

Experience report by Leandra Bias, beneficiary of the [Europaeum Oxford-Geneva](#) bursary between 3-21 December 2018

Of Greek heritage and born and bred in Zurich, I packed my bags to do my undergraduate degree in International Relations at the University of Geneva in 2009. It was during those three formative and very happy years that I first fell in love with Geneva as a city and with the Geneva Graduate Institute as a place to study one day. It took a seven-year long detour however, before I finally put my first step in one of the “petals” this year in the capacity of a short-term visiting scholar.

I started the detour with a first year figuring out whether I should really specialise in former communist Europe as a region. An internship at the Swiss Embassy in Bratislava, Slovakia and a five-months language stay in Belarus, Minsk cemented my fascination for the region, which is why I embarked with great excitement on an MPhil in Russia and East European Studies at the University of Oxford. Having had a foretaste of what it meant to conduct research and fieldwork in Russia, a country I had always been compelled by and which was all of a sudden again in the headlines, I decided to carry on with a DPhil in Politics. I have thus spent the last three years extensively researching transnational feminist resistance in illiberal Russia and Serbia, which is what ultimately drew my attention to the Europaeum scholarship, which made my three weeks research stay at the Graduate Institute possible.

It was the Europaeum’s commitment to support the development of European thinking, understanding and empathy vis-à-vis our neighbours that initially drew my attention to the scheme. The Oxford-Geneva bursary was furthermore appealing because it would allow me to spend three full weeks at an Institution that is commitment to the internationalism and humanitarianism that are specific to the very city where it is located. It is commonly accepted that good research stems from exposure to different perspectives. This also goes for different academic environments and traditions, which is why a stay at a different institution would have been in and of itself beneficial. The Geneva Graduate Institute however, brought several specific advantages.

During my stay I had the privilege to discuss my research with the renowned Russia expert, Prof. André Liebich at the Department of International History and Politics. I moreover had access to de-democratisation experts through the Institute’s Albert Hirschman Centre on Democracy, among them Dr. Rebecca Tapscott. These exchanges proved inspiring both for my thesis and my future career. Thanks to the Institute’s close collaboration with the Institute for Human Sciences (IWM) I was furthermore exposed to a range of leading scholars in my field, I had previously not known, at the occasion of their co-organised conference “Is the Transition Over?”. Needless to say that the conference’s topic could not have been more fitting for my own research. Finally, the Institute had crucially changed character since I had last seen it in 2012. The new building and amenities are absolutely impressive and to the highest standard of what a scholar could wish for. Not least of all, I was benefitted from an excellent working space, where I was surrounded by other young and inspirational scholars, who made work both more productive and more fun. Overall then, my three weeks stay provided me with an excellent working environment, a vital opportunity to enrich my existing network and the chance to develop ties with an institution I had always wanted to become part of ever since I had arrived in Geneva. My stay was thus more than the “change of scenery” I had been looking for to gain inspiration for writing-up in my last year of the DPhil. It allowed my personal history to come full circle. I am deeply grateful to the Europaeum for having granted me this opportunity and to the Geneva Graduate Institute for having welcomed me so warmly.

In light of all the above, I strongly recommend the scheme and would happily assist future potential candidates in their application process.