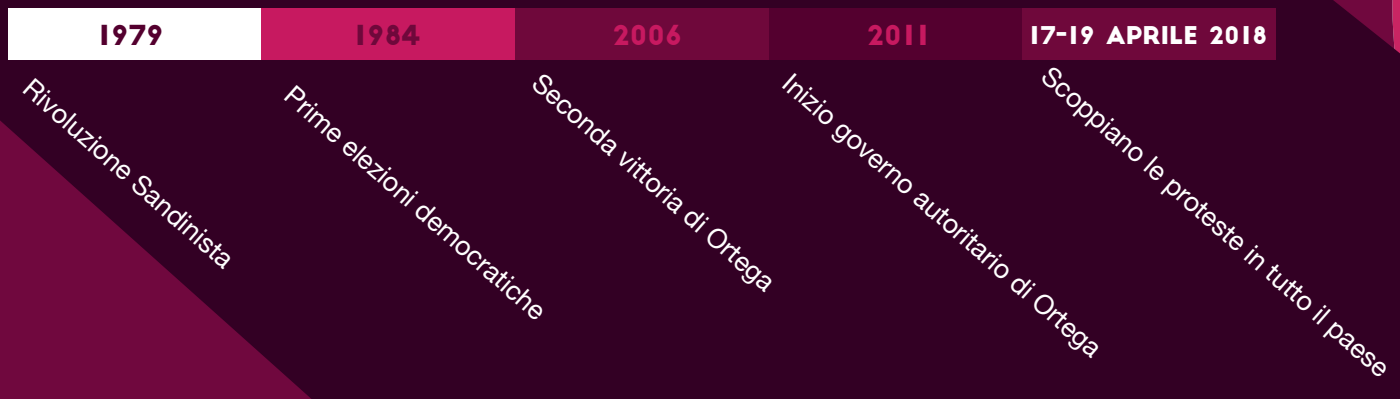
UNIVERSITÀ DEGLI STUDI
DI TRENTO

SCHOLARS AT RISK
NETWORK  ITALY SECTION

NICARAGUA



Nicaragua (Republic of Nicaragua) timeline:



Perché le rivolte in Nicaragua?

A seguito della repressione violenta delle proteste da parte delle forze di sicurezza nazionali e di gruppi paramilitari fedeli al governo, movimenti studenteschi in tutto il paese si sono sollevati contro la condotta autoritaria e antidemocratica del presidente.

Rimozione dei limiti costituzionali alla rielezione del presidente
Tagli alla spesa pubblica per le pensioni

Oltre **325 morti** dei quali svariate decine colpiti da armi da fuoco, oltre **2.000 feriti** e numerosi **casi di sparizione**.

- Uso eccessivo e ingiustificato della violenza.
- Negazioni de facto della libertà di espressione ed informazione.
- Detenzione arbitraria e negazione di assistenza legale.
- Discriminazione per motivi politici.
- Dal 2006 l'aborto è illegale in qualsiasi circostanza.

Freedom House ha declassato il Nicaragua da partly free country a non free country e segnala un deterioramento democratico (February 4, 2019).

Gli Stati Uniti hanno imposto sanzioni diplomatiche al paese premendo per la cessazione delle repressioni.

RAGIONI DELLE
PROTESTE

QUANTE
VITTIME?

CRISI DEI
DIRITTI UMANI

REPUTAZIONE
INTERNAZIONALE

CHI É AMAYA?



Amaya Coppens è una studentessa al quinto anno di medicina e attivista politica. Nata e cresciuta in Nicaragua, lotta per la difesa dei diritti civili e politici del suo Paese. Oltre ad essere una dei leaders del Movimento studentesco di Leon del 19 Aprile, è coordinatrice universitaria di CUDJ (Coordinadora Universitaria por la Democracia y la Justicia).

IL CASO

Arrestata in seguito alla protesta con capi di accusa quali terrorismo e incendio doloso, è detenuta in attesa di processo presso la prigione femminile “La Esperancia”. Diversi sono **i diritti** costituzionalmente riconosciuti che **sono stati violati dalle istituzioni pubbliche**: diritto di protesta pacifica; di libera associazione; di difesa legale. Inoltre, durante la detenzione le sono state negate le visite (inizialmente) e fonti autorevoli hanno accertato che **è stata vittima di aggressione psico-fisica**.

STATUS QUO

Il processo, rinviato più volte, presumibilmente **subirà una svolta entro 90 giorni** a seguito della pubblica ammissione di volontà del Presidente Ortega di liberare tutti i prigionieri politici “per riaprire il negoziato per la transizione democratica”.